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THE ATTITUDE OF THE LABOUR PARTY TO REFORM OF PARLIAMENT,  
WITH PARTICULAR REFERENCE TO THE HOUSE OF COMMONS, 1919-1951

Thesis submitted in accordance with the requirements of  
the University of Keele for the degree of Doctor of  
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## ABSTRACT

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Title: The Attitude of the Labour Party to Reform of Parliament, with particular reference to the House of Commons, 1919-1951.

The thesis examines the Labour Party's view of Parliament as an instrument through which the transition from Capitalism to Socialism could be made. The traditional interpretation of the conservatism of the Party on this issue is re-examined and an attempt made to explain the principles governing the attitude of the Labour Movement towards the question of House of Commons reform as a reflection of its broader concept of the role of Parliament in society.

After a preliminary survey of the pre-war conflict that existed in the Labour Movement between those who believed in the parliamentary method and those who favoured industrial action, the study concentrates on the weaknesses of Parliamentary democracy brought about by the Coupon Election of 1918. The vigorous Labour response in support for direct action and the nature of the direct actionist case are examined and a distinction drawn between those who saw it as a substitute for, and those who regarded it as a supplement to parliamentary methods. Its inter-connection with intra-party disputes is examined closely.

A study is made of the relationship between the Labour Party and the Communist Party of Great Britain indicating the centrality of the issue of the parliamentary method as a fundamental source of division between them. An examination of the intellectual attack on Parliamentarism is made by studying the Guild Socialist Movement and its alternative philosophy with particular reference to the writings of G.D.H. Cole and S.G. Hobson, demonstrating its failure to understand the pragmatic philosophy of the

## Labour Party.

Basing the argument upon the Labour Party's commitment to the principles of strong government and fair representation the study continues with a detailed examination of the various proposals to democraticise the existing legislative and electoral system. Proposals to increase House of Commons control over the Executive are also looked at. The Party's attitude to women's suffrage and proportional representation is followed in detail throughout the nineteen-twenties, culminating in the case of P.R. in the 1931 economic crisis - which itself is re-examined in the light of recent evidence.

The post-1931 period deals with the intellectual attacks made upon Parliamentarism by Laski, Strachey and the Socialist League. It examines the disputes between those who saw the conflict as being between Capitalist democracy and Socialism and the mainstream Labourite view associated with Bevin, Citrine and Morrison, among others, that the real conflict was between democracy and dictatorship. The intra-party disputes arising from these differing interpretations are fully examined in the context of the attempts of the C.P.G.B. to affiliate to the Party and to promote the policy of the United Front. The Party's proposals for legislative and executive reform are also studied in relation to the Party's commitment to an efficient and effective Parliamentary system.

The final chapters are concerned with the changes that took place as a result of the impact of the war. The relationship of the executive and legislative branches of government is fully examined both in war-time and in the period of the Labour Government of 1945/51. Particular reference is made to the divisions between Party members who were members of the different branches of government. The demands for electoral reform and control of administration are studied with an emphasis upon the pragmatic approach adopted by Labour Members of the executive power.

The thesis ends by showing that the Party's commitment to certain principles of reform had not changed, even if the application had, and draws the broad conclusion that British Socialism remained the particular product of a peculiar culture.

**PREFACE**

The history of the University of Kentucky and the University of Tennessee is the history of two of the oldest and most distinguished institutions of higher learning in the South. The University of Kentucky was founded in 1794, and the University of Tennessee in 1796. Both universities have played a significant role in the development of the South and the United States. The University of Kentucky has been a leader in the field of agriculture, and the University of Tennessee has been a leader in the field of medicine. Both universities have produced many notable alumni, including presidents, judges, and statesmen. The history of these two universities is a story of dedication, hard work, and achievement. It is a story that is worth knowing and remembering.

The subject matter of this thesis arose out of discussions with my supervisor, Professor Martin Harrison, whose wealth of knowledge and breadth of criticism have proved invaluable guides through the many pitfalls and difficulties raised by a venture of this kind. I readily acknowledge my debt to him and to those members of the academic community who have often reminded me that the world has continued to turn whilst I have been pre-occupied with my own researches.

In the pursuit of knowledge I have good cause to be grateful to the staff of the libraries of the University of Keele and the University of Liverpool. Nor would it be just of me to fail to mention the library staff at Transport House, the Trades Union Congress, The British Library of Political and Economic Science, the Public Record Office, Nuffield College, the British Museum, the House of Commons, the House of Lords Record Office, the John Rylands Library, Manchester, the Beaverbrook Library, the National Liberal Club and the Liberal Organisation. In addition, the Public Libraries of Liverpool, Manchester, Bradford and St. Helens all provided willing assistance when it was requested. Miss Enid Lakeman of the Electoral Reform Society also deserves recognition for her assistance.

I gratefully acknowledge access to personal papers and for the help given me in rooting-out the essential from the mass. To John Parker and the Rt. Hon. Arthur Woodburn, who must get tired of requests for information about their careers, I acknowledge thanks for correspondence answered and interviews granted. To the Rt. Hon. James Griffiths, for correspondence answered, I am very grateful.

On the academic side, the work of the late Professor Hanson on many aspects of Parliament, including the articles from which this thesis was developed, provided the quality of scholarship for which I aimed. David Butler's excellent work on The British Electoral System since 1918, despite my criticisms of it, provided an invaluable survey of part of the material covered in the present work.

To Mrs. Jean Parry, who typed the finished product, goes a particularly warm thanks and record of gratitude. Any errors that may be found in the text are, of course, my own responsibility.

For two people a special thanks. To my father for encouragement and sustenance when no-one else understood, and to my wife who has endured the last four years gracefully, I acknowledge an unrepayable debt.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS USED

A.S.E.	Amalgamated Society of Engineers.
A.V.	Alternative Vote.
A.S.L.E.F.	Amalgamated Society of Locomen, Engineers and Firemen.
B.S.P.	British Socialist Party.
C.P.G.B.	Communist Party of Great Britain.
C.P.S.U.	Communist Party of the Soviet Union.
C.U.C.	Communist Unity Convention.
E.C.C.I.	Executive Committee of the Communist International.
I.L.P.	Independent Labour Party.
L.R.D.	Labour Research Department.
M.P.	Member of Parliament.
N.C.L.	National Council of Labour.
N.E.C.	National Executive Committee.
P.L.P.	Parliament Labour Party.
P.R.	Proportional Representation.
S.L.P.	Socialist Labour Party.
S.S.I.P.	Society for Socialist Information and Propaganda.
S.W.S.S.	South Wales Socialist Society.
T.G.W.U.	Transport and General Workers Union.
W.S.F.	Workers' Socialist Federation.

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this thesis is to examine the Labour Party's view of Parliament as an instrument through which the transition from Capitalism to Socialism could be made and to study in detail the Party's attitude to House of Commons Reform as a reflection of the larger views which were held about the nature and role of the Parliamentary method itself. It is designed to ascertain the strength or weakness of the Party's belief in the "functional capacity of Parliament to deal with whatever demands are made upon it" (1) and to consider those changes which were thought necessary to ensure that Parliament was fitted to play an effective and proper role in the establishment and development of the Socialist Commonwealth.

The Labour Party inherited from the broad movement from which it developed a variety of opinions about the capacity of Parliamentary institutions to solve social ills and create an economic structure which eliminated the excesses of wealth and poverty and allowed complete individual self-development through collective action. The very fact of the Labour Party was proof that the majority view was one of faith in established Parliamentary methods and institutions, but there was a strong and very vocal section of the Labour Movement which did not share that faith and utilised such opportunities as they had to dispute the majority view.

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1. A.H. Hanson, "The Labour Party and House of Commons Reform" Parliamentary Affairs (Vol. X, Autumn, 1957, pp. 454/68, and Vol. XI, Winter, 1957/8, pp. 39/56) reprinted in A.H. Hanson Planning and The Politicians (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1969), pp. 44-66. (45). All references are to the reprinted article.

The conflict that existed in the Labour Party in the years between 1919-1951 was therefore a continuation of an existing conflict rather than the emergence of a new one, while the changes made by the Labour Government of 1945-51 represented the ultimate victory of pro-Parliamentary opinion. What makes the overall period so important, however, was the political context in which the arguments took place; the chronic instability of Parliamentary democracy throughout Europe and the establishment of the Labour Party as the second great Party of the nation.

The false antithesis that existed in the inter-war period between dictatorships of the Right and dictatorships of the Left had attractions for those in the Labour Party who favoured Marxist rhetoric but not Bolshevik methods. Reinforced by the misguided logic of politically naïve intellectuals and revolted by the conservatism of MacDonalld's leadership and betrayal they represented a concerted threat to Labour's commitment to Parliamentary democracy. Yet their threat was in real terms no greater than their intellectual forbears. It was the fact that Labour had dislodged the Liberals as the alternative government which gave these ideas an added dimension and sense of importance.

In the years 1919-1951 the Labour Party re-examined, or was forced to re-examine, its basic beliefs about Parliament and to state and defend its view of the proper functioning of Parliament in the political process. There is some reason to assert its success in this field, "Simultaneously with the laying of the foundations of the Welfare State the Labour Governments of 1945-51 brought parliamentary democracy up to date. Henceforward the task was one of consolidation and defence." (2) Yet

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2. Ibid., p.45

this was not achieved without a great deal of intra-party conflict which this thesis will examine. In addition, it was achieved with a variety of tactics all designed to secure the basic changes which the Party thought necessary but which were flexible enough to take account of political realities.

In part the following study will re-examine the thesis put forward by the late A.H. Hanson that the mainstream of Labour's political thought in the field of parliamentary reform has been conservative. This he attributed in part to "the influence of our unbroken tradition, centuries-old, of parliamentary government; and in the extraordinary capacity of our institutions gently to lead the most rugged and revolutionary-minded political characters - a Maxton or a Kirkwood for instance - along the paths of constitutional conformity" but more importantly to the development of the Labour Movement "along gradualist lines, guided by a leadership which understood politics mainly in terms of electoral activities and parliamentary debate. Such a movement could readily see in a democratically-elected House of Commons its most appropriate instrument. To moderate middle-of-the-road Socialists, who never ceased to dominate the party's councils, schemes for the radical reform of parliamentary government seemed unnecessary and dangerous: unnecessary because it was difficult to prove that a traditionally-patterned House would manufacture Socialist legislation less effectively than Liberal or Conservative; dangerous because any suggestion that Labour might lay impious hands on the ark of the Constitution would inevitably be exploited by political opponents to alienate those sensitive marginal voters in whose hands lay the key to parliamentary majorities." (3)

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3. Ibid., p. 46.

As a broad sweep Hanson's conclusions are undoubtedly sound, although perhaps he did not make full allowance for what Ralph Miliband has called "the infinite adaptability of social-democratic leaders to conservative purposes" (4) or for the reasons behind the moderation of "middle-of-the-road-Socialists". Clearly Parliamentary institutions did reinforce the gradualist tradition of the Party but did they do so to the extent of destroying the Party's desire for reform? Alternatively might not the values of the Party have reinforced the institution of Parliament rather than vice-versa? Part of the task of the present work is to disentangle these overlapping and intertwined motivations.

In addition to the general question of the nature and role of Parliament in the Party's thinking there were vital questions concerned with the institution's composition and working. Those concerned with the composition of Parliament centred around issues such as electoral reform, while the actual functions of the House of Commons raised questions about changes in the procedure of the House and its relationship with the Executive. The debate about the electoral system was largely concerned with questions such as Women's Suffrage and proportional representation. The Labour Party's attitude to the latter has what might be called a "bad press" much of which has been quite unjustified. What this thesis will do is examine the principles to which the Party was committed and the tactics which it adopted to secure the implementation of those principles. The study of changes in the procedure of the House of Commons will go beyond the references made by Hanson to the proposals of the I.L.P. and the Socialist League to examine the general position of the Party as a whole toward the question of procedural change, its unfortunate intermix

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4. R. Miliband, The State in Capitalist Society (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1969), p. 121.

with the intra-party disputes of the 'Thirties, and the extent to which the issue was simply a matter of the application of party principles rather than matters of conflict between members of the party in executive or legislative positions.

Although the reactionary influence of Parliamentarism is implicit in Hanson and central to Ralph Miliband's Parliamentary Socialism (5) the extent of this influence has never really been shown. In Miliband's case such proof as he produced tended to measure the extent to which the Labour Party's interpretation of Socialism differed from his own. The actual influence of Parliament upon the values of the Party is far more difficult to trace than is commonly asserted. One small aspect which can be examined, however, is the willingness of the party to push for minor reforms such as the payments of M.P.'s or the revision of House of Commons Standing Orders and the ease with which it surrenders to the very evident forces of inaction which appear to be a composite part of the British Parliamentary system.

The importance of the following work derives not from the fact that it is based upon completely new sources, although in recent years the minutes of both the Cabinet and the N.E.C. have shed new light on old controversies, but that it draws together existing evidence around the common theme of House of Commons reform. By so doing it shows how and why the Labour Party was able to establish its credibility as a constitutional Party and become a respected part of the political scene. It illuminates the fact that without a sound political, social and philosophical base the Labour Party's broad proposals for economic change were valueless.

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5. R. Miliband, Parliamentary Socialism: A Study in the Politics of Labour (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1961).

Of course any study of the Labour Party examining a particular theme is quite capable of producing a warped perspective. The more so when the study hardly touches on such important issues as the General Strike and the conflicts over foreign policy in the late 'Thirties. Even if the latter can be omitted on grounds of irrelevance the "nine days" of 1926 require more explanation. Although the idea of the general strike was very important to a section of the Labour Party in the early 'Twenties and was explicit in the formation of the Council of Action in August 1920, the intellectual commitment to the idea was something quite separate from the industrial action of May 1926. It is perfectly clear, the General Strike of 1926 was an industrial conflict which the Government of the day quite deliberately turned into an alleged struggle for the constitution and which some trade union leaders, such as J.H. "Jimmy" Thomas, accepted as such, albeit in histrionic terms. The period itself, unlike that of August 1920, was too intensely concerned with the day-to-day industrial situation to have relevance for this particular thesis. Whilst the inclusion of the General Strike might help defend the thesis against charges of intellectualism it would be an unnecessary and misleading diversion from the general theme.

The bulk of what follows is inevitably narrative with some analysis at conceptual and numerical levels. The details which are produced are designed to illustrate the theme and reinforce the basic contention of the thesis that the Labour Party's attitude to House of Commons Reform is an examination of the Party's social and political philosophy in the years 1919-1951.



## CHAPTER ONE

### THE LABOUR PARTY AND THE HOUSE OF COMMONS BEFORE 1919.

It was a combination of the quickening of the processes of social and economic change and the political repercussions of the advent and course of the First World War that produced the essential conditions for the realignment of political forces behind the ideological banners of "Capitalism" and "Socialism" and the replacement of the Liberals as the Party of alternative government by the Labour Party. The causes of the decline and fall of the Liberal Party are still a matter of academic controversy, (1) but what is clear is that the Labour Party emerged from the "Coupon Election" of December 1918 in a far stronger position than it had been before the outbreak of hostilities some four years earlier. Although its Parliamentary strength was a mere 60 Members (2) as compared with 42 in the second election of 1910 it had fielded 361 candidates, as compared with 56, and had increased its total vote from 0.4 million to 2.2 million. (2a) More significantly the split in the Liberal forces meant that the Labour Party was now the largest opposition Party in the House in terms of seats and in the country in terms of votes. (3)

The pre-war Labour Party had been in a much weaker position. Although 29 Members had been returned to Parliament in 1906 the Party's failure to make rapid electoral advances and its very obvious dependence upon the Liberal Government had produced a great deal of disillusionment in the Party as a whole. The election of Victor Grayson as Member for Colne Valley in 1908 was taken as evidence of the Parliamentary Labour Party's

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1. A useful collection of essays can be found in J.A. Thompson, The Collapse of the British Liberal Party (Lexington, Massachusetts: D.C. Heath, 1969). See Note 1.
  2. Fifty-seven Labour candidates were returned at the General Election. The number was increased by the addition of two unendorsed candidates and Josiah Wedgwood, formerly a Liberal M.P.
  - 2a. This increase in the total vote also represented an increase in the percentage of the total vote compared to 1910.
  3. The Independent Liberals, the "Wee Frees" received 1.4 million votes and returned 34 Members. Seventy-three Sinn Fein Members had also been elected but they refused to take their seats.

dependence on the Liberals, a dependence often more apparent than real, but of great importance in the years between 1909 and 1913 when the Osborne Judgement threatened the very existence of the Party, a threat which was only partially removed by the introduction of payment for Members of Parliament in 1911 and the passage of Trade Unions Act of 1913.

The failure of the Labour Party to emerge quickly from the shadow of Liberalism was a function of its close electoral ties with the Liberals and its own internal divisions. These divisions were very often the product of the differing ideological interpretations of the role of the Labour Party in Parliament. The I.L.P. contingent led by Philip Snowden saw Parliament primarily in terms of the articulation of general principles of Socialism whereas the Trade Unionist section, some of whom had doubts about Socialist doctrine, looked to Parliament to secure immediate solutions to their primary economic grievances. The divisions in the P.L.P. weakened its hold over the rank-and-file as the focal point of political activity for economic and social ends and strengthened the hands of those who preached that parliamentarism represented class collaboration and a weakening of the class struggle in society. These opposing points of view were not new to the Labour Movement and, indeed, many of the early internal struggles of the Social Democratic Federation in the 1880's and 1890's had been fought over the desirability and effectiveness of using Parliament as a political instrument for social and economic change.<sup>(4)</sup> In due time many of the "direct actionists" found themselves ideologically alienated from the Labour Party and followed their predominantly Marxist viewpoint to its logical conclusion in the formation

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4. Details of these conflicts can be found in J. Clayton, The Rise and Decline of Socialism in Great Britain 1884-1924 (London: Faber & Gwyer, 1926) and T.H. Taylor, Parliament and British Social Democracy 1881-1907 (Unpublished M.A. Thesis, Keele, 1967).

of the Communist Party of Great Britain, but in the years 1910-1914 led by Syndicalists such as Tom Mann, A.J. Cook and James Larkin and plainly encouraged by the militancy of the suffragettes, the Conservatives' challenge to the Government over Ulster and the pliability of the Liberals under pressure, they sought to translate industrial militancy into tangible economic success. In some instances such as the ports strike of 1911 they did secure changes, but in doing so only antagonised the official Union leadership and the Parliamentary Party by their "irresponsible" use of the national strike for pseudo-political ends, although even the "responsible" leaders had recognised their potential industrial power by the formation of the Triple Industrial Alliance between National Union of Railwaymen, The Transport Workers' Federation and the Miners' Federation of Great Britain. Yet the 'Big Five' Labour leaders J.H. (Jimmy) Thomas, Arthur Henderson, Ramsay MacDonald, J.R. Clynes and Philip Snowden all challenged the Syndicalist claims that it was through industrial action alone that effective political change could be achieved.(5) Syndicalism was, and remained, a doctrine adhered to by a vociferous minority which in the changing circumstances and conditions of war-time fused with an articulate group of young middle-class intellectuals in the Guild Socialist movement.(6)

The divisions over the use of Parliament as a viable political instrument in the promotion of social progress were quite different in essence from the conflicts which arose over matters of the application of Socialist principles. The former were matters of democratic principle (in effect a branch of the Revisionist dispute among left-wing intellectuals)

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5. See, for example, P. Snowden, Socialism and Syndicalism (London: Collins, 1912), especially Ch. XIV. The idea of a general strike which was central to syndicalist theory was not new to the British Movement. It had had amongst its earliest exponents Robert Owen but as a practical weapon it had fallen into disrepute with the failure of the Chartists.
6. See below Chapter 3.

the latter were matters of political judgement. The former sought to defend Parliamentaryism, the latter to prove that it worked. Women's suffrage was a case in point. The Labour Party was the only political group which as a party supported the principle of equal political rights which it adopted at the Conference of 1901 and which it constantly advocated (despite tactical shortcomings) until the principle was finally established by the Representation of the People Act 1948. However, there was "a sharp division of opinion as to whether the vote should be given immediately to women or whether it should form part of the larger reform of full adult suffrage. One section held the view that to get the principle established would be a great step forward. Another held that any reform granting women the vote on the existing basis would only increase the power of the propertied classes. The latter view carried the conference in 1906 by a narrow majority and full adult suffrage became the policy of the party." (7) The stance was not an overwhelming success. The more militant women suffragettes believed that some Trade Unionists in particular were not as enthusiastic for female suffrage as they should have been. (8) In 1912 Mrs. Pankhurst and her followers demanded that the Labour M.P.'s should oppose the Liberal Government on every question, whatever the issue, until Asquith and the Government were driven from office or compelled to give the vote. Whatever sympathy might have existed for female suffrage it was extinguished by this politically impracticable demand which "would.....completely have frustrated any influence that Labour could bring to bear on political events.. ." (9)

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7. H. Tracey, Ed., The Book of the Labour Party: Its History, Growth, Policy and Leaders (London: Carlton Publishing Co., 1925), I, 173.
  8. Constance Rover, Women's Suffrage and Party Politics in Britain, 1866-1914 (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1967), pp. 146-167.
  9. Francis Williams, Fifty Years' March: The Rise of the Labour Party (London: Odhams Press, 1950), p. 194.

Only the emotionally insecure George Lansbury accepted the demand, resigning his seat at Bow and Bromley to fight a bye-election on the issue, which he lost largely because of the antagonism brought about by some of the militant suffragettes' actions. The result showed not only the wisdom of Labour's action but was a vindication of their faith in Parliamentary institutions: G.D.H. Cole was surely right in regarding the activities of Mrs. Pankhurst's followers as part of the general revolt against the very parliamentarism to which the Labour Party was committed.(10)

The extent of this commitment was a function of the development of the Party as the political instrument of the organised working-class as represented by the Trade Union Movement. Trade Union leaders who had come to power and office through the relatively well-ordered processes of Victorian England saw in Parliament the effective means of solving their economic grievances. Political action was essential to economic and social change, a view shared by the majority of the Social Democratic Federation and Independent Labour Party despite the factional opposition of Morris and others who saw no hope in Parliamentarism for the kind of revolution they had in mind. The inevitability of gradualness which characterised the Fabian Socialist approach to politics reinforced this parliamentarism. As Ralph Miliband has pointed out, "of political parties claiming socialism to be their aim, the Labour Party has always been one of the most dogmatic - not about socialism, but about the parliamentary system. Empirical and flexible about all else, its leaders have always made devotion to that system their fixed point of reference

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10. G.D.H. Cole, British Working Class Politics 1832-1914 (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1941), p. 212.

and the conditioning factor of their political behaviour .... The Labour Party has not only been a parliamentary party - it has been a party deeply imbued by parliamentarism: - And in this respect there is no distinction to be made between Labour's political and industrial leaders. Both have been equally determined that the Labour Party should not stray from the narrow path of parliamentary politics."<sup>(11)</sup> This is undoubtedly true although Miliband's assertion that Parliamentary politics are narrow was not a view shared by most early Labour leaders. Arthur Henderson, for example, writing in 1918 opined that "the triumph of democratic principles in politics and industry and social life is a matter simply of wise and capable leadership and resolute and united effort on the part of all sections of the organised movement."<sup>(12)</sup> Parliament was, in Labour's eyes, the sovereign instrument for authoritative political decision-making. They fully recognised that political change was not per se sufficient to create a new society but they believed that freedom and equality could only flourish in a society where political democracy was practiced. "The war has proved to democracy," Henderson wrote, "that a dictatorship whether with one head or five, is incompatible with its spirit and its ideals even in war-time."<sup>(13)</sup> Revolution was not in the British tradition (a doctrine held dear by the British Labour Movement and eventually conceded by its critics).<sup>(14)</sup> They intended to use traditional British constitutional methods which would act as a restraining influence upon wild and revolutionary ideas. It was because the British Trade Union Movement had developed in an empirical rather than an ideological tradition that the

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11. R. Miliband, Parliamentary Socialism, p.13.
  12. A. Henderson, The Aims of Labour (New York: Huebsch, 2nd Edition, 1918), p.22.
  13. Loc. cit.
  14. See, for example, John Strachey, What Are We To Do? (London: Victor Gollancz, 1938), Part I.

Labour Party became and remained loyal to the Parliamentary method. On the rare occasions that the leaders challenged the Parliamentary system they did so in the liberal tradition of John Locke's defensive right of rebellion rather than an ideologically aggressive interpretation of class rule. In general they did not deviate from the view that the economic reconstruction of society was possible through Parliamentary means, or as Arthur Henderson wrote "the path to the democratic control of industry lies in the common ownership of the means of production..."<sup>(15)</sup> which could only be achieved through political means. Whatever doubts may have existed in Henderson's mind about parliamentarism were removed by his experience of war-time government and the questions raised by the advent of the Russian Revolution. J.H. Thomas caught the mood when he remarked in the House of Commons, "that so far as our constitution is concerned it gives full and free political expression to the people's will."<sup>(16)</sup>

Because the Labour Party as a whole did not regard Parliament as the instrument for the political legitimisation of capitalism, even if the vested interests of capitalism were represented by the excessive number of Members of Parliament on the Conservative and Liberal benches, it followed that they saw little need to undertake extensive reforms of the House of Commons. Thus, whilst Professor Hanson's view that "to moderates and middle-of-the-road Socialists, who have never ceased to dominate the Party's counsels, schemes for the radical reform of parliamentary government seemed both unnecessary and dangerous,"<sup>(17)</sup> is essentially true it is somewhat overstated. Many proposals for the radical reform of the House of Commons have been proposed by sections of the Party, only to be turned down on

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15. Henderson op.cit., p. 28.

16. H.C. Deb. 113 cc 688. All references are to the 5th Series.

17. Hanson, op.cit., p. 46.



empirical grounds, partly related to the moderate temperament of the leadership but also because of the recognition that the traditional political structure in Great Britain provided an outlet for personal and Ministerial power far more desirable than that available to individual Members of Parliament. The fact was a recognised part of the I.L.P.'s objection to Cabinet Government and irresponsible Departmentalism.

The Labour Party was, however, devoted to the principle of universal adult suffrage and to inter-related changes designed to produce a House of Commons more representative of the nation at large. The enfranchisement of women, changes in the electoral system (sometimes in favour of proportional representation and on other occasions for the alternative vote - a situation reflecting genuine divisions in the Party) and the determination to secure the acceptance and application of the principle of "one person, one vote" were reflected in the Party's attempt to introduce a Bill enacting such proposals into Parliament in 1911.<sup>(18)</sup> The reform of Parliamentary procedure played little part in the attempts of the Party to secure a fuller democracy perhaps because until the powerlessness of Parliament was revealed in the face of authoritarian if not despotic government, under war-time conditions, the question simply did not arise to any great extent outside the "Root and Branch" criticisms of the I.L.P.

Labour's inability to capitalise on its position in the years between 1906 and 1914 reflected the fact that it had, to some extent, reached the Commons by virtue of the Liberal's generosity. Not one

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18. See H.H. Schloesser, The Twentieth Century Reform Bill, Fabian Tract, 153. (London: Fabian Society, 1911). See note 2.

Labour Member had been returned from a three cornered contest in a single member constituency in the election of December 1910.(19) Moreover, the Liberals were determined not to allow Labour to advance too far, or too quickly: certainly there was no desire to permit the development of a distinctive third party strong enough to allow the Liberals to be replaced.

The march of events, however, proved to be stronger than the forces resisting them and the outbreak of war produced a cathartic response amongst Liberals. Divided about the origins of the conflict and unhappy about its prosecution, the Liberal Party found itself assailed from all sides and in December 1916, through the personal opportunism of Lloyd George, bowed to those predominantly Conservative forces demanding a more vigorous prosecution of the war by the central government. It was Labour's good fortune that although as deeply divided as the Liberal Party the majority of the leadership, including individuals like MacDonald and Snowden who were opposed to the war largely because of the foreign policy which had brought it about, were prepared to practice the art of the party tolerance during Labour's association with the Government.

That association had begun early in the war with the Industrial and Electoral Truces of 24 and 29 August 1914 respectively and the instruction to local affiliated bodies to render all possible local support in the recruiting campaign.(20) The endorsement of this course of action by the Trades Union Congress reinforced Labour's stand and the rift that existed between the bulk of the Party and the I.L.P. which vigorously opposed the war. That the rift did not develop into a permanent cleavage and destroy Party unity is a tribute to Arthur Henderson's leadership of

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19. Cole, History of the Labour Party (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1948), p.4.

20. Williams, op.cit., p.226.

the Party and proved to be a vital factor in attracting disillusioned Liberals to Labour's ranks after the cessation of hostilities.(21)

The demands made upon industry by the military not only relieved the nation of widespread unemployment but created a crisis situation in the delivery of munitions which necessitated the signing of a formal agreement between the Trade Unions and Government, later embodied in the Munitions of War Act of July 1915, which provided for large-scale Governmental interference in industrial life, especially in the enforcement of compulsory arbitration and the direction of labour. The importance of industrial labour's contribution to the war-effort was recognised by the Government's invitation to the Labour Party to join the Coalition which had been formed in May 1915. After some initial hesitation caused by fear of compromising its independence the Party decided in favour of accepting the invitation. In practice the Party's role proved to be a very junior one notwithstanding Henderson's presence in the Cabinet (22) but it did provide the Party with governmental experience which it had not had before. Even if the Labour Party acted in some instances such as the Military Service Bill as the ineffective modifiers, or more often, legitimisers of unpopular policies, its performance of that role was either so necessary or successful that when Asquith resigned in December 1916 Lloyd George felt obliged to offer Henderson a seat in his newly-constituted War Cabinet. The offer "although given to the political party and primarily to Henderson as its leader, derived not from political but industrial causes. It arose, not from any great support for the Labour Party as a political force in the country, but from the fact that it was the political voice of the industrial workers."(23)

21. Ibid., 239/40.

22. Ibid., p.222. Henderson was made President of the Board of Education while William Brace and G.H. Roberts became an Under Secretary at the Home Office and a Government Whip respectively.

23. Ibid., p. 239.

At the same time Labour's representation in government was increased whereas that of the Liberals was diminished by the secession of Asquith and his followers.(24) The Party's acceptance of Lloyd George's offer had been "a new assertion of Labour's independence of Liberalism,"(25) an independence which was made fully possible by the reorganisation of the Party under Henderson's guidance following his departure from the Cabinet in August 1917. The reasons for Henderson's resignation are unimportant in this context, what is important is that the decision to resign was a personal decision, the Labour Party remained represented in the War Cabinet in the person of George Barnes. As a consequence the Labour Party maintained its overall political unity.

Once freed from Cabinet duties Henderson devoted himself to ensuring that Labour's newly recognised strength was capable of post-war maturation within a new framework of organisation. The pre-war organisation of the Party had been sketchy consisting of just over 150 local organisations and less than 2,000,000 affiliated members.(26) The exigencies of war-time by an intensification of pressure on trade-union rights and practices, and the interference of the Government in industry ('War Socialism' as it was popularly known) had proved to be a dynamic factor in the growth in trade unions and the conversion of conservative trade union leaders to the doctrine of socialism, however nebulous their interpretation of it may have been. By 1917 the number of local bodies affiliated to the Labour Party had risen to 260.(27) Henderson's contribution to the Party's assertion

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24. Henderson became a member of the War Cabinet, John Hodge Minister of Labour, George Barnes Ministry of Pensions, William Brace Under Secretary for Home Affairs, G.H. Roberts Parliamentary Secretary to the Board of Trade and J. Parker Junior Head of the Admiralty. Tracey, op.cit., pp.209/10.

25. Loc. cit.

26. Cole, A History of the Labour Party, pp. 9-15. Cole's total figures for 1913 which appear on p.50 are miscalculated.

27. Ibid., p.50.

of independence was to reorganise these affiliated bodies, under a new constitution. Samuel Beer has pointed out that it was the organisation of the Labour Party as a Party that made post-war political independence a possibility - the adoption of Socialism was functional to the choice of political independence.(28) "Henderson could respond aggressively to the 'doormat incident' not only because the Liberals were split, but also because the growth of trade unionism at last provided the party with the means for a strategy of full fledged independence....the increase in organisational power of the unions did more than merely provide an opportunity for this strategy. It also virtually forced the Labour Party to adopt it and to break politically with the Liberals. The commitment to Socialism....can be regarded as a consequence of this breach."(29) The breach was reinforced by the Labour Party's involvement with independent peace moves late in 1917 and the adoption in June 1918 of a new and distinctive programme "Labour and the new Social Order".

The sections relating to reform of the House of Commons were not in the least revolutionary. All radical proposals for changing the fundamental role of Parliament in society such as those suggested by the Guild Socialists were discounted and the only reforms advocated were those which might be regarded as institutional changes. The 1918 Conference came out in favour of "complete adult suffrage with absolutely equal rights for both sexes, with effective provision for absent voters and the best practicable arrangements for ensuring that every minority should have its proportional and no more than its proportionate representation; civic rights for soldiers and sailors, shorter Parliaments...."(30) The Conference also

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28. Samuel H. Beer, Modern British Politics (London: Faber & Faber, 1965), p.149.

29. Ibid., p.145.

30. Cole, History of the Labour Party, p.67.

"asserted that 'some early devolution from Westminster of both legislation and administration is imperatively called for'. It advocated that, 'along with the grant of Home Rule to Ireland, there should be constituted separate statutory legislative assemblies for Scotland, Wales and even England....' It advocated the retention of Parliament at Westminster as a 'federal assembly for the United Kingdom'."(31)

Suitably armed with a separate programme and a new constitution the Labour Party made its final assertion of freedom when it decided in November 1918 to leave the Coalition. Thus in December the Party fought the election with 361 candidates as compared with 78 in the first election in 1910, and despite a meagre improvement in seats from 42 to 57, the increase in votes from less than half a million to over two million augured fundamental changes in the nature of British Politics.(32)

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31. Loc.cit.

32. Tracey, op.cit. p.230. The statistics recorded here differs slightly from those in Cole's History of the Labour Party, p.5.

CHAPTER 1 - NOTES

1. In brief the argument is between those who believe that Liberalism was dying in waves of anarchistic violence before the First World War and those who believe that the course of the War finally killed it. Douglas argues that Liberalism was in fact reviving when it was struck down by Asquith's fatal decision to support a Labour administration in 1924; Cook that the decline of the Party accelerated into its downfall by the same sequence of events.

The main sources of the controversy are:

George Dangerfield, The Strange Death of Liberal England (London: Constable, 1936).

Trevor Wilson, The Downfall of the Liberal Party 1914-1935 (London: Collins, 1966).

Roy Douglas, The History of the Liberal Party 1890-1970 (London: Sidgwick & Jackson, 1971).

Chris. Cook, "A Stranger Death of Liberal England" in Lloyd George: Twelve Essays, ed. A.J.P. Taylor (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1971), pp. 287/313.

2. The S.D.F. programme of the early 1880's, derived in part from the earlier demands of the Chartists, had called for, amongst other things, Adult Suffrage, Triennial Parliaments, Equal Electoral Districts, Payment of M.P.'s, Stricter measures against corrupt practices and National and Federal Parliaments. See C. Tsuzuki, Hyndman and British Socialism (London: Oxford University Press, 1961), pp. 40/1.

CHAPTER TWO

PARLIAMENTARY DEMOCRACY UNDER PRESSURE 1919-1922



The Consequences of the Coupon Election.

Lloyd George's decision to go to the electorate in December 1918 was undoubtedly motivated by his own political opportunism and desire to remain Prime Minister even at the expense of splitting the Liberal Party. It was essentially a short-sighted decision, the results of which produced the greatest strain on Parliamentary democracy in the period under review. By skillfully exploiting the jingoistic fervour engendered by the recently-signed Armistice the total number of successful Coalition candidates returned to Parliament was 484 of which 338 were Conservatives few of whom had fought in the war.(1) Notwithstanding the Labour Party's contribution to the war effort many of its most prominent members, including MacDonald, F.W. Jowett, Henderson and Snowden were roundly defeated. The I.L.P., as the representatives of the defeatist views of pacifism, came in for particular rejection by the electorate which popularly regarded the initials I.L.P. as meaning "I love Prussia".

As a result the bulk of the newly-elected P.L.P. consisted of trade union candidates. This created friction between the P.L.P. and its former members largely over the Party's change of emphasis away from the wider issues of reform to the more detailed discussion of industrial affairs. Inspired as much by personal hostility and ambition as the actual performance of the Parliamentary Party the critics, led by MacDonald and Snowden, utilised every opportunity, and on occasion created

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1. J.M. McEwan, "The Coupon Election of 1918 and the Unionist Members of Parliament". Journal of Modern History, XXXIV, No. 3, (September, 1962), pp. 294-306.

opportunities, to attack the alleged failings of the Party in Parliament. The validity of these criticisms are discussed below but what is important here is the fact that in practical terms the Parliamentary Party had no chance of defeating a Government with such a numerical advantage and with whom they often agreed on policy. Consequently, many in the Party took the view that the only effective way of ensuring that their views were adequately expressed was through direct industrial action. Alan Bullock has pointed out that "the three years after the war were more disturbed by open conflict between the trade unions and employers, (and) between the unions and the Government, than any other period in Modern British history, with the solitary exception of 1926, the year of the General Strike."<sup>(2)</sup>

In part this was but one aspect of the pre-war discontent which had been channelled into the war effort and had re-emerged in an even greater outbreak of social violence. The evident weakness of Parliament reinforced that violence by effectually legitimising alternative forms of authoritative decision-making. The immediacy of strike action took precedence over the more leisurely process of Parliamentary and judicial rule. Certainly there were efforts made by those elements of the Labour Movement which were soon to leave at the instructions of Moscow in order to form the Communist Party of Great Britain, to turn social unrest into a political revolution, but there is little doubt that they received the broad support of many individuals like Emmanuel Shinwell, David Kirkwood and others who later became pillars of constitutionalism. The extent of the unrest was such that the Government had doubts about its capacity to enforce the law against what it too frequently saw as a Bolshevist uprising and on occasion replied

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2. A. Bullock, The Life and Times of Ernest Bevin (London: Heinemann, 1960), I, pp. 98-9.

with the use of military force, and the threat of special legislation and mass prosecution.(3) Such measures only produced an instinctive unity among what was a loose amalgam of groups with very little in common beyond a disrespect for existing authority and a desire to replace it with their own. When under pressure this contempt for government was reinforced, while the conflicting notions of how to replace it by a workers' government resulted in the bitter sectarianism that divided the Communist and Labour Parties in a fundamental conflict over the role of Parliament in a democratic society.

The role of the Party leadership in this period was a restraining one. Frequently protesting that direct action was the product of the weakness of Parliament they argued that it was the sectionalism of the Government's economic and social policies which had given strength to the revolutionary elements of society. The all but open declaration of war upon the Soviet Union (a country which even if not adored by the Labour leadership, which had attached great store by the Kerensky regime, was still thought of as having avowed Socialist objectives to be achieved through a working-class revolution) was regarded as an indication of the Government's reactionary character. Its repressive policy in Ireland was seen in a similar light. The post-war economic and social policies of the Coalition saw the decline of the ideal of "a country fit for heroes to live in" to a situation of widespread unemployment brought about by an artificially induced economic boom that resulted in "an orgy of speculation and profiteering in every field."(4) The Government's slowness to

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3. For details of the unrest of 1919, its national and international context, and its interpretation by contemporaries see David Mitchell, 1919: Red Mirage (London: Jonathan Cape, 1970), especially pp. 112/30.

4. Cole, History of the Labour Party, p.90.

demobilise the rumours of possible conscription and the aggressiveness of Winston Churchill (of pre-war Tonyandy infamy) increased the possibilities of political polarisation. The sheer devlousness of its policy towards the Miners, towards Russia and Poland was successfully designed to buy time until "normalcy" returned. It was in this atmosphere that "Direct Action" held sway in the Labour Movement and it is to an analysis of this that we now turn.

### Direct Action:

The term "direct action" was used in two distinguishable ways which affected the idea of Parliamentary government. On the one hand it meant the use of the Labour Movement's industrial power, usually in conjunction with, but often without reference to, Labour's Parliamentary forces, in order to force the government to change certain of its policies. The other use of term was its articulation by the "Left-Wing" of the Party - a group which included many who were later to join the Communist Party of Great Britain - upon its formation in 1920 - who spoke of direct action as a means of effecting the overthrow of Capitalism by revolutionary means and in accordance with Marxist doctrine.(5) The attitude of the former was, as Alan Bullock points out, "not to overthrow the Government but to remedy what they regarded as the deficiencies of the democratic system by forcing the Government to concede specific demands, the nationalisation of the mines or the abandonment of intervention against Russia."(6) To moderate direct actionists such as Ramsey MacDonald the policy of direct action was justified by the political outcome of the Coupon Election. Shortly after the

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5. Cf. for example Herbert Morrison's speech at the Labour Party Conference (Labour Party Annual Conference Report, hereafter L.P.A.C.R.), 1919, p.128 with the attitude of Robert Williams, The New Labour Outlook (London: Leonard Parsons, 1921), and William Mellor, Direct Action (London: Leonard Parsons, 1920), both passim.

6. Bullock, op.cit., p.100.

announcement of the election results he wrote, "The election has created a Parliament that has none of the democratic safeguards of a Parliament - especially a well-equipped critical Opposition and a guarantee of full discussion and exposure. Therefore the Parliamentary Opposition must come from the outside."(7) MacDonald justified his argument by declaring "my greatest concern is not about the winning and losing of Elections. It is with the institution of Parliament. Never was there a more ignorant appeal made to ignorant people than that contained in the Coalition cry of "Bolshevism".....Rather than live under a Parliament elected in such a way as to crush out Labour opinion by vast combinations of Labour's enemies, I should welcome a Soviet Government which crushes out Labour's enemies."(8) Even allowing for a necessary exaggeration and ambiguity born of political opportunism and journalistic fervour, the reasons for which will be demonstrated shortly, the conservative nature of MacDonald's views are clear. "Parliament", he said, "was only Parliament when it was representative. When it ceased to be representative it was not Parliament, and, therefore, action taken against a non-representative Parliament was not anti-Parliamentary."(9) Writing after the events of August 1920 involving the Council of Action MacDonald claimed that industrial action for political ends was not per se wrong. "Everything necessary to protect the constitution is constitutional, if 'constitutional' means anything at all except passive obedience to any outrageous acts done by men who happen to be Ministers."(10)

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7. Labour Leader, 2 January, 1919.
  8. Forward (Glasgow), 11 January, 1919.
  9. Ibid., 13 September, 1919. Cf. "There must be means found for challenging the abuse of its power by such a Parliament and "direct action" is one of them." Socialist Review XVI, No.88 (January/March, 1919), p. 18.
  10. Socialist Review XVII, No. 95 (October/December, 1920), p. 299.

It was essentially an argument in favour of consensus politics within a Parliamentary framework. "This Parliament," he argued, "has no moral authority. When political opposition is crushed by fraud or force, industrial opposition is the only defence that is left. Still, I am as far from being converted to anti-Parliamentarism as ever I was, but if I were so converted I should hail with delight the results just announced."<sup>(11)</sup> Thus MacDonalld did not favour the indiscriminate use of the direct action weapon, but took the view that it should only be used if it was successful. He never believed or intended that it should be a substitute for political action through Parliament.<sup>(12)</sup>

The revolutionary direct actionists, however, had no such faith in Parliamentary institutions. Direct Action was to their way of thinking one of the techniques available to the working-classes in the fight to replace the existing Capitalist society with one based on Socialist principles in accordance with the doctrines of Marx and Lenin. The theoretical basis of the revolutionary view were not given systematic expression until the publication of Direct Action by William Mellor <sup>(13)</sup> late in 1920 but the substance of the argument was frequently articulated by Robert Williams a leading exponent of revolutionary direct action. "I am in favour of direct control by the workers themselves," he wrote, "of the industries in which they are engaged, and, in fact, of the whole of the political affairs of the country, Parliamentary government has ceased to be representative. We must now carry on the preparatory work, in order to establish Soviet government in this country comparable to, but not identical with, the Russian institution.

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11. Forward (Glasgow), 11 January 1919.

12. This point is made by R.E. Dowse in "A Note on Ramsay MacDonalld and Direct Action", Political Studies, IX, No.2, (1961), pp. 306/8. See Note 1.

13. See footnote No.2.

There is no country in the world where the working-class are so prepared to take over the affairs which concern them so intimately as in Great Britain. There is no real democracy except that of the passion swayed mob."(14) Direct action, therefore, was conceived of as part of a wide ranging revolutionary change in British society in order to reconstruct it on Soviet lines, including, in the short run, the institution of a dictatorship of the proletariat. Thus the revolutionary direct actionists differed fundamentally from their more moderate colleagues in their rejection of the basic principles of Parliamentary government and the belief that the Socialist State could be established by legislation passed by a freely and democratically elected Parliament.

It was for this reason that the debate on direct action formed an integral part of the wider debate of "Democracy versus Dictatorship" and was seen primarily in those terms by the bulk of the Labour leadership both in Parliament and on the National Executive Committee. In turn, it was this attitude which made the whole question of direct action appear to be a simple matter of "Parliament versus direct action." It was a choice ostensibly as simple as that described by the American commentator Scott Nearing:- "Two lines of action presented themselves: one constitutional, the other direct. If... labour was to follow constitutional means, it would elect its representatives to local government bodies and to Parliament, and would transform British society by a series of constitutional legislative and administrative acts from a capitalist empire into a workers' republic. If it was to employ direct action, it would seize the economic and political machinery, smash the structure of the old order and establish a working-class government by the direct action of the organised workers."(15) In practice, however,

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14. Daily Herald, 10 May 1919.

15. Scott Nearing, The British General Strike: An Economic Interpretation of its Background and Significance (New York: Vanguard Press, 1926), p.13. Cf. Raymond Postgate, The Bolshevick Theory (London: Grant Richards, 1920), Ch. V.

the direct action of the organised workers proved to be more elusive, for, as Alan Bullock points out, "although a General Strike was constantly referred to and threatened between 1919 and 1926, no one on the trade union side ever worked out the problems of organisation involved, leave alone prepared for armed insurrection."(16) The reason for this was that the direct actionists were politically organised. Notwithstanding what was said about the failure of the Parliamentary Labour Party the moderate direct actionists never lost their faith in the political objectives of the Labour Movement, a fact demonstrated by the lack of individual withdrawals from the ranks of the Labour Party. For the revolutionaries the formation of the Communist Party of Great Britain theoretically provided the organisation for the overthrow of capitalist society, but it never presented a significant numerical challenge to the Labour Party.

Clearly there were many in the Labour Party who were confused about the nature of the debate over direct action. A certain degree of this confusion can be attributed to the political circumstances in which Labour found itself after the war. In the broadest context this was stated by the Permanent Commission of the Second International early in August 1919. The International, it declared, "must consider the forms of democracy and representative institutions, the place of revolutions in the transformation of Society, (and) the relations between industrial and political Organisation and mass action..."(17) At the domestic level these problems were intensified by the disaster of the Coupon Election which effectively prevented the House of Commons from having any meaningful influence on the government. Together with the devious policies adopted by the Coalition and the wide-spread industrial ferment which accompanied the ending of the war the political

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16. Bullock, loc.cit.

17. Permanent Commission of Labour and Socialist International, Lucerne, 1st-9th August 1919, Text of Resolutions reprinted in L.P.A.C.R. 1919. Appendix XV, pp. 218-224 (218)



situation convinced many in Britain that social distintegration was just around the corner. (18) In such an atmosphere it was virtually impossible to draw the fine distinction between unconstitutional and extra-Parliamentary activities which can be seen in retrospect. In addition there is little doubt that the moderate direct actionists as a whole failed to state their position clearly and frequently did not appreciate that they were in political harness with individuals whose oft-declared aim was the overthrow of the Parliamentary system by revolutionary means. Some, like MacDonald, were jockeying for their personal political advantage while others like Smillee were concerned with the establishment of political support for their ideas in the Party.

Such nuances of opinion were not clearly definable immediately. As long as Labour had been divided on its political stand the question of tactics was not raised. This was especially true while Labour was on the defensive as part of the governmental war-machine. It was when the party became united in Opposition that the divisions became apparent. These divisions were all the more deeply held because of the issues with which they were concerned: the continuation of conscription into peace-time; the continued imprisonment of, and discrimination against, Conscientious Objectors; the Government's blockade of Eastern Europe and, in particular, Allied military intervention in Russia.

The outbreak of the Russian revolution had been generally welcomed by the Labour Party. Relieved at the demise of "the most powerful tyranny in the world," (19) and grateful that the war for the democracy was at last being fought

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18. See Mitchell, op.cit., (page 23 note 3 above) cf. Walter Kendall, The Revolutionary Movement in Britain 1900-21: The Origins of British Communism (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1969). W.S. Churchill, The World Crisis: The Aftermath (London: Thornton Butterworth, 1929).

19. Manchester Guardian, 21 March 1917.

by democracies, Labour's attitude proved to be distinctly sympathetic. The anti-war section of the Party in particular saw the revolution as increasing the likelihood of peace. Thus in June 1917 the B.S.P. and the I.L.P. organised a convention at Leeds to welcome the Revolution and espouse the anti-war case. Both MacDonald and Snowden spoke at the Convention in glowing terms, and in ignorance, of the democratic nature of the new Russian government. Resolutions were passed congratulating the Russian people on their revolution, expressing satisfaction with their recently announced peace aims, and calling for the full restoration of civil liberties in Great Britain. A fourth resolution called for the establishment, "in every town, urban and rural district (of) Councils of Workmen and Soldiers' Delegates for initiating and co-ordinating working-class activity....." so as to give effect to the policy decisions of the Conference, while a Provisional Committee was established to co-ordinate their overall activities.(20)

The exact purpose of this new organisation was a question which revealed the different approaches of the moderates and the revolutionaries to the solution of political problems. Proposing the resolution W.C. Anderson saw the new organisation primarily in pressure-group terms apparently expecting it to operate successfully upon a politically aware government and eventually conquering it by political means. It was neither subversive nor unconstitutional. Revolution would come only if the authorities resorted to tyranny.(21) Robert Williams had no such ideas. For him the resolution meant nothing more or less than the 'Dictatorship of the Proletariat' and he advised those with cold feet to leave the

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20. What Happened at Leeds (London: Pelican Press, 1917). See Note 2.

21. What Happened at Leeds, pp. 14/15.

Convention, for Leeds was determined to break the influence of Labour's decrepit political and industrial machine. Parliament had never done anything for the working masses and never would. The Russians had shown the way by their contempt for their constitution. They had succeeded, the parallel was obvious, "Go thou and do likewise." (22) Willie Gallacher followed with similar sentiments while Sylvia Pankhurst asserted that the Provisional Committee selected at Leeds would one day be the provisional government of Great Britain. (23) R.C. Wallhead, who was to issue the call some years later to the 'I.L.P. Left-Wing' to get out of the party, showed traits of woolly thinking in supporting the action. The only able voice of dissent throughout the whole proceedings came from Ernest Bevin who, amongst other insights of political sagacity, questioned the motives of the politicians who were present at the Convention. Observing that the platform had said, "The tide is on the rise for us," Bevin asked, "For whom? The professional politicians of the Labour Party?", a cutting remark which provoked disorder in the Convention. (24)

Graubard in reference to the Convention asked about MacDonald and Snowden, "How were such men able to agree to a resolution creating extra-parliamentary Soviets with sovereign powers?" (25) and pointed to the unrepresentative nature of the Convention which came "not so much to debate as to applaud," (26) as the answer. "The Leeds Convention was a well-staged demonstration and as such left no permanent mark on the Labour Movement." (27)

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22. Ibid., pp. 15-17.

23. Ibid., p. 17.

24. Ibid., p. 11. cf., Bullock, Op.cit., pp. 75/6.

25. S.R. Graubard, British Labour and the Russian Revolution 1917-1924 (London: Oxford University Press, 1956), p. 39. Cf. J.T. Murphy, New Horizons (London: John Lane, the Bodley Head, 1941), p. 61.

26. Graubard, Op.cit., p. 40.

27. Ibid., p. 40. See Note 3.

But this is misleading. The resolution could mean the setting up of Soviets, if that is what one wanted it to mean. Yet Philip Snowden did not see it in this light, and it is doubtful if MacDonald did either.(28) Moreover, as Graubard records, Will Thorne specifically denied that physical revolution was even possible in Great Britain.(29) What Leeds did signify was that Labour was already divided between those who looked to violent revolution and those who looked to action through Parliament for the transition to Socialism and that until faced with the realities of operating as a cohesive body claiming to be the alternative government, both sections could agree on a suitable form of words to express their essentially different ideas. The failure of democratic reason in 1918 merely confused this division by creating a third group willing to use industrial power for political ends but not accepting any Bolshevist notions of a revolutionary uprising.

The first large scale discussion of the general principle of direct action in the Labour Party took place at the Party's Annual Conference of 1919 where a resolution was passed condemning Allied intervention in Russia and instructing the National Executive to consult with the Parliamentary Committee of the T.U.C. with a view to effectively enforcing Labour's demands "by the unreserved use of their political and industrial power."(30) A similar resolution on Conscription was introduced by David Kirkwood.(31).

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28. Snowden, Autobiography, I, pp. 455/6. See Note 4.

29. Will Thorne, My Life's Battles (London: George Newnes, 1931), p. 195.

30. L.P.A.C.R. 1919 p.156 ff.

31. Ibid., pp.166. The resolutions' reference to "the full power of organised Labour" can be taken to mean Direct Action. This particular motion was adopted unanimously and without debate.

The Executive's Report, the debates on the subject and the hostility shown towards the P.L.P., clearly illustrate the failure of the Executive to understand the dual nature of the direct actionist case and the failure of the moderates to fully define their position. As it was few of the latter could appreciate that they were being led into positions hostile to Parliamentary government, while the former regarded all Direct Actionists as revolutionaries.

The Direct Actionist attack was led by Robert Williams and Robert Smillie both of whom argued that the government's policy was unconstitutional. Smillie in seeking to prove this assertion showed a tendency to confuse political acumen with public morality. Attacking the government, he asked, "Had they not deceived the people? Were they not returned to power under false pretences? Did not every member of their Committee believe that the present government was sitting in its place through fraud?"(32) While it can be appreciated that for democracy to function adequately a certain level of electoral rationality, free from hysteria, has to operate one can only conclude that Smillie's assertion that Labour had the right "to get rid of a Government....sitting there through fraud and deceit"(33) would tend to further undermine the prestige of the House of Commons and political action, which was certainly not what he had intended.

Several speakers at the Conference failed to realise that their objections to the moral standing of the government led them to draw conclusions which could be interpreted as being hostile to Parliamentary government. Bromley of A.S.L.E.F., for example, bitterly attacked the government for not fulfilling its election pledges, a condition he seemed to associate with

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32. This was on a motion to refer back the section of the Executive's Report which did not accept that industrial action for political purposes was an acceptable object for the Labour Party. L.P.A.C.R. 1919, pp. 116-123. Smillie's comments are to be found on pp.118.

33. Loc.cit.

democratic government. Then, declaring that progress was the sole province of "the intelligent progressive minorities," he voiced his own doubts that Labour would or could ever win an election in a capitalist society even where it had a wide suffrage.(34) In so doing Bromley was unwittingly using the argument which the Marxists would use in justifying the Dictatorship of the Proletariat. In reacting against the result of the 1918 election many people in the Labour Party like Bromley questioned the validity of majority rule and the efficacy of Parliamentary government. This is clearly illustrated by the speech of R.J. Davies, who proposed the resolution condemning Allied intervention in Russia. Pointing out that he wished industrial action to be thought of in terms of supplementing rather than substituting political action, he argued that "nearly every movement in favour of the working-classes had been unconstitutional."(35) Clearly such attitudes, reinforced by the certainty of the rightness of the cause, could be used to justify any revolutionary action.

Part of the direct actionist attack was centred upon the alleged failings of Labour's leaders in general, and the P.L.P. in particular. Bromley, in his speech, called upon the leadership to give the rank and file the call for which they were waiting. "It was the leaders who were too respectable, who didn't like to be roasted in the capitalist Press, who liked to be called level-headed Trade Unionists."(36) The rank and file were only waiting for effective leadership. The attack on the P.L.P. was more severe. Herbert Morrison described it as "a failure in the present Parliament."(37) Its ranks were sadly lacking in quality, its outlook was

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34. Ibid., p.120.

35. Ibid., p.157.

36. Ibid., pp. 120/1.

37. Ibid., p.128.

distinctly narrow. It had failed to voice the aspirations of the Labour Movement "on great national questions of principle, on great matters of liberty, and on great matters of international policy."(38) Other delegates drew up specific examples of the inadequacy of the Parliamentary party. Its inability to do anything about the Glasgow strike, and the use of military on that occasion, was cited by a delegate from Glasgow. "The Labour Party in the House of Commons," he declared, "did not voice the matter as they ought to have done."(39) Mrs. Bamber of the B.S.P. accused the P.L.P. of failing to distinguish itself as a separate political entity, a failure she attributed to its inferiority complex, and urged that it adopt a more militant tone in the House of Commons.(40)

According to Graubard the direct actionists case drew great strength from the failure of the P.L.P. to provide positive leadership. On the Russian question for example, "The Labour Party's protest in Parliament lacked both vigour and purpose" so that "as Labour's weakness in Parliament became increasingly apparent, the proponents of 'direct action' gained new prestige."(41) This conclusion however does not accord with the evidence. In the first place Labour's main weakness was less in quality than in quantity, a fact which few direct actionists seemed to appreciate. Herbert Morrison, for example, had stated that the Government's policy "was not war against Boshevism....but against the international organisation of Socialism..... (and) against the organisation of the Trade Union Movement itself and as such should be resisted with the full political and industrial power of the whole Trade Union Movement."(42) The Labour Party's role as Trade Unionism's

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38. Loc.cit.

39. Ibid., p.129.

40. Loc.cit.

41. Graubard, Op.cit., p.70.

42. L.P.A.C.R. 1919, p.128.

political arm should be to conduct itself in Parliament, "On the lines of opposition, on the lines of hostility to the Government..."(43) tactics which he seemed to think would somehow or other lead to the government's downfall. Similar ideas were expressed the following year by Josiah Wedgwood who told the 1920 Party Conference that "he wanted the Labour Party to oppose, for it was only by opposition that they would get their way."(44) Believing that militant tactics would increase party membership, Wedgwood asserted that "if the Labour Party made themselves as objectionable as they could in the House he had no doubt they could get their Russian policy followed."(45) The following year another delegate approvingly referred to Parnellite tactics as the kind of militancy the P.L.P. should practice.(46.)

The relevance of such action was limited for as Adamson was to point out 60 members could not dominate a House of 700 members.(47) Certainly this was true of the House of Commons since the 1880's when the Irish Party had attempted to impose its will upon the House. In addition it should be remembered that a number of individuals had an interest in being critical of the P.L.P. Ramsay MacDonald, with his political sense guiding him, was proclaiming the need for non-Parliamentary action before the P.L.P. had even reached Westminster even though his call was couched in conservative terms.(48) MacDonald's dislike of the P.L.P. and its membership could only have been reinforced by his humiliating failure to secure the post of adviser to the P.L.P. early in 1920.(49) Moreover,

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43. Loc.cit.
44. L.P.A.C.R. 1920, p.151.
45. Loc.cit. See Note 5.
46. L.P.A.C.R. 1921, p.187. The delegate was Mr. G. Thompson (Bolton Labour Party)
47. L.P.A.C.R. 1919, p.132.
48. See above, Footnote 12.
49. This incident is described in Lyman, Op.cit., pp.135/6.



defenders of MacDonald have too often forgotten that his ambiguous statements on direct action, like those during the war, were spoken by a politician whose main skill was to play both sides at once - though not always dishonourably.(50) Nonetheless, it was noticeable how quickly the P.L.P. once under MacDonald's leadership was praised by MacDonald himself in the Socialist Review. In January 1923 he wrote "Labour is the Opposition and is functioning as the Opposition. It has had even more than its fair share of opportunities provided for it and has taken them well."(51) Of course, part of this banter was directed at the Liberals. "The Opposition falls more and more into the hands of the Labour Party" MacDonald wrote in May of the same year. Yet he could not resist references to the alleged absence of an Opposition during the previous Parliament.(52) Clearly MacDonald was far from being a disinterested observer.

Philip Snowden too used his columns in the Labour Leader to gloomily forecast even before Parliament had met in 1919 that the P.L.P. did not appear to be a dynamic force, and although he took great pains to declare his impartiality, it is clear that he, like MacDonald, was anxious to prevent the new Labour Members, of whom only three had I.L.P. connections, from getting any credit which they, as the natural leaders of the party, really deserved.(53) The Labour Leader's criticism throughout the period 1919-1922 was primarily an exercise in anti-Trade Union sectionalism based essentially on the temperamental, emotional, intellectual and policy differences between the "advanced" position of the I.L.P. and the conservatism

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50. Mary Agnes Hamilton commented that "Between 1919 and 1922 his only secure support came from within the I.L.P....to the I.L.P. he had been a hero. Now in going against the Russian Revolution he jeopardised his heroism." Uphill all the Way: A Third Cheer for Democracy (London: Jonathan Cape, 1953), p.37.
51. Socialist Review, No.112 (January, 1923), p.5. See also "The Party in Parliament" Ibid., pp.25/35.
52. See Forward (Glasgow), 25 November 1922. Cf. 23 December 1922 (MacDonald).
53. Labour Leader, 2 January 1919. See Note 6.

of the Unions. (54) This bias was particularly noticeable in the Labour Leader in its constant criticism of the P.L.P. as a typical Trade Union body and its conclusion that members of the I.L.P. would make better Labour M.P's. (55) Moreover, while the Labour Leader was forever bemoaning the absence of MacDonald, Jowett and Snowden from the House of Commons it never once referred to Arthur Henderson, whose party, governmental and Parliamentary experience was, and remained, unmatched by the darlings of the I.L.P. (56)

In January 1919 Snowden wrote, "Unless the Labour Party makes the best use of its opportunities the movement among the rank-and-file for unofficial direct action will grow, but an effective Opposition in the House of Commons .... will convince the revolutionary element that Parliament can be used as a potent instrument for constitutional revolution." (57) His optimism about the 'revolutionary element' apart, Snowden's analysis and conclusion stood in stark contrast to his own barren record as a leading Labour member in the House of Commons, both before and during the war, when the P.L.P. was fundamentally divided on a great number of issues. Moreover, he should have noticed a far more astute observation made by the Labour Leader's 'London Diary.' "The direct actionists," it commented, "are likely to reap a harvest from the hopelessness of the political situation." (58)

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54. In April 1920 the I.L.P. sent a letter to the N.E.C. complaining at the inactivity of the P.L.P. in the Parliamentary discussion and debates on foreign policy, particularly those concerned with the Austrian Treaty. See N.E.C. Minutes Vol. 19. 20 April 1920. See also Labour Leader, 4 March 1920.
55. Labour Leader, 1919 passim. Cf. MacDonald's "A Member of Parliament cannot be selected in the same way that a delegate to a Trade Union Conference or an I.L.P. Conference is. The jobs are altogether different ...." Forward (Glasgow), 3 May 1919.
56. See Note 7.
57. Labour Leader, 30 January 1919. Cf. MacDonald Socialist Review, XVI, No. 89 (April/June 1919), p.104.
58. Labour Leader, 2 January 1919. Cf. MacDonald's statement that the new Parliament "invited outside action" Times, 3 January 1919. The Italics are mine.

Indeed the Labour Leader in an editorial had expressed the "conviction that the strength and influence of the Party would depend less upon its numbers and exertions in the House than upon the energy of the Labour agitation in the country..."(59)

The most complete and detached criticism of the P.L.P. is found in an article by Willie Graham which represented in less vitriolic terms the I.L.P. case. "Parliament demands the exclusive attention of the best minds if real progress is intended. From the very beginning that is impossible in the case of Labour members. Of the 60 representatives, practically all are overworked Trade Union officials. Due largely to the great development of the work of the Ministry of Labour, to the establishment of all manner of Advisory Committees and Conciliation Boards and to the demands of a greatly increased membership throughout the country, the duties of these men have become harder than ever. The Unions expect results."

"The inevitable effect is that the House of Commons can see these men only occasionally. They are not able to appreciate its atmospheres because they have not the opportunities; they lose touch with legislation; there is no hope of patient study; Committee work cannot be attempted for lack of time; and the critics are probably sound when they argue that the Parliamentary Party is not doing the best work. It is defeated not by lack of ability, for there is much solid sense in the ranks, but by a system. We must do all in our power to secure the return of many of the men who disappeared in December. They had the parliamentary way. They specialised. Above all, they had the preliminary training which enabled them to deal effectively with the sophistries of an impromptu Treasury Bench."(60).

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59. Labour Leader, 9 January 1919. See Note 8.

60. "Parliament and Labour", article in Edinburgh Evening News reproduced in Thomas N. Graham, Willie Graham: The Life of the Rt. Hon. Willie Graham (London: Hutchinson, 1948), pp. 84/5. See note 9.

There was some substance in Graham's criticism although its real aim was "to secure the return of many of the men who disappeared in December" - but if the symptoms were obvious, the diagnosis was wrong for the kind of criticism which was made of the P.L.P. betrayed the prejudices of its critics. Graham himself admitted "This Parliament was hardly elected before the vendetta against all reasonable Labour representatives was commenced."(61) The Parliamentary Party's concentration on industrial affairs (the natural product of the composition of the P.L.P. and the importance of industrial conflict in the immediate post-war years) riled the I.L.P. which preferred to talk about wider international issues. Thus when the Labour Leader claimed that "as it (the P.L.P.) is constituted at present it is not worthy of democratic opposition. The Parliamentary party does not represent the movement"(62) it was hitting at Trade Union domination of the leadership of the Party and its own exclusion from power. Objectivity was of little consequence. One delegate at the 1919 Conference announced that M.P.'s "were returned to Parliament to put in attendance at Parliament, and nothing should prevent them from being in their seats"(63) - a criticism which showed no understanding of the operation of the House of Commons and ignorance of the nature of what constituted a Parliamentary seat. Certainly it made little allowance for the political difficulties in which the P.L.P. found itself in its attempts to be recognised as the official Opposition.(64)

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61. Times, 12 April 1920, Quoting Edinburgh Evening News.
  62. Labour Leader, 24 July 1919. It was not until 1922 that the N.E.C. agreed to consult with the Trade Unions financially responsible for M.P.'s with a view to allowing them facilities for full-time devotion to their Parliamentary duties. N.E.C. Minutes Vol. 25, 23 November 1922.
  63. H.P.A.C.R. 1919, p.128. Mr. W.H. Harding (Hammersmith Central Labour Party). See Note 10.
  64. See Note 11.

Although the impetus for direct action had subsided by the time of the 1920 and 1921 Conferences (the Council of Action notwithstanding) criticism of the P.L.P. continued on much the same lines as before. Criticism was not, however, couched in terms of supplementing the P.L.P.'s numerical weakness but of strengthening its quality. The main line of attack was still the alleged failure of the P.L.P. to behave according to the standards supposedly set up by rank-and-file delegates. Emmanuel Shinwell speaking at the 1920 Conference expressed concern with "the efficiency of the Party in the House of Commons"<sup>(65)</sup> intimating that in all respects (attendances, its representativeness and its faith) it was not up to the required standard. Another delegate (E.E. Hunter) criticised the P.L.P. for not attracting attention as the anti-war section of the party had allegedly done. "The charge and the criticism was that the Party was not attracting attention, that it was not acting as the leader of working-class opinion in the House of Commons."<sup>(66)</sup> Several speakers attacked the failure of the P.L.P. to function as an Opposition by expressing the aspirations of the Party. This continued criticism of the P.L.P. at a time when Direct Action was on the wane clearly indicates that unless the P.L.P. had suddenly become a purposeful and vigorous force in the House of Commons such criticism was not framed independently of the phenomenon of direct action. The supposed failure of the P.L.P. was used by the direct actionists and other anti-Trade Union, anti-P.L.P. elements in the Party to augment their case not to prove it. It was these elements who attempted to mould Labour Opinion through the party organs of propaganda (Labour Leader, Daily Herald and Forward) all of which were hostile to the P.L.P.

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65. L.P.A.C.R. 1920, p.148.

66. Ibid., p.151.

It is quite obvious that the criticisms which were made of the P.L.P. boiled down in the end to a matter of psychology and opinion. Ben Spoor, himself a member of the I.L.P. Parliamentary group, expressed this when he said, "there was a feeling that for some reason or other the sixty and more men in the House had not done their work so effectively as did twenty men when they were in the House before."(67) Like Wedgwood he attributed this feeling to the willingness of the P.L.P. to compromise. Several speeches from the rank-and-file at both Conferences pursued the same theme. It was felt that the P.L.P. had failed to lead, that they had not put Labour's case effectively enough, fought hard enough, attracted enough attention or received deputations as they ought. Such criticism was not new, indeed, it had been an integral part of the pre-war Labour politics, but it was not entirely true either. Rank-and-file movements inevitably tend to be critical of what they consider to be the leadership's foot-dragging. Such criticism merely reflected the frustration of the Party with its exclusion from real influence. It is noticeable, too, that the P.L.P. in 1921, though not substantially different in personnel and tactics from its 1919 counterpart, far from being condemned as a failure was being spurred "on to greater efforts in the House of Commons."(68)

It is quite clear that contemporary critics neither knew nor cared about the technicalities of Parliamentary opposition; they wanted effective action of a type which the P.L.P., by virtue of its Parliamentary position, could not provide. Later critics have too readily ignored the defences which were made by, and in favour of, the P.L.P., or have chosen to accept at face-value some of the criticisms made at the time. Despite Snowden's

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67. Ibid., p.152. See Note 12.

68. L.P.A.C.R. 1921, p.178. See Note 13.

claims to the contrary the speeches which Adamson and Clynes made correctly analysed the problems facing the P.L.P.(69) Quite simply successive leaders of the Parliamentary Party declared that criticism of the Party's performance was a mixture of lies and the naïve acceptance of the propaganda churned out by the capitalist press - which was naturally anxious to prevent the P.L.P. from attracting the favourable attention of the electorate. J.R. Clynes answering a charge from Philip Snowden that he was drifting away from Socialism commented, "Mr. Snowden requires but little evidence to pass a judgement upon his fellows. A line lifted from the 'Capitalist Press' is at times enough on which to give a verdict."(70) Criticism of the P.L.P. Adamson noted, "was almost an annual procedure...."(71) In reply to such criticism it was asserted that the attendance record of the P.L.P. in the existing Parliament was favourably comparable with that of any of its predecessors, its opponents, the Party Conference and branch meetings. The last point stirred some guilty consciences.(72) In his report to the 1919 Conference Adamson in answer to critics of the P.L.P.'s record pointed out that an M.P.'s time was limited by a variety of claims - including the demands of local parties for Members to make visits. Attendance in the debating chamber was not the sole criteria of an M.P.'s legitimate activity.(73) There was no need for him to elaborate for even Willie Graham came under attack from the disgruntled minority.(74)

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69. William Adamson and J.R. Clynes were successive leaders of the P.L.P., 1918-20 and 1920-22 respectively.

70. Labour Leader, 15 May 1919.

71. L.P.A.C.R. 1919, p.130.

72. Ibid., p.131.

73. L.P.A.C.R. 1919, p.63 and pp. 130/2.

74. Graham, Op.cit., p.93

The facts supported the Parliamentary leadership's case: the attendance record of both Clynes and Adamson was good while the most notable absentees were older Members of the Party several of whom (Abraham, Crooks and Wilkie for example) were to retire at, or before, the next General Election. The critics readily admitted that there was Party and Committee work to be attended to in addition to the time spent occupying the Commons' benches whilst attendance figures could be deceptive.(75) The alleged inefficiency of Trade Union Members was denied; Parliamentary tactics were defended and shortcomings recognised.(76) In the final analysis, as Adamson pointed out, "no matter how strongly or intelligently they might put their case, when they went into the Division Lobby they could only return 60 votes."(77) The answer was more, not less political activity, so as to ensure that Labour had increased representation in the House of Commons.

Significantly the Party which was dismissed as a failure in 1919 was being faintly praised by 1921. The arguments in its defence which had been scorned by Hodges in 1919 were admitted by him to be valid in 1921. The political methods which had meant 'failure' in 1919 were heralded as essential in 1921, although the 'Clarion' in which the Right Wing of the Labour Party frequently wrote articles had never shared the views of the I.L.P. on the question of poor leadership by the P.L.P.(78) Not all of this can be attributed to the failure of Direct Action in practice, such as the psychologically detrimental effect of Black Friday for example, although this, no doubt, had its effect especially during a period of increasing unemployment and an employers' offensive; viz the Miners' lock-out 1921.(79) This changed

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75. Spoor at the 1920 Conference, L.P.A.C.R. 1920, p.152.
76. See, for example, Clynes' speech to the 1920 Conference. L.P.A.C.R. 1920, pp.154/5. L.P.A.C.R. 1921, p.180/1.
77. L.P.A.C.R. 1919, p.132.
78. See Note 14.
79. G.D.H. Cole opined that Black Friday "brought an epoch in the Labour movement's history to an end." History of the Labour Party, p.117.



attitude helped towards the re-establishment of political methods, although the very fact that the P.L.P. was criticised is evidence of an underlying faith in political methods. Yet the P.L.P.'s defence did not go by default. Clynes speaking at the Annual Conference accepted in principle a resolution which attacked the continuing practice of allowing Trade Union officials to remain in their posts when they were elected to the House of Commons, but argued that the Conference should judge the P.L.P. "not by some imaginary standard of high efficiency which the critics believed they could reach if they were in their place, but by exactly the standard which the critics would have to keep if they had the job as Members of Parliament to do." (80) Clynes was never tired of pointing out, usually by inference, that the most continual complaints among the I.L.P. ex-M.P.'s were not motivated solely by the interests of the party. There is little doubt that notwithstanding the fact that the P.L.P. was far from being the dynamic force it might have been, the increasing imminence of a general election modified the criticism of several aspirant Labour M.P.'s, especially since the credit for the Council of Action belonged to the despised trade union bloc. A recent commentator, moreover, has pointed out that, "the Labour Party made extensive advances between 1918 and 1921 succeeding in the process in consolidating its position as the chief opposition party in the country." (81)

The P.L.P. may not have been the most brilliant advocate of the claims of new enfranchised Labour but it performed its role as dutifully as could be expected in the circumstances. Perhaps the best perspective is the following comment from Sidney and Beatrice Webb "What the militants in the country failed to allow for," they wrote, "was the impotence of a small

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80. L.P.A.C.R. 1920, p.155.

81. Cowling, op.cit., p.25.

Parliamentary section to secure the adoption of its own policy by a Parliamentary majority. But it is, we think, now admitted that it was a misfortune that the Parliamentary Labour Party of these years never managed to put before the country the larger outlines of an alternative programme based on the Party's conception of a new social order...."

Although the Webbs' comments were substantially those made by the I.L.P. of the P.L.P. between 1919 and 1922, their remarks were in fact a criticism of the P.L.P. of 1906-1911 when Snowden and MacDonald were amongst its leading personnel. (82)

Some understanding between the moderate direct actionists and the constitutionalists might have been possible had not the latter refused to admit the possibility of compromise. During his address to the Labour Party Conference of 1919, however, the Chairman, McGurk, put any such ideas out of court immediately. "We are either constitutionalists or we are not .... constitutionalists. If we are constitutionalists, if we believe in the efficacy of the political weapon, (and we do, or why do we have a Labour Party?), then it is both unwise and undemocratic because we fail to get a majority at the polls to turn round and demand that we should substitute industrial action." (83) No room was allowed for a duality of approach, it was either constitutional political action or revolutionary industrial action.

This approach, which was followed by the majority of Labour leaders, was based upon a positive antipathy towards the revolutionary direct actionists. As far as Jimmy Sexton was concerned, for example, any concession to the direct actionists would be "letting loose an element that was rife...."

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82. S. & B. Webb, op.cit., p.688.

83. L.P.A.C.R. 1919, p.113. See Note 15.

..in the Trade Union Movement, that would take every advantage of the confusion, and make it impossible for them to exercise any controlling power. There was a section whose intentions may be of the best, but his quarrel with them was that their policy was a rotten one....they had no machinery to replace what they had destroyed. Their only machinery would be revolution."(84) For Sexton these 'mad dogs' would do nothing but harm to the Trade Union Movement.

Lest it be thought that Sexton overstated or exaggerated the case he was advocating it should be remembered that he was a fair representative of the solid Trade Union M.P. block. Clynes was another. Speaking in opposition to the resolution calling for direct action on the issue of Allied Intervention in Russia, Clynes stated that while he supported industrial and strike action for economic aims, "he refused to use that weapon for so clearly and obvious a political purpose, as that mentioned in the resolution."(85) Taking a swipe at those who bemoaned the absence of I.L.P. stalwarts from the P.L.P. he reminded the assembled delegates that while the Labour Party had been rejected at the polls, even in the great industrial centres, they still hoped one day to see a Labour and Socialist government. "What then would any class be entitled to do which rejected an action which that Government may take? Were they going to concede to every other or any other class the right they were claiming to exercise? Did it mean that any class which could exercise the power should have the right to terrorise a Labour government by the use of any means or manoeuvre that it could apply?"(86) The Labour Leader recorded sarcastic

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84. L.P.A.C.R. 1919, pp.119/120. Cf. Sexton's protest against the "pernicious policy of challenging the State by direct action." H.C. Deb. 119, cc 1240.

85. L.P.A.C.R. 1919, p.160.

86. Ibid., pp. 160/1.

cries of assent.(87) Pursuing the argument to its logical conclusion Clynes declared that, "the blow which they were threatening would not be a blow at a Government but a blow at democracy."(88)

Ralph Miliband, a Left-Wing critic of the Labour Party, has interpreted Clynes' speech as asking, "that the Labour Movement should deliberately forebear to use its power over urgent issues in the expectation that its opponents, in grateful memory of that forbearance, would also behave nicely when Labour came to office."(89) Such an interpretation, however, seems designed to fit Miliband's own prejudices about the nature of capitalist society and the way in which it allegedly induces Left-Wing purists to flee from their ideological principles, for Clynes was merely implying that which Henderson on behalf of the solid Trade Union bloc of the Party made clear: "To force upon the country by illegitimate means the policy of a section, perhaps a minority, of the community involves the abrogation of Parliamentary Government, establishes a dictatorship of the minority and might easily destroy eventually all our constitutional liberties."

"It is, moreover, a two-edged policy. When Labour conquers political power and accepts responsibility for the machinery of Government, I cannot see it prepared to admit say, the followers of Sir Edward Carson, or the medical profession to set the Executive at defiance by any process of direct action."(90)

Clearly the constitutionalists were confident in practice, as well in theory, of their ultimate Parliamentary victory through the polls. William Brace of the South Wales Miners chided the direct actionists on this very point.

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87. Labour Leader, 3 July 1919.

88. L.P.A.C.R. 1919 p.161.

89. Miliband, Parliamentary Socialism, p.72.

90. Daily Herald, 14 July 1919. Cf. The Times' version of 14 July 1919. J.H. Thomas' speech, Times 28 July 1919. Sir Edward Carson was at the time making thunderous speeches against the possibility of Ulster being forced to remain part of Ireland.

Reminding them of their professed faith in a Labour victory, he asked, "Did they believe their vision? Why, they had been proclaiming that within the next few years they would see the control of political opinion in this country and that a Labour Government should be power. Had they faith in themselves?"(91) The answer, as the moderates so often said, lay in the imperfect state of Socialist propaganda.

Perhaps it was not faith that was lacking but patience; the direct actionists were impatient, an impatience born of the arrogance of the intellectual certainty that underlies the tenets of Marxist and neo-Marxist social and political analysis. Ben Tillett was well aware of this when he attacked 'the middle-class and professional politicians' who were always anxious to lead the Trade Unions into trouble but the last to help them out of it. He made this contempt for them quite clear; "The lions on the platform had been rats when the sword had been drawn" he declared.(92) As far as he was concerned the decision on industrial action properly belonged to the Trade Union Movement not the Labour Party. The Conference evidently believed otherwise, for it passed the resolution by a substantial majority.(93)

The Conference, however, could not control the actions of the party leadership which remained predominately constitutionalist in principle and pragmatic in practice. Considering the inevitable clash of personalities, the disloyalty of Robert Williams to collective decisions and the emotional energy that exploded at each stormy meeting of the Executive, its own stance on the question of direct action epitomised the fine art of compromise. In

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91. L.P.A.C.R. 1919, p.121.

92. Ibid, pp. 158/9. The I.L.P. was as contemptuous of Tillett as he was of it, see Labour Leader, 3 July 1919. Tillett had been the author of a pamphlet "Is the Labour Party a Failure?" which was circulated at the Portsmouth Conference (1908). See Robert Williams, The New Labour Outlook, p.28.

93. L.P.A.C.R. 1919, p.161. 1,893,000 votes to 935,000.

its statement to the Conference it had noted that "many resolutions have been received at the Head Office indicating that there are some sections of the Movement anxious that an organised attempt to defeat the Government's political policy by direct industrial action should be discussed by a joint Conference representative of both the political and industrial movements."(94) However, it had continued, "the Triple Industrial Alliance has indicated by resolution their desire that the issue should be determined by the Trades Union Congress only."(95) Its own view was non-committal, "if the British Labour Movement is to institute a new precedent in our industrial history by initiating a general strike for the purpose of achieving not industrial but political objects, it is imperative that the Trade Unions, whose members are to fulfill the obligations implied in the new policy and whose finances it is presumed are to be involved, should realise the responsibilities such a strike movement would entail and should themselves determine the plan of any such new campaign."(96)

On the 9th July 1919 the Executive agreed to press for a special conference "for the purpose of discussing whether, and by what means, direct industrial action should be taken to secure the adoption of the policy of the Labour Movement on Allied Intervention in Russia and the continuance of Conscription."(97) The Parliamentary Committee of the T.U.C., however, refused to co-operate. It had earlier refused similar requests from the Miners and the Triple Alliance, on the grounds that a special Conference

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94. L.P.A.C.R. 1919, p.27.

95. Loc.cit.

96. Loc.cit., The Executive had already turned down a proposed 24 hour strike on the grounds that "it is not the business of the Labour Party to interfere with the business of the Trades Union and the Parliamentary Committee of the Trades Union Congress." N.E.C. Minutes Vol. 17., 25 June 1919.

97. N.E.C. Minutes, Vol.18., 9 July 1919. The resolution was moved by Cramp and Robert Williams. Tom Shaw and J. Wignall failed in an attempt to refer the matter to ballot of the Trade Union Movement. The Amendment was defeated 14 to 4 and the motion passed by 14 votes to 5.

had no power to order the General Strike demanded by the Miners' Leaders, and that "to declare such a threat without the certainty of its being carried out would reduce the prestige of the Labour Movement,"(98) preferring instead to accept Bonar Law's assurances on governmental policy. By the narrow majority of six votes to four it again refused to call a special Conference. The Triple Alliance therefore, took its own steps to force the issue by calling a ballot to ask its members whether they were in favour of withdrawing their labour to secure the abolition of conscription, of military intervention in Russia, and of military intervention in Trade Union disputes."(99) The result of the ballot was never announced, owing to the policy statement given by Mr. Winston Churchill, Secretary of State for War, in the House of Commons on 29th July 1919 which effectively answered each of the questions asked by the Triple Alliance. The Daily Herald was elated and declared that the event was "the final and irrefutable proof of the necessity and efficacy of direct action"(100) a view which few observers then or since have shared.

None of these events eased the antagonism within the Party over the question of direct action. Indeed, they reinforced and polarised the two sides in their views. The constitutionalists had still less faith in the likelihood of widespread rank-and-file support for industrial action and complete disrespect for the direct actionist leaders, especially Robert Williams whose deliberate leakages of confidential information were a constant source of political embarrassment. At the Trade Union Conference

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98. V.L. Allen, Trade Unions and the Government (London: Longmans, 1960), pp. 153. Allen is quoting the minutes of the Parliamentary Committee of the T.U.C., 8 April, 1919.

99. Bullock, op.cit., p. 105.

100. Daily Herald, 30 July 1919.

of 1919 the direct actionists were accused of attempting to foment a revolution in Britain, with the ultimate purpose of establishing a government on the Soviet model, whereas the constitutionalists argued that redress through the ballot box was still possible.(101) The Conference disagreed and defeated all the devices put up by the Parliamentary Committee designed to prevent the appearance of having gone revolutionary, by referring back the section of the Report excusing its inaction and defeating a motion which was hostile to the idea of Direct Action.(102) However, no vote in favour of direct action was proposed and although the Parliamentary Committee had been censured for failing to act on the issues upon which that censure was based those issues had lost their immediacy. The hostile votes represented the frustration of the direct actionists with the failure of the leadership to discharge governmental functions, notwithstanding the fact that it was not in a position to act as a government.

The impetus for Direct Action decreased as unemployment rose and the Government and employers grew in confidence. The Miners, having been bought off with the Sankey Commission, were the first to feel the drop in the tempo when, in spite of the indictment of private ownership which the Commission had elicited, the Government in August 1919 finally dismissed all ideas of nationalisation. A special conference of the T.U.C. in December 1919 revealed a distinct unwillingness in the Movement to resort to extra parliamentary force.(103) A widespread "Mines for the Nation" Campaign was inaugurated without success. Another special Conference (11 March 1920)

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101. Trades Union Congress Report, 1919, p.216/31. Hereafter T.U.C. Report. See also Clynes in The Times, 10th and 15th August 1919, and 8th September 1919.

102. T.U.C. Report, 1919. pp 288/300.

103. L.P.A.C.R., 1920, pp 7/9. T.U.C. Report, 1920, pp 87/90.



voted against using a general strike weapon to secure nationalisation and in favour of "political action, in the form of intensive political propaganda in preparation for a General Election." (104) Recent bye-election and local election results no doubt played their part in generating hope for Labour's political future, while the continuing increase in Labour Party membership also contributed to that end. (105) Increasingly the idea of direct action came to mean a term denoting economic action alone, such as a strike.

The re-emergence of direct action as a political force came with the Government's blundering policy of repression in Ireland and its support for the Polish attack on the Soviet Union in 1920. In Ireland the Irish T.U.C. had successfully secured the release of a hundred nationalists by calling a general strike. Direct action was thus seen to work where political action had failed. (106) The refusal of Irish railwaymen to move British troops or supplies was backed by the T.U.C. which, in a special session on 13 July 1920, demanded the withdrawal of all British troops, cessation of production of war materials for use against Ireland or Russia, with the recommendation of "a general down-tools policy" if these demands remained unfulfilled. The stage was being set for the confrontation of early August.

The Labour Party had little trust in the Churchillian interpretation of the Bolshevik menace and even less in the integrity of Lloyd George. (107) Suspecting British and French collusion behind the Polish invasion of Russia late in April 1920, the London dockers, backed by Ernest Bevin, refused to

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104. L.P.A.C.R. 1920, pp. 9. T.U.C. Report 1920, pp.112/4. See Note 16.

105. Although only Spen Valley had been won since the 1918 Election the Labour Party had come a close second in several other constituencies.

106. See Daily Herald, 15 April 1920.

107. See for example, Labour Leader, 20 February 1919. The I.L.P. was still bitter over its war-time experience. The Right too had its grievances. See Note 17.

load a ship called the "Jolly George" with cases labelled "O.H.M.S. Munitions for Poland." Bevin referring to the event shortly afterwards preferred to regard it as a purely industrial action based on moral precepts not as an example of direct action in practice. (108) As long as the Polish troops advanced, the British government remained officially neutral, but the sudden reversal of Polish military fortunes brought an equally sudden reversal in the British Government's policy. By the time of the 1920 Labour Party Conference, the threat to the Soviet Union had subsided with the Bolshevik counter-offensive of early July. Thus when the B.S.P. moved an amendment to a resolution calling for the implementation of the recommendations of the recently returned Labour delegation to Russia, advocating a general strike to compel the Government to cease its attacks on Russia, it was overwhelmingly defeated after a strong attack on it and its movers by Ernest Bevin. (109) Bevin rejected the implications of the resolution which claimed that the Trade Union Movement was a military force leading the revolutionary wing of the party. Swiping at the unrealistic premises of the B.S.P. Bevin made it clear that Britain was not ripe for revolution. Fundamentally, a Socialist whose reliance was based on educating public opinion to his own viewpoint, Bevin intimated that where direct action was necessary he would take it but vividly showed his contempt for academic theoreticians. "Those who talked lightly about leading ought to know they could not order a man at will to obey.... The Trades Union Movement was not a military force where men had to go blindly, at the orders of the leaders, one way or another.... He knew that many strikes that had taken place in this country had been a fiasco owing to orders and

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108. Bullock, Op.cit., p.134.

109. L.P.A.C.R. 1920, pp. 132/141 and 143/4 for the debate; 138 for the Amendment and pp. 143/4 for Bevin's speech.

resolutions which could not be carried out when the time came."(110) In general the tone of the Conference resolutions was more moderate than the previous year with emphasis being placed on the role of the P.L.P. in articulating the demands of the Movement as a whole.

The retreat of the Polish armies and the Bolshevik advance into Polish territory brought about a diplomatic threat from Curzon that Britain would be obliged to intervene in favour of Poland if the Russian troops advanced any further. The Times of 6 August spoke as if war was imminent.(111) The Labour Party needed no excuse to respond rapidly. It too thought war was in the offing but regarded it as being deliberately engineered by trigger-happy elements in the Cabinet. A manifesto signed by a cross-section of the party representing every shade of opinion, from Clynes to Robert Williams, was published within 24 hours declaring that Labour would "not co-operate in a war as allies of Poland."(112) The following day protest meetings were held throughout the country. On the ninth a special meeting of the Parliamentary Committee of the T.U.C., the Executive Committee of the Labour Party and the P.L.P., called at the instigation of Ernest Bevin, passed a resolution pointing to the deliberate war-orientated policy of the government and warning the government "that the whole industrial power of the organised workers will be used to defeat this war." It also resolved "that the Executive Committees of affiliated organisations throughout the country be summoned to hold themselves ready to proceed immediately to

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110. Ibid., p.144

111. The leading editorial had stated "It is a terrible truth that once more we stand upon the edge of a crisis fraught with possibilities only less tragic than those which hovered over us in this first week of August six years ago...We must face it with the same unanimity and the same courage with which we faced the crisis of 1914." 6 August 1920.

112. Council of Action: Report of Special Conference on Labour and the Russian-Polish War. (London: Labour Party, 1920), hereafter Council of Action Report.

London for a National Conference; that they be advised to instruct their members to 'down-tools' on instructions from that National Conference; and that a Council of Action be immediately constituted to take such steps as may be necessary to carry the above decisions into effect." (113)

The Council of Action showed how united the organised Labour Movement was on the issues. (114) Local councils sprang up as Labour in effect declared that it represented public opinion whereas the government, sectionally based on dubious electoral results, was out of step with reality and the mood of the nation. Few Labour voices were raised to cast doubt on the wisdom of the action, or to protest that the move was unconstitutional, although its unconstitutionality was readily admitted, its justification being the 'unconstitutional' policy of the government. (115) Locke's moment for the right of rebellion had arrived.

On 10 August the Council, led by Bevin, who had been co-opted on to it, met Lloyd George at 10 Downing Street, where Bevin declared that the Council's policy was "not merely a political action, but an action representing the full force of labour and we believe we are representing the great desire and will of the majority of the British people," (116) a declaration echoed by members of the P.L.P. in the House. (117) On 13 August the Conference called by the Joint Session met at the Central Hall, Westminster, where Bevin, ably supported by Clynes and Thomas, both noted "constitutionalists," spoke approvingly of the necessity of forming the Council of Action. (118) Thomas,

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113. Ibid., p.3. See also L.P.A.C.R. 1921, pp. 11/18.

114. A complete list of the Members of the Council of Action is given in the L.P.A.C.R. 1921, pp. 11/12 and in the Council of Action Report, p.3.

115. See Note 18.

116. Daily Herald, 11 August 1920. The Party's mistrust of Lloyd George was so great that they sent a shorthand writer along with the deputation to see the Prime Minister.

117. H.C. Deb. 133, cc. 253-355 especially Neil MacLean's contribution cc. 346.

118. Council of Action Report, pp. 6/16.

in particular, pointed out that Parliamentary methods should always be used unless, as in the present situation, they could not yield the right results in time.(119) The Council of Action was instructed to stay in existence until the appropriate policies demanded by the Conference had been adopted by the government.(120) In the event this proved unnecessary. The Government, whose intentions, Churchill notwithstanding, had been primarily to force the Bolsheviks into accepting a diplomatic solution, quickly realised that it had gone beyond the bounds of public opinion and commonsense and reverted to the argument that the strong language of Curzon's note was designed to restrain radical elements in Russia not as a threat. The war, it was claimed, was a figment of Labour's imagination.(121)

Labour disputed this interpretation and hoisted the events into a canon of Labour's faith in itself. "There is no doubt whatever, that the action of the Labour Movement early in August prevented open war with Russia," the Party Executive declared.(122) Thomas told the T.U.C. conference of 1920 that there had been "for the first time, a united and determined working-class effort to challenge the existing order of Parliamentary Government" and went on to draw the conclusion that the Labour Movement could "by unity and by the exercise of our political powers, determine our own form of government..."(123) MacDonald, his political eyes ever open, put Lloyd George's 'open door' comment in perspective when he wrote "there was no open door until Labour appeared in front of it."(124)

119. See Note 19.

120. Ibid., pp. 18/19.

121. H.C. Deb. 133, cc 253. cf., seq. cc 663. Churchill later claimed that "all forms of military intervention were impossible" Op.cit., p. 268. For an assessment of Churchill's influence on British policy towards intervention. See R.R. James, Churchill: A Study in Failure 1900-1939. (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1970), Part III, and R.H. Ullman, Britain and the Russian Civil War (London: Oxford University Press, 1968).

122. L.P.A.C.R. 1921. See Note 20.

123. T.U.C. Report, 1920. pp.62/3.

124. Forward (Glasgow), 28 August 1920.

In its own view and that of some later commentators the Labour Movement had effectively articulated public opinion. As Alan Bullock expressed it, "Those who called for action to prevent war had majority opinion on their side. The Government's recognition of this fact was reluctant but decisive." (125) The threat to the constitution had come from the government, Labour was as committed as ever to the constitutional road. (126) Its rejection of the newly-formed Communist Party's application for affiliation was to illustrate that. Not everyone, however, saw it in those terms. Shortly after the events of August, William Mellor, a leading Communist member of the Guild Socialist movement, published a slim volume which set out the case for direct action from the revolutionary point of view. (127)

Mellor argued that the real struggle in society was the class struggle, between those who had economic power and those who wanted to obtain it. This struggle was reflected throughout society. Politics and the results of political action merely reflected these economic struggles. All political results and tactics were in fact dictated and decided by economic strength. The strength of the P.L.P. was derived from its trade union base rather than from the number of votes it could gain in the constituencies or seats it held in the House of Commons. (128) Parliament rather than being a social forum where disinterested people met to solve Society's problems was in fact the place where economically powerful groups met to legitimise their political and class claims. Victories inside the House of Commons, according to Mellor, were in reality won by the organisation of economic forces outside

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125. Bullock, *op.cit.*, p.142. See Note 21.

126. See Note 22.

127. See Footnote 2 above

128. Cf. J.T. Walton Newbold "The Labour Party in the House is weak by itself not merely on account of its personnel, but in the nature of things. The Triple Alliance makes the Labour Party a power." Forward (Glasgow), 10 May 1919. Italics in the Original.

the House. Gains such as Universal suffrage were symbols of the growing economic power of Labour not of the efficacy of political methods. As in the past the real function of the P.L.P. should be to register the economic aspirations "of an industrially conscious section of the community."(129)

Mellor went much further than merely suggesting a secondary role for political activity. As far as he was concerned the State, Parliamentary government and democracy in toto was an attempt by the Capitalist ruling class to divert the attention of the workers from the reality of economic power. "Direct actionists" he declared, ".....deny that (universal adult suffrage) within a specified geographical group makes that group self-governed, and they deny that the State is an expression of the wills of all the people."(130) Those who did not agree with Mellor were accused of accepting the philosophic assumptions of Capitalism and of turning the state from its real function as a part of the machinery of Capitalism "into the image of a God...."(131) The political superstructure of capitalism was a front, designed to disguise the real nature of social disunity, Capitalist dictatorship and the reality of the class struggle. Parliament, the State and the press all propagated ideas of a Community, social unity and Constitutional myths in order to prevent the workers from recognising the fact that they were living under a coercive system of economic oppression and that they had the power to end it. For Mellor the State was "merely an instrument of the economically powerful class for the suppression of the non-dominant class."(132) It was the "Executive Committee of the Capitalist class."(133)

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129. Mellor, op.cit., p.31.

130. Ibid., p.48. See Note 23.

131. Mellor, Loc.cit.

132. Ibid., p.53.

133. Loc.cit.

Mellor's contention that the existing society was not a democratic one was based on the assertion that "political democracy without industrial and economic freedom is a sham."(134) It was in fact a disguised dictatorship in which the possessors controlled the possessed, through the system of wage slavery. The economic struggle was thus the struggle for liberation from the economic oppression called Capitalism. For the worker, Mellor declared, "the road to freedom lies not through the polling-booth, but through the workshop gates."(135)

This struggle for liberation was a world-wide and historic one. Capitalism had served its historic mission and had inevitably and necessarily to bow before the onslaught of Socialism. The historic mission of the workers was to overthrow the State and transform it, by means of the Dictatorship of the Proletariat, into the historic role designed for it by Marxist Communist Scientific philosophy.

This was for Mellor the ultimate object of Direct Action. The mad defensive policies adopted by Capitalist Imperialists towards the economic revolution in Russia and the success of the Bolshevik idea testified to the creation of the revolutionary historical situation within which Capitalism would be overthrown. The workers ought to assist in this momentous struggle by "the use of direct action to secure the ending of the present forms of ownership and control..."(136) Nationalisation of the mines was thus not an end in itself but served to ease the intensity of the struggle which would follow upon the assumption of power by the Socialist/Communist/Proletarian elements of Society. Therefore, the fullest expression of Direct Action

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134. Ibid., p.52.

135. Ibid., p.51.

136. Ibid., p.43. see Note 24.



was the Dictatorship of the Proletariat. Mellor conceived of the Dictatorship of the Proletariat as an essential part of the economic revolution. He chided "libertarians" such as Bertrand Russell and "emotionalists" like Ethel Snowden for their opposition to the idea. He accused them of not understanding that freedom was essentially an economic rather than a political concept and of being "defenders of the values and Shibboleths of Capitalism."(137) Of course, the dictatorship of the proletariat, (the embodiment of direct action), was not 'nice' but it was historical inevitability not 'niceness' which mattered. It was obviously inevitable "on the theory of class struggle..."(138) It was necessary in the interest of the workers, whose minds were clogged with capitalist propaganda. It was necessary to deal with counter-revolutionaries. True, it involved the suppression of 'formal' liberties, (undefined, but presumably freedom of speech, assembly, press and association were not in accordance with revolutionary principles), but this was a price worth paying. All the dictatorship of the proletariat really represented was "the use of the coercive State to coerce the 'coercers'."(139) Drawing a comparison Mellor claimed that it was "the counterpart in the transition period from individualism to Communism of the dictatorship of the few which is the normal and necessary condition under modern Capitalism."(140)

Taking the overthrow of capitalism and imperialism as his object Mellor described the means necessary to make this effective. Because Capitalism was decaying before their very eyes the time was short. Thus

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137. Mellor, op.cit., p.57-65. Quotation from p.65.

138. Ibid., p.58.

139. Loc.cit.

140. Loc.cit.

the sooner Labour organised the easier the transition would be. Therefore, the best policy should be to create an army of Labour through real industrial unionism, central control and the creation of a Commissariat. Mellor saw hope in the new General Council of the T.U.C. for central control and regarded the Council of Action and its local counterparts as "the cadre of the Soviet form of organisation...."(141) and vindication of Direct Action in practice. Surveying the previous two years Mellor believed that Direct Action (threatened or actual) had changed the British Government's policy of intervention in Russia.(142) The significance of Mellor's work is as a harbinger of the theoretical conflict of the Thirties. As with most contemporary theoretically Marxist commentators of the period his analysis was not only late, inadequate and wrong, but totally out of sympathy with the pragmatic outlook and philosophical tenets of the Trade Unions and Labour Party. The impact of his work was minimal.

By 1920 the forces which had been temporarily united in advocating direct action were split over two other issues - the role of the International and the relationship of the newly-formed Communist Party with the Labour Party. These issues, under the guise of the debate about democracy and dictatorship split the direct actionist forces into the more easily recognisable 'reformist' and 'revolutionary' camps, the one supporting Parliamentary and political action in order to create the new Socialist society, and the other willing out of Marxist necessity to forcibly wrest power from the hands of the "ruling elite." The first clash of these new aligned groups was seen at the Party Conference 1921 when the question of the affiliation of the Communist Party to the Labour Party was first debated.

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141. Ibid., p.156.

142. Ibid., p.44.

Labour and the Communists:

The Communist Party of Great Britain had been formed at the Foundation Congress of 30th July/1st August 1920, when the British Socialist Party and the Communist Unity Group of the Socialist Labour Party had amalgamated into one Moscow-approved organisation. The C.P.G.B. was the product of two years' "tortuous negotiations"(143) and represented only a small proportion of the total numbers of organised membership of the pro-Russian sympathetic left-wing. Most of the others joined at the Second Congress held at Leeds on 8th and 9th January 1921. For the purpose of this study we are not concerned with the details of the Unity negotiations, though these will be referred to in order to put the Communist Party's relationship with the Labour Movement into perspective. What is important here is the attitude which the Communist Party took in relation to Parliamentary democracy because it was this, and all it entailed (revolutionary methods as a means to Socialism, the Dictatorship of the Proletariat and so forth) which determined the Labour Party to reject the Communist Party's application for affiliation. The Labour Party's attitude to the Communist Party represents, at the leadership level at least, its attitude to the whole question of direct action and the role of Parliament.

The main groups which had been involved in the unity negotiations were the B.S.P., the Socialist Labour Party and the Workers' Socialist Federation, the latter, along with the S.W.S.S. (a small organisation which eventually disintegrated early in 1920) having taken the place of the I.L.P. which had found itself at odds with the revolutionary groups.(144) Constantly

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143. L.J. MacFarlane, The British Communist Party: Its Origin and Development Until 1929 (London: MacGibbon & Kee, 1966), p.47.

144. See Note 25.

prompted by the Third International the final negotiations took place without the main leadership of the Socialist Labour Party (S.L.P.) or the W.S.F. - the latter having renamed itself the Communist Party (British Section Third International) in June 1920. The S.L.P. had pulled out of negotiations a couple of months previously. The same basic sectarian dogmatism was common to both defections, a sectarianism which had vitiated all previous attempts at left wing unity.

Two questions had defied agreement: firstly what role, if any, should Parliamentary action play in Communist strategy for the revolution which was allegedly just around the corner? Secondly, should the United party apply for affiliation to the Labour Party? Walter Kendall implies that but for the support of the International no lasting agreement would have been possible on any basis. The B.S.P. was firmly committed to both Parliamentary action and affiliation with the Labour Party, being already involved with the Labour Party in Parliament in the person of Dan Irving, M.P. for Burnley. It was prepared to see the issue discussed, even if rejected, by the new party but was manifestly hostile to Sylvia Pankhurst's anti-parliamentary, anti-affiliation, doctrinal "super-revolutionary, leftist sectarianism"(145) posture. The S.L.P., on the other hand, whilst prepared to fight Parliamentary elections, would have no truck with the class-traitors who led the compromising and compromised Labour Party. During the early part of 1920 it became deliberately obstructive to all attempts at Unity, so that the Communist Unity Committee was in fact a small unofficial body of the S.L.P., although it contained important figures such as Bell, MacManus and Paul.(146)

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145. Klugman, op.cit., p.20.

146. MacFarlane, op.cit., p. 51/56.

In May 1920 the B.S.P. and the C.U.C. agreed to call a Convention to Unite their two groups, a Convention at which the question of tactics and affiliation would be discussed and decided upon. Sylvia Pankhurst made her unilateral declaration of independence, despite Lenin's unfavourable attitude to her earlier opposition to Parliamentary action.(147) The B.S.P. immediately applied to Lenin for clarification and authority on the point and received his reply early in July in which he declared Pankhurst's action had been wrong and that he personally was "in favour of participation in Parliament and of affiliation to the Labour Party on the condition of wholly free and independent communist activity."(148) Thus, well armed, the Provisional Executive of the C.P. upheld its foundation congress.

At the Congress three resolutions were passed. The first, proposed by A.A. Purcell, a prominent Trade Unionist, and supported among others by William Mellor, declared "for the Soviet (or Workers' Council) system as a means whereby the working-class shall achieve power...(and) for the dictatorship of the proletariat as a necessary means for combating the counter-revolution during the transition period between capitalism and communism."(149) The debate which followed indicated that violence was regarded as a legitimate, even necessary, part of the process.(150) Having thus declared itself in favour of two necessary conditions for allegiance to the Third International it accordingly declared its adherence to that body. The next two resolutions on Parliamentary action and affiliation to the Labour Party, involved a great deal of debate. The mood for the role of Parliamentary action had been set by the Provisional Committee's

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147. See Note 26.

148. Ibid., p.503.

149. Communist Unity Convention Report, p.6.

150. Ibid., pp.5/9.

Manifesto of 9 July which had stated that, "Parliamentary democracy - that idol of the social reformist - has been stripped of its veneer once and for all and....stands revealed...(as) an instrument of class oppression..... engineered and wielded in the interest of the bourgeoisie. Against this sham parliamentary democracy of capitalism the workers' republic places the method of direct representation and recall, as embodied in the Soviet idea, only those performing useful social services being enfranchised."(151) Thus, following the Russian example, the fundamental principles must include, amongst other things, "the Soviet idea as against the Parliamentary democracy."(152) These notions were reflected in a strongly worded motion which stated blandly that "The Communist Party repudiates the reformist view that a social revolution can be achieved by the ordinary methods of parliamentary democracy, but regards parliamentary and electoral action generally as providing a means of propoganda and agitation towards the revolution. The tactics to be employed by the representatives of the Party elected to Parliament or local bodies must be laid down by the Party itself according to the national or local circumstances. In all cases such representatives must be considered as holding a mandate from the Party, and not from the particular constituency for which they happen to sit."(153)

The rest of the amended motion dealt with the obligations of a Communist Party member who stepped out of line. The severity of the motion and the uncompromising nature of its interpretation was to worry such B.S.P. members as Robert Williams and A.A. Purcell forcing several of them to leave when the

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151. Bell, op.cit., p.54. Italics in the Original. There is a photostat copy of the document reproduced in the centre pages of Klugman, op.cit.

152. Bell, loc.cit.

153. Communist Unity Convention Report, pp.9 and 29.

conflict between their prospects as Labour M.P.'s and their obligations as Communist Party members became too intense. (154)

However, for the moment affiliation was the issue, with a severe debate splitting the unity of the Congress, resulting in the end in a victory by a narrow majority 100:85, largely, so Bell asserts, on the strength of Lenin's views, recorded in favour of affiliation. (155) It was this which prompted the first C.P.G.B. application for affiliation to the Labour Party on 10 August 1920.

This will be dealt with shortly, but a brief survey of the subsequent history of the Communist Party is important to place later events in context. Simultaneously with the Congress, 17 July to 8 August 1920, the Communist International was holding its second Congress. Various representatives of the non-parliamentary group such as Jack Tanner of the S.S. and W.C. Movement, Willie Gallacher of the Scottish Workers' Committee and Sylvia Pankhurst of the Communist Party (B.S.T.I.) were present to argue the non-affiliation, non-Parliamentary case. They met a Lenin who was determined to brook no opposition, even if it meant splitting the British Communist movement in two. (156) With Europe supposedly on the edge of total revolution, and the Second International allegedly about to collapse, Lenin wanted to ensure that new groups applying for membership of the Third International met both the doctrinal requirements and the disciplinary authority of the International and through it, the Russian Bolshevik Party, which controlled both its floor and the Executive Committee. He was determined that any future revolutions

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154. Bell, op.cit., p.56. Kendall, op.cit., p.215. See Note 27.

155. Bell, op.cit., p.57.

156. Kendall, op.cit., p.231. Lenin's speech can be found in On Britain, pp. 538/44.

would be in accordance with the Russian experience and controlled by the Third International. Affiliation to the Third International meant doctrinal control under the authority of the Executive Committee of the Communist International as embodied in the twenty-one "theses" setting out the conditions of entry which were put to the Congress - a point which finally kept the I.L.P. out of the Third International.(157)

The prestige of Lenin and the Third International made it quite easy for the C.P.G.B. to join the International without too many qualms. In accordance with the instructions of the E.C.C.I., the C.P.G.B. joined in negotiations with the other dissident groups, now suitably chastened after meeting the master, which lead to a more broadly based C.P.G.B. following the Leeds Convention of 29/30 January 1921.(158) Kendall rightly comments, "the external intervention which would dictate the future course of British Communism was thus present from the Party's very inception."(159) Its acceptance of Muscovite control was quite apparent; it was a foreign-inspired organisation, subversive of social relationships and frequently out-of-touch with social realities. Obediently mouthing unrealistic party doctrines it was to prove its irrelevance to, and unsuitability in, British political life by applying for official membership of the Labour Party in 1920.

Relations between the Labour Party and the C.P.G.B. cannot be seen simply within the context of British politics but in the wider sphere of the international Socialist Movement. For while overlapping membership,

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157. The twenty-one theses may be found in J. Degras (Ed. The Communist International 1919-1943 (London: Oxford University Press, 1956), I, pp.166-172.

158. Kendall, op.cit., Ch.14.

159. Ibid., p.233.



especially in the early 'twenties, blurred the profound differences that existed between the Labour Left and the Communists on the question of Parliamentary democracy at the international level those differences were turned into the mutually exclusive philosophies of the Second and Third Internationals by the dogmatic sectionalism of the Russian Communist Party.

The failure of the Second International in 1914 to prevent the outbreak of hostilities, as it had promised to do several years earlier, destroyed its credibility in the eyes of most class-conscious socialists. Instead of uniting in Socialist solidarity against bellicose nationalism the various national working-class organisations and parties supported their governments with differing degrees of enthusiasm. During the war attempts by the neutralist rump of the Second International to arrange meetings between the various Socialist and Labour Parties representing the belligerent powers failed owing to the nationalistic feelings of the Party's concerned. The British Labour Party maintained its own links with the International Bureau of the Socialist International and advanced money to help in meeting its expenses during the war-time emergency. However, not all members of the Party, in particular the anti-war section of the I.L.P., were satisfied with adherence to the Second International and they lent their support to such moves as were made to recreate a new international movement out of the ashes of the old. In doing so they were hoping to find a class-conscious Socialist role within the Parliamentary system. In fact, the anti-Second International movement developed logically into the Third International under the doctrinal leadership of Lenin and just as logically excluded those who found that doctrine and its anti-Parliamentary tenets unpalatable.

The I.L.P.'s antipathy towards the Second International was aggravated by the decision of the Special Labour Party Conference in December 1917 denying Socialist Societies separate representation from the official Labour

Party and Trade Union Congress delegation chosen to attend the Stockholm Conference. Consequently, it was no surprise when the I.L.P., nursing its wounded pride, although not inspired by such motives alone, disaffiliated from the Second International in which it no longer had separate representation and asked its National Administrative Committee to make enquiries of the Third International concerning possible membership.

The Third International, however, was created primarily to further the aims of the Russian Bolshevik Party rather than to accommodate the views of the individual parties who sympathised with its general aims, but deplored its methods. The crux of the differences between the I.L.P. and the Third International were made clear by the latter's assertion that civil war was as necessary as the dictatorship of proletariat which itself was an essential part of the transition from Capitalism to Socialism and that there was no true socialism outside the pale of Third International. The issuing of the Twenty-One Theses of membership made it quite clear that control of the International itself effectively lay with the Russian Communist Party in Moscow.

The antagonism which the Third International's reply to the I.L.P. created destroyed such sympathy as existed for the International in that Party. (160) In particular it alienated those pacifist elements who had most cause to despise the failure of the Second International to act in Socialist harmony to prevent the outbreak of war in 1914. A short time later similar arrogant tactics by the C.P.G.B. which faithfully mirrored its Muscovite progenitor alienated the Labour Party itself. For the Labour Party as a whole, the arrogance of the Third International was adequate

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160. See The I.L.P. and the Third International: Being questions submitted by the I.L.P. to the Third International and its reply, with an introductory statement of the National Council of the I.L.P. (London: National Labour Press, 1920).

Justification of the Party's decision to assist in the revival of the Second International. This body, which met at Berne early in February 1919, had declared itself unequivocally against Bolshevism and all that it represented. In the words of the so-called "Branting" resolution it insisted that:-

"A reorganised society....permeated with Socialism cannot be realised, much less permanently established, unless it rests upon triumphs of Democracy and is rooted in the principles of liberty.

These institutions which constitute Democracy - freedom of speech and of the Press, the right of assembly, universal suffrage, a Government responsible to Parliament, with arrangements guaranteeing popular co-operation and respect for the wishes of the people, the right of association etc., - these also provide the working classes with the means of carrying on the class struggle."

The resolution fully represented the pragmatic philosophy of the Labour Party - a philosophy which was to be constantly reiterated in response to the periodic claims and applications of the Communist Party for membership. It received fuller elaboration eighteen months later at Geneva when a resolution was passed on the "Political System of Socialism."<sup>(161)</sup> This resolution specifically repudiated "methods of violence and all terrorism" and insisted that "The Socialist Commonwealth can come into existence only by the conquest by Labour of Government power." It continued, "Socialism will not base its political organisation upon dictatorship. It cannot seek to suppress Democracy: its historic mission, on the contrary, is to carry Democracy to completion." In particular, "Socialists will not allow factious minorities, taking advantage of their privileged positions, to bring to naught popular liberty." Moreover, it was "the supreme function of Parliament...to represent all the popular aspirations and desires from the standpoint of the community as a whole."

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161. See L.P.A.C.R., 1921, Appendix IV, pp. 222-7 (226-7 passim).

More than anything else therefore the majority of the Second International represented the reformist philosophy of pragmatic and Parliamentary Socialism. Moreover, it took an aggressive stance in response to the Third International's attempts to infiltrate Socialist and Trade Union movements at all levels. It was for this reason that a minority left to form the Vienna (two-and-a-half) International. The minority's view expressed in the "Adler-Longuet" resolution, which demanded, among other things, "free entry into the International for the Socialist and Revolutionary Parties of all countries conscious of their class interests" and its movers succeeded when the International found their view unacceptable. For the I.L.P. the problem which arose was based upon the contradictory implications of their Socialist and Parliamentary convictions. While the former attracted them to the Third International the latter repelled them from it. Whilst still a member of the Second International the I.L.P. prepared a memorandum for submission to the Geneva Congress of the Second International on the question of the "Political System of Socialism." (162) The I.L.P. summarised the main two political questions raised by Bolshevism as follows:-

1. "Is a revolutionary dictatorship of the Proletariat necessary as a transition from Capitalism to Socialism?"
2. Is the Soviet form of Government the only form which will enable the proletariat to exercise political power?"

Its answer to both questions was "No." It recognised that in Great Britain the authority of Parliament had declined but argued that a country

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162. The Memorandum on Socialism and Government appeared in the Labour Leader, 18 December 1919, it is also to be found in Forward (Glasgow), 13 December 1919. It is quoted *passim*.

could not be continually ruled by force. "The weakness of the Socialist Movement cannot be made good by Revolution, which with a dictatorship may succeed for a time, but which in the end has to base itself on public acceptance." The answer lay in rectifying the bad education of democracy and correcting the imperfect state of Socialist propaganda (a vindication, it might be added, of the arguments of Adamson and the P.L.P.). Unless the capitalists forced it upon them Socialists ought not to resort to violence which would lead to massacre rather than revolution. The I.L.P. denied the monopoly of Socialist purity attributed by some to the Soviet system of government. It could not accept that the direct representation of industrial interests should be the basis of a political constitution and looked with askance at the indirect elections which the Soviet system involved. By contrast the I.L.P., claimed the document, "strives to adopt (the) Parliamentary system to the needs of democracy, and to supplement it with what industrial organisation is necessary to keep Parliament in vital touch with proletarian life." Whilst not condemning Soviet departure from normal political conditions the I.L.P. made it clear that the departure should be temporary not permanent. In the final analysis, therefore, the I.L.P. took the view "that the election of Socialists to Parliament remains the best guarantee that the working-class can have that Parliament will be influenced by their views." In a final section the I.L.P. rejected Direct Action as a substitute for Parliamentary action but considered it one of several weapons which the working-class might use to restore but not destroy representative government. If, therefore, the I.L.P. was forced to choose between Parliamentarism and revolution there was no doubt that it would be the former which would emerge triumphant. The I.L.P. had no desire to raise the issue to the level of conflict and persisted in the belief that ideological class-conscious socialism required an international

outlet quite different from that of the Second International which appeared to be little more than watered-down liberalism. However, whatever differences might have existed between the Labour Party and the I.L.P. on the role of the International their philosophy of Socialism remained in essence encapsulated within a context of the ultimate value and purpose of Parliamentary democracy - values which were different in essence and in spirit from those held by the Communist Party of Great Britain. (163)

In their initial application for Membership of the Labour Party the C.P.G.B. reiterated the three resolutions which had been passed at the Unity Conference of 31 July and 1 August. (164) These resolutions not only declared the Party to be in favour of the Soviet system and the dictatorship of the proletariat but its adherence to the Third International. Moreover, the resolutions rejected the reformist view (held by the Labour Party) that a Social revolution could be achieved through Parliamentary democracy. It was also stated that Communist Members of Parliament would be bound by the decisions of the Communist Party not the electoral district for which they happened to sit. In sum the C.P.G.B. declared itself to be against those principles of Parliamentary democracy to which the Labour Party was committed. Consequently, it was not surprising when its application was turned down by the Executive of the Labour Party on the grounds "that the basis of affiliation to the Labour Party is the acceptance of its constitution, principles, programme, with which the objects of the Communist Party do not appear to be in accord." (165)

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163. "The difference between Socialism and Communism cannot be bridged in spirit, in method or in philosophy," Socialist Review, XVII: No.95, (October-December 1920).

164. L.P.A.C.R. 1921, pp. 18-22.

165. L.P.A.C.R. 1921, p.19.

There is little point in tracing all the details of the C.P.G.B.'s application for membership of the Labour Party through their various stages. What is important to note is that notwithstanding the irritations caused by Communist Party activities in politics, such as their antics at East Woolwich in 1921, and in trade union affairs in the shape of the Minority Movement, the basic reason for their rejection by the Labour Party and exclusion from its membership was the differences that existed over the value of Parliamentary democracy and its concomitant view of the role of Parliament in society.

Walter Citrine, for example, describing the disruptive role of the Minority Movement and its international mentor the Red International of Labour Unions, ruefully admitted that the Trade Union Movement "were optimistic enough to believe that the steady influence and shrewd practical commonsense of the British Trade Union Movement would be able to unite the warring factions on the Continent into one homogeneous and world-wide Trade Union International. The results have scarcely justified our optimism. We have seen our movement....distracted and confused by savage criticism and weakened by wholly unwarrantable interference in our affairs."(166)

Nonetheless, in Citrine's view the real conflict was one of ideas. "Communism" he wrote, "has revived the classic controversy between the reformist and revolutionary conception of working-class action...." It was a controversy between "the advocates of revolutionary Communism and those who held the conception of social and economic evolution with which the British Trade Union Movement is historically identified."(167)

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166. W. Citrine; Democracy or Disruption: An Examination of Communist Influences in the Trade Unions, (London: T.U.C., 1928), p.5.  
Italics Mine.

167. Ibid., p.4.

At the 1922 Conference Frank Hodges, Secretary of the Miners Federation of Great Britain, made it clear that the differences were more than those of personality and method. "He did not want the Conference to come to a decision upon the actions of this or that Communist. He thought that would be wrong. But he would like it to come to a decision upon the difference of principles that exist between the Theses of Communism and the Constitution of the British Labour Party....He wanted to say.....that a perusal of the constitution and statutes of the Communist Party was alone necessary to show that there could be no reconciliation between the Communist Party and the Labour Party so long as those statutes existed. The Labour Party was a Parliamentary political democracy. Its Constitution was based upon the democratic theory that our national institutions must be so modelled as to give always the best expression of the will of every member of the nation. That was the fundamental principle upon which the Labour Party rested, implying thereby that it was against all forms of dictatorship. The Communist Party did not profess....a belief in political democracy. It had no use for political democracy....(or) democratic institutions....It was a believer in the dictatorship of a nucleus of people who were taken to represent the will of millions of others." Although Hodges went on to characterise the C.P.G.B. as "the intellectual slaves of Moscow, unthinking, unheeding, accepting decrees and decisions without criticism or comment, taking orders from the Asiatic mind, taking the judgement of middle-class Russia....the dictates and decrees of the same type of intellectuals whom they despised in this country,"(168) it was the Communist's rejection of Parliamentary democracy in favour of dictatorship that proved to be the fundamental sticking-point. Even had the C.P.G.B. been a free agent it

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168. L.P.A.C.R. 1922, pp.198.



would still have been rejected for that reason.

The proof of this is to be found in the questionnaire drawn up by the Labour Party and submitted to the Communists in January 1922, following discussions between representatives of the two Parties. The questions not only insisted that the object of the Labour Party was the achievement of "the political, social and economic emancipation of the people by means of Parliamentary democracy" but enquired whether the Communist Party still adhered to the Soviet System (which was understood to be incompatible with parliamentary democracy), and to the Third International (which it was claimed was inconsistent with the constitution and objects of the Labour Party). Moreover, not only did the questionnaire emphasise the Labour Party's insistence on the use of lawful means it confirmed the principle that Members of Parliament were responsible primarily to their constituents. Furthermore, in its rejection of the C.P.G.B.'s application, the National Executive pointed out that the Communist's claims "appear to be inconsistent with the principles and practice of the Labour Party to be and to continue to be a lawful association seeking lawful ends by lawful and constitutional means only."(169)

Arthur Henderson drew the implications of the Executive's refusal in a speech to the Party Conference of 1921.(170) Affiliation, he told the Conference, had been refused on the grounds of unity. Unity of purpose, principle, conception and method was missing. The second reason was that the Communists, could not, because of Muscovite domination, honourably abide by the decisions of the Conference or give effect to the constitution. He

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169. L.P.A.C.R. 1922, pp. 74-83.

170. L.P.A.C.R. 1921, pp. 165-7.

reminded delegates that Parliament was the place where Labour should be if it were to hold its own in British politics and then pointed out that it was the actions of the Communist Party that lost the previously held seat at Woolwich where the candidate had been an individual "second to none as a Parliamentarian." Henderson went on to chide the Communists for their continuing anti-Labour campaign, a campaign which admitted no errors on the part of its doctrinally inspired authors.

In its Report to the 1924 Annual Conference the Executive reiterated its view that the differences of methods between Parliamentary democracy and armed revolution were too great to be overcome. It placed its faith in the power of the ballot box and the institutions of free democracy. "That the differences are fundamental and unchanging is evident from the fact that no person with a belief in Labour Party principles can become a member of the Communist Party. Communists must renounce Parliamentary democracy." (171)

The alienation that existed between the C.P.G.B. and the Labour Party was completed by external events in the international sphere and the Trade Union Movement. Attempts to unify the three International political organisations failed through ill-will and the refusal of the Third International to cease cell-building tactics, to allow a commission to enquire into the case of Georgia, or to liberate political prisoners (172)

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171. L.P.A.C.R. 1924, p. 39.

172. See L.P.A.C.R. 1922, pp. 13-24 and The Second and Third International and the Vienna Union: Official Report of the Conference between the Executives held at the Reichstag, Berlin on the 2nd April 1922, and the following days. (London: Labour Publishing Co., 1922).

Although by 1925 the Labour Party had passed a series of decisions at the Annual Conference which had effectively removed Communists from the ranks of the Party the Trade Union movement persisted for a number of years with its attempts to reach some kind of international trade union unity. By 1928 irritation with the attitude of the Communists abroad and their satallites in the Minority Movement had brought these moves to an end. (173) Yet whilst the tactics of the Communists proved to be the final straw, the differences over the value of parliament and parliamentary democracy were so fundamental that the question which poses itself is why so many in the Labour Party believed that the differences were capable of easy solution?

In the first place there is little doubt that the favourable response towards the Soviet Union was based upon the belief that the Russian revolution, even when its nature was fully known, was an experiment in Socialism which ought to be supported even if there were differences over the question of method. Hutchinson of the A.S.E., for example, told the Labour Party Conference of 1920 that "there is no need to be in full sympathy with the policy and outlook of the Russian Bolshevism in order to feel that the struggle of the Soviet Government against capitalist reaction, both within and without is of immense moment for all workers all the world over." (174)

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173. Citrine, *op.cit.*, An examination of the Minority Movement, i.e. its relationship with the Labour Movement is to be found in R. Martin, Communism and the British Trade Unions 1924-1933: A Study of the National Minority Movement, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969).

174. L.P.A.C.R. 1920, p.133. See Note 28.

The emotional Left led by George Lansbury willingly ignored distasteful facts to claim that "no set of men and women responsible for a revolution of the magnitude of the Russian Revolution ever made fewer mistakes or carried their revolution through with less interference with the rights of individuals, or with less terrorism and destruction than the men in control of Russia."(175) Other observers such as Ethel Snowden, Bertrand Russell and the Official delegation of the T.U.C. and Labour Party were less enamoured than Lansbury.(176)

Clynes frequently took a positive anti-Bolshevik line, relating to the general issues of democracy and dictatorship. Forward reported him as saying, "The workers must choose between government based upon elected institutions consisting of men who are fit for the purpose and a Communist Dictatorship, which indeed, can only be of one kind. It can survive only as it suppresses personal liberty. It has always had to be backed by military authority and methods of force...."(177) Philip Snowden, too, came out strongly against Bolshevik methods. "Better continue to suffer under (Capitalism's) domination and oppression than gain economic power through blood and slaughter," he told the 1920 I.L.P. Conference.(178) MacDonalld used the publication of Moscow's Reply to the I.L.P. to confirm that the Russians were "no fireside revolutionists....When they say dictatorship, they mean dictatorship, when they say Revolution, they mean bloodshed and violence....the I.L.P. and the Third International are oil

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175. G. Lansbury, What I Saw In Russia (London: Leonard Parsons, 1920), p.xii.
176. See Note 29.
177. Forward (Glasgow), 5 June 1920. cf. Clarion, 24 September 1920 and H.C. Deb. 114, cc 3001/2, 16 April 1919.
178. Labour Leader, 8 April 1920. Cf. Colin Cross Philip Snowden (London: Barrie & Rockeliff. 1966), Ch.10. Snowden's Autobiography, II, 533/42.

and water and will not mix."(179) Yet as Graubard points out "MacDonald's opposition in the I.L.P. came not so much from convinced Marxists as from emotion-ridden humanitarians."(180) If these persons were willing to make the theoretical distinctions that hindsight affords the practice of the Bolshevism eventually convinced them that the theory was unacceptable, for even in the depth of their ignorance people like Lansbury had no intention of deserting democracy in favour of a dictatorship and in the final analysis the real difference between Labour and the Communists lay in their concepts of democracy and the role that Parliament as the supreme instrument of political power had to play in the furtherance of reform.(181)

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179. Forward (Glasgow), 31 July 1920. Cf. Wheatley who had argued that "force was the only system with which the Russians were familiar" and that such conditions did not apply to Great Britain. Forward (Glasgow), 24 January 1920.

180. Graubard, Op.cit., p.188.

181. See Note 30.

CHAPTER TWO - NOTES

1. Cf. Richard Lyman, "James Ramsay MacDonald and the Leadership of the Labour Party 1918-22," Journal of British Studies, II, 1, (November, 1962), pp. 132-60. MacDonald's views on the subject were not unique. Clifford Allen also claimed that industrial and political action were indivisible and that both were compatible with democracy (See Labour Leader, 9 October 1919). Philip Snowden expressed similar views, (see Labour Leader, 31 July 1919; 21 August 1919; 11 September 1919). On the Right of the Party, Tom Shaw asserted that the democratic stream of Socialism "believes in the rule of all the people and in Parliamentary action, supplemented, when needs be, by industrial action." "On Things in General," Clarion, 27 August 1920.
2. Some of the original documents concerned with the Leeds Conference are to be found in the papers of J.S. Middleton (Box 14) at Transport House under the heading "Fascist and Similar Bodies." Accounts of the Conference written by individuals who were present may be found in Philip Snowden, An Autobiography (London: Ivor Nicolson & Watson, 1934), I, pp. 449-56. Robert Williams, The New Labour Outlook, pp. 80/5.  
  
There is a brief reference to the Conference in J.M. Kenworthy, Sailors, Statesmen and Others (London: Rich & Cowen, 1933), pp. 99-102. Herbert Morrison, Herbert Morrison: An Autobiography (London: Odhams Press, 1960), pp. 68/9.  
  
Secondary references of varying importance are to be found in Lord Elton, The Life of James Ramsay MacDonald: 1866-1919 (London: Collins, 1939), pp. 314/6.  
  
R. Postgate, The Life of George Lansbury, (London: Longmans Green, 1951), pp. 169/70., and A. Bullock, op.cit., pp. 74/6.
3. Murphy points out that one reason for the lack of sustained interest in the "soviet" was the fact that "we welcomed the Russian Revolution ... but we knew next to nothing about how Workers' and Soldiers' Councils were constructed and had the vaguest ideas as to the conditions in which they could and should be formed." Murphy, op.cit., p.63.
4. At the Conference both Snowden and his wife spoke of the Revolution in terms of its bringing about an early end to the war. See What Happened at Leeds, pp. 7/8 and 17.  
  
Mary Agnes Hamilton claimed that MacDonald had years later regretted his presence at the Leeds Conference, M.A. Hamilton, Remembering My Good Friends (London: Jonathan Cape, 1944), p.79.

5. Cf., J.R. MacDonald urging the P.L.P. to adopt Parliamentary tactics so that "the temper....of both industrial and political sides of the Labour Movement should appear sans phrase on the floor of the House of Commons." Forward (Glasgow), 29 October 1921, with his claim that "Parliament should be used for defining the attitude of the Party to the general policy of the Government." Forward (Glasgow), 18 October 1919.
6. Cf., however, MacDonald "We Parliamentarians have no leg to stand upon if the House of Commons ceases to be a place where reason meets reason and argument is marshalled against argument." Socialist Review, XVII, No.93 (April/June 1920), p.106.
7. At the time of the Woolwich bye-election the Labour Leader commented, "The return of MacDonald to the House at this particular moment would.... make an enormous difference in the political situation. By sheer ability he would rapidly become the leader of the Opposition whether he were formally recognised as such or not, and he would infuse into the Labour Party the fighting spirit which it so badly needs." 10 February 1921.
8. Maurice Cowling makes the point that "despite protestations of innocence from the official Labour leadership there was a chronological connection between Direct Action and the first serious increases in the Labour vote...." The Impact of Labour: The Beginning of Modern British Politics (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1971), pp. 109/110.
9. For other criticism of Trade Union Members of Parliament see:  
S. & B. Webb, The History of Trade Unions (London: Longmans Green, Revised Edition, 1920) pp. 701 and 703.  
J. Ramsay MacDonald, Socialism After the War (Manchester; National Labour Press, 1917), p.76.  
The Labour Leader 1 January 1920, referred to "the absence of men of real debating ability, and the meagre attendance of members. The failure of the Party to impress Parliament and the public has been due, not to the fact that the Labour view has not been put forward, but to the fact that it has not been put forward effectively."
10. Cf. "The work of a Parliamentary Labour Party which ought to be the Opposition to the Government, cannot be carried on by men who have a divided interest, and whose outside work necessitates their frequent absence from the House of Commons." 1 March, 1920. See also MacDonald's criticism of "slackness" in attendance. Socialist Review, (April-June 1920) XVII, No.9, pp. 103/4.
11. Both the Labour Party and the "Wee Free" Liberals claimed the right to be regarded as the official Opposition. The Speaker accepted neither claim but recognised the right of all Privy Councillors to sit on the Opposition front benches. MacDonald complained that one of his criticisms against the P.L.P. was that it never seemed to recognise this and other changes in its powers. See Forward (Glasgow), 18 October 1919. Cf. Socialist Review, XVI, No. 89 (April-June 1919) p. 105. Some years later the New Leader complained "Attendance has not been up to high-water mark. But this is largely because members far too good-naturedly yield to the shower of invitations to spend time in the country when Parliament is sitting." 10 April 1925.

12. Italics mine. Spoor, of course, belonged to the I.L.P. Cf. MacDonald "Everywhere there is a feeling of Parliamentary weakness" Forward (Glasgow), 1 November 1919. Significantly enough similar comments were made after the 1931 debacle. "Inside Parliament itself the workers see the game being played in the same old way, except that the fifty-eight in 1932 are not playing it so effectly as did the thirty in 1906." J. Scanlon, Decline and Fall of the Labour Party, (London: Peter Davies, 1932), p.245. The famous thirty of 1906 constituted the P.L.P. when the challenge to Parliamentary democracy was at its pre-war height. See footnote 82.
13. The Labour Leader had earlier recorded its view that "During the past session the Labour Party has not done as well as those who have realised the possibilities of the situation would have liked, but it has done a great deal better than most Socialists outside Parliament give it credit for." 1 January 1920.
14. Thomas Shaw and J.R. Clynes frequently wrote for the Clarion. The T.G.W.U. Record noted in September 1921, "The Labour Party in the House has worked together and rendered real service to those whom they represent. Our weakness is only felt in the Division Lobby. In debate, in committee, or any other department of Parliamentary life, we more than hold our own, but argument, debating power, facts of figures count for nothing when you go through the Division Lobby. A large increase in the number of Labour Members is needed before our full power can be effectively exerocised in Parliament."
15. Cf. J.H. Thomas. "We have no right to substitute industrial action for our political disappointments. We may disagree with the verdict of the electors .... but we are compelled to accept that verdict in any democratic government." H.C. Deb. 112, cc 339. See also "Rob Roy's" criticism of Robert Williams. Forward(Glasgow), 31 May 1919.
16. Philip Snowden wrote, somewhat prophetically, "I do not interpret the decision of Congress to mean that Direct Action, even for a political object, is in all circumstances repudiated.... I could imagine circumstances where a general stoppage of work would be the most effective means of opposing the policy of a government. Such a case, for instance, might arise, if a government prepared to embark upon a war which was opposed by the overwhelming majority of the people." Labour Leader, 18 March 1920. Cf. B. Russell, Democracy and Direct Action (London: I.L.P., 1919), pp. 7/8.
17. An article in the Clarion asked "We have won the greatest war in history. Who has won it?" and answered "it is quite certain that it has not been won by the pacifists, nor by the shop-stewards, nor by the rabid anti-British Press, nor by Messrs. George Bernard Shaw, Ramsay MacDonald and George Lansbury. These men have contributed nothing to the national success but vituperation, sedition and ignorant malice. These men have been as consistently mistaken, sour and useless during the war as they were before the war, and they are today striving their utmost to render impossible the task of Government and a reconstruction, and to mislead and embitter the working-classes, and stir up mutiny." Robert Blatchford "Bolshevism or Democracy?" Clarion, 23 May 1919.



18. Robert Williams, for example, told an I.L.P. demonstration that "they had heard a great deal about unconstitutionality but the Constitutionalists had taken unconstitutional action on Russia, for they had never really declared war upon it, so that the workers were really being compelled to adopt the same extra-constitutional methods for the restoration of the British constitution." Forward (Glasgow), 13 September 1919. Cf. MacDonald's argument that "Everything necessary to protect the Constitution is constitutional, if 'constitutional' means anything at all except passive obedience to any outrageous acts done by men who happen to be Ministers." Socialist Review, XVII, No.95. (October/December 1920), p.299
- Tom Shaw did question the 'Soviet' implications drawn by the setting up of District Councils. Clarion, 27 August 1920. All but a handful of resolutions and other communications received at Transport House were in favour of the Party's action, indeed, some affiliated organisations wished to extend it to the question of Ireland. (Council of Action material at Transport House). For a left-wing interpretation of the Council's role as a Soviet see The Guildsman, September 1920.
19. "No Parliamentary effort could do what we are asking you to do, and desperate as all our measures, dangerous as they are, we believe that the disease is so desperate and dangerous that it is only desperate and dangerous methods that can provide a remedy. (p.14) If this resolution (approving and endorsing the setting up of the Council of Action) is to be given effect to it means a challenge to the whole Constitution of the country." (p.16)
- Cf. Ernest Bevin "On the question of war, whatever our views on ordinary industrial matters, we felt convinced that we were justified in taking any, and every means." (p.7) Clynes "No Parliamentary or political measures.... could be effective in themselves to save the country from being committed to war against its will ...." (p.12) All references are to the Report.
20. A joint meeting of the Executive Committee of the Labour Party and the Parliamentary Committee of the Trade Union Congress claimed "we are satisfied that the efforts of Organised Labour were wholly responsible for the action of the British Government in keeping the nation from war." N.E.C. Minutes, Vol.20, 18 October 1920.
21. J.R. Clynes argued, "Labour has not only led Labour, it has led and interpreted the opinion of the country .... Labour has made no mistake about this crisis. It should now make no mistake about never using the same sort of action, except in relation to the same sort of crisis." "How Revolutions Grow," Clarion, 20 August 1920. Italics in the original.

continued/....

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(contd.)

Cf. MacDonald, Forward (Glasgow), 28 August 1920. Neither the Cabinet nor the Lloyd George Papers throw very much new light on the attitude of the government towards the Council of Action. On 15 August 1920 Hankey wrote to the Prime Minister, who was in Paris, "Our attitude appears to me to be just, logical, correct, representation of the entire (sic!) public opinion of the country, and admirably voiced in the press." He continued, "The Labour Council of Action' movement is an unpleasant development, but, as they are merely taking the same line as the Government and the whole nation, no-one is so capable as you are of turning it to advantage and using it to strengthen your hands. The real difficulty will arise if the Bolsheviks insist on impossible conditions at Minsk. There will then be a struggle between the extremists and the moderates on the Council of Action, and, if the former (as I apprehend) get the mastery the Government's position will be a very delicate one." Lloyd George Papers, E.24/3/6: (italics mine). While Hankey was restrained in his assertions, which were clearly biased, Lloyd George, who had described direct action as "Bolshevism pure and simple" reflected the views of the rabid anti-Socialist Sir Basil Thomson who described the Council of Action in the following terms: "In form, the body is a Central Soviet and is in conflict with not only the Constitution of the country but the laws governing Trade Unionism." CAB. 24/110. Report on Revolutionary Organisations in the United Kingdom: 19 August 1920, Report No. 68 in CAB. 24/110 (1793). In a later report Thompson asserted that "the formation of the Council was the work of professional revolutionaries...." i.e. Russians. CAB. 24/111/C.P. 1830. 2 September 1920.

See also Churchill's account in The World Crisis, p.269. Alternative recent interpretations of August 1920 are to be found in L.J. MacFarlane, "Hand off Russia: British Labour and the Russian-Polish War, 1920." Past and Present, 38, (1968) pp. 126/152. N. Davies "Lloyd George and Poland 1919-20" Journal of Contemporary History, 6, No. 3. (1971), pp. 132-155.

22. "Our opponents knew and still know that our only object was to prevent another war against Russia." T.U.C. Report, 1921, p.63. (Thomas) Cf., F. Hodges "the motives that have brought the Council of Action into being are transient. Their main object is peace. There is no desire to destroy Parliamentary government and there is no question of Soviet government." Labour Leader, 19 August 1920. As late as 1 October 1920 the Council, calling for public demonstrations to be held on 17 October 1920 declared "Following upon these demonstrations it is proposed that the Labour Party should secure early opportunity for a debate in the House of Commons. Local councils, therefore, are urged to do their utmost in making the demonstrations successful, and so help to strengthen the Labour spokesman in Parliament." (Council of Action material: CA/PRI/63/3). Italics mine.

23. Cf. "Parliamentary democracy is a myth exploded by the war and the developments arising from the war. The Soviet idea or that of Workers', Soldiers' and Peasants' Councils is one which .... goes right down to the roots of the Capitalist system and destroys it at its very foundations." R. Williams, *The New Labour Outlook*, p.160.
24. Robert Williams declared that "before the General Strike, the General Election pales into insignificance." Cf. his 1926 Presidential Address to the Labour Party Conference in which he declared, "the Communist Party and the Minority Movement still believes in the General Strike. The Labour Party looks with confidence to the General Election." *L.P.A.C.R. 1926*, p.172.
25. Details of the Unity negotiations can be found in the Official Report of the Communist Unity Convention (London: C.P.G.B., 1920), hereafter Communist Unity Convention Report.
- Tom Bell, The British Communist Party; A Short History (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1937), Ch.3.  
 Kendall, op.cit., Ch.11-15.  
 J. Klugman, History of the Communist Party of Great Britain; Formation and Early Years, 1919-24 (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1968), I,i.  
 H. Felling, The British Communist Party: An Historical Profile (London: A. & C. Black, 1958).  
 For the reasons for the breakdown of talks with the I.L.P. see MacFarlane, op.cit., p.47; Kendall, op.cit., p.199; and Bell op.cit., p.52.
26. She had written to Lenin in July 1919 asking for his opinion on the controversial question of Parliamentary action and had received the following reply:
- "I am personally convinced that to renounce participation in the Parliamentary elections is a mistake for the revolutionary workers of Britain, but better to make that mistake than to delay the formation of a big Workers' Communist Party in Britain." V.I. Lenin, "Letter to Sylvia Pankhurst" in On Britain (Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House), pp. 422/8 (424).
27. For Bell's interpretation of the motion see Communist Unity Convention Report, pp.9/11. One delegate at the Conference advocated a scheme whereby a Communist Member of Parliament would have to write an application for the Chiltern Hundreds before he entered Parliament and hand it to the Executive of the Communist Party. In the case of the M.P. stepping out of line the application would be posted to the appropriate authority. Ibid., p.15. Williams was expelled from the Communist Party for his part in "Black Friday."
28. Cf. Philip Snowden "One can sympathise with and support the Bolsheviks without accepting their policy and methods as being applicable to other countries where political and economic conditions are altogether different." New Leader, 12 February 1920. See also New Leader, 9 January 1919.

29. British Labour Delegation to Russia 1920 Report (London: T.U.C. and Labour Party, 1920).  
 Ethel Snowden, Through Bolshevik Russia (London: Cassell, 1920).  
 B. Russell, The Practice and Theory of Bolshevism (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1920).  
 For the confused reaction to Russell's book see his Portraits from Memory and other Essays (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1956), esp. pp. 13/14.
30. In his autobiography Left Turn (London: Martin Secker & Warburg, 1930), John Paton, who was not unrepresentative of the I.L.P.'s views, summarised the Third International's Reply to the I.L.P. as demanding not merely "acceptance of the principles of Marxist Socialism from its adherents, but in its replies to the enquiries made by our delegation it insisted on dictating the main activities to be followed by the I.L.P. in Britain. It had worked out on the basis of the Russian experience a set of fixed rules which it appeared determined to impose as the common form of authority in every country of the world. There was to be no deviation permitted to meet special needs and conditions, the law was laid down and had to be obeyed on pain of expulsion."(p.80) As if that were not enough the reply was delivered in "a hectoring dictatorial tone - a bullying note - which was singularly difficult to stomach."(pp.80/1).

**CHAPTER THREE**

**THE INTELLECTUALS & PARLIAMENTARISM:**

**THE CASE OF THE GUILD SOCIALISTS**

## The Guild Socialists:

The basic philosophical differences between the Labour Party and the Communists had repercussions throughout the organised Labour movement but was most keenly felt in what might be called 'peripheral' movements such as Guild Socialism which contained a disproportionate number of active Communists or Communist sympathisers in key administrative and decision-making positions.

Guild Socialism was essentially an intellectual movement having an eclectic philosophy representing, in the eyes of its best known propagandist at least, the practical application of Syndicalist doctrines to the British industrial situation.(1) Eschewing political Labourism as irrelevant, the Guild Socialists attacked the orthodox Collectivism of the Labour Party as a patently inadequate appreciation of the nature of power in society. Moreover, they characterised the supposed Collectivist 'solutions' to the demands of Labour as a positive evil, which would merely substitute State capitalism for private capitalism and thus leave the workers still enslaved to abstract economic forces.

What the Guild Socialists were concerned with was freedom; freedom to enable the individual to fulfill his creative nature. Freedom, they claimed, involved the pre-requisite conditions of controlling, as far as possible, those factors which determined the individual's life-style, particularly the conditions under which he worked. The majority of Guild Socialists, following G.D.H. Cole, looked to the producers in society to win the class struggle, and the doctrine of Pluralism, with its emphasis on the illegitimate claim of the State to sovereignty, to preserve it. The rest,

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1. G.D.H. Cole, Self-Government in Industry (London: G. Bell, Reprinted Edition, 1919), pp. 32-3. Cf. his The British Labour Movement: Retrospect/Prospect (London: Fabian Special No.8, 1951), p.7.

divided between the theories of S.G. Hobson, Maurice Reckitt and Major C.H. Douglas, (2) preserved the State and its institutions to varying degrees, but were unable to inter-relate their ideas within the framework of the National Guilds League, and were forced to watch helplessly as internal wrangling and external pressure destroyed the guild idea. The main concern here is not the industrial theories of the Guild Socialists, although these cannot be ignored, but those aspects of Guild Socialist theory which were concerned with Parliament and House of Commons reform. These range from Hobson's Spiritual State with its co-equal 'political' Parliament and 'economic' guilds - sovereignty lying with Parliament - to Cole's progressively weakened State in which sovereignty, in so far as it existed, eventually becomes the province of a 'Joint Body' of producers and consumers, which replaces, rather than reforms Parliament.

The approach adopted here involves, first of all, an examination of Guild theory, particularly in the writings of G.D.H. Cole and S.G. Hobson, with special reference to reform of the House of Commons. Much of this will be a discussion of the differing concepts of the State and its role in society. Secondly, it is necessary to make an examination of the impact of Guild Socialism on the Labour Party, Trade Union and I.L.P. circles through the activities of the National Guilds League and prominent Guildsmen. Finally, there is an explanation of the sudden demise of the movement in the early 'twenties.

Although the Guild Socialist movement became popularly identified with the writings and activities of G.D.H. Cole - "its most obvious leader and

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2. The contributions of the various individuals to the Guild idea may be traced in S.T. Glass, The Responsible Society: The Ideas of Guild Socialism (London: Longmans, 1966). A contemporary account of the origin and development of Guild Socialism is to be found in Niles Carpenter, Guild Socialism: An Historical and Critical Analysis (London: D. Appleton, 1922).

most effective exponent,"(3) guild theory owed its origins to A.J. Penty and S.G. Hobson, both of whom later became Cole's opponents within the National Guilds League. Cole frequently acknowledged his intellectual debt to Hobson and The New Age journal where the outlines of national guild theory were first sketched.(4) The Guild theorists were agreed on most fundamental issues, other than the role of the State, and a discussion of any one of them can suffice as a resumé for them all. Thus the following pages will consist of an examination of the two main theories that are relevant to House of Commons reform, those of Hobson and Cole. When the latter was not expanding on Hobson's ideas he was developing new ones of his own. The ideas of A.J. Penty and Stirling Taylor on the one hand and Douglas and Orage on the other will not be referred to in detail, primarily because they barely touch on the political aspects of Guild theory. This can perhaps be illustrated by the brief nature of Penty's reference to political organisation in his 'Restoration of the Guild System.'(5) the book which heralded the Guild movement. Penty envisaged a bicameral legislature, the lower chamber of which would be elected on a territorial basis, and the Upper chamber by the Guilds. That was the extent of his concern.(6)

By comparison, both Hobson and Cole made substantial references to political organisation, although it must be remembered that they developed their theories under pressure of demand. Hobson, for example, developed

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3. A. Gray, The Socialist Tradition: Moses to Lenin (London: Longmans Green, 1946), p.434.
  4. See for example, Cole's preface to the first edition of The World of Labour: A Discussion of the present and future of Trades Unionism (London: G. Bell, 1913), and his foreword to B. Pribicevic, The Shop Stewards' Movement and Workers' Control (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1959).
  5. A.J. Penty, The Restoration of the Guild System (London: Swen Sonnenschein, 1906).
  6. Ibid., p.70/1. See S.T. Glass, op.cit., pp. 18/19.



his thoughts on the State in his second book National Guilds and the State, in response to questions which had been raised by readers and as an answer to Cole's interpretation of the role of the State as the protector of the consumer.(7) By the time Cole had got round to restating Guild Socialism he had realised that whilst the emphasis of the theory was on industrial self-government, "its implications and conclusions.....extend(ed) over a considerably wider field than that of industry, and indeed..... involve(d) a theory of democratic representative government as a whole and constructive proposals governing the general lines of political as well as industrial reconstruction."(8)

Any study of Guild Socialist theory should properly start with S.G. Hobson's work on National Guilds:(9) for notwithstanding the fact that A.J. Penty "sketched out the main lines of.....guild theory,"(10) the latter was "altogether too medievalist and backward-looking for his contemporaries."(11) Whereas Penty took a reactionary and wistful look at the medieval guilds Hobson was concerned with the new concept of 'national guilds.' Hobson argued that under modern industrial capitalism the worker was reduced to the status of a commodity through the operation of the wage-system. Having no control over the value of his product he was thus robbed of his sacred birthright and sold into economic slavery. Moreover, basing his argument on the premiss that "economic power proceeds and dominates political action,"(12) Hobson claimed that the social and economic conditions

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7. S.G. Hobson, National Guilds and The State (London: G. Bell, 1919), Preface.
  8. G.D.H. Cole, Guild Socialism Restated (London: Leonard Parsons, 1920), p.10.
  9. S.G. Hobson, National Guilds: An Inquiry into the Wage System and the Way Out. (London: G. Bell, 1914). The book was edited by A.R. Orage.
  10. S.T. Glass, op.cit., p.20.
  11. M. Cole, "Guild Socialism and the Labour Research Department", A. Briggs and J. Saville (Eds.) in Essays in Labour History 1886-1923 (London: Macmillan, 1971), pp.260/83(264). Hereafter cited as Guild Socialism and the Labour Research Department.
  12. S.G. Hobson, National Guilds and the State, p.109.

of four-fifths of the working population, wage-slavery as he called it, prevented their realising their rightful political power. "In all the political democracies there are two classes of citizenship the active and the passive. The active citizen derives his authority from his economic position; the passive or subdued citizen is the wage-earner, who is inevitably passive because he is caught and choked in the wage system."(13) Remedial measures such as universal suffrage had little effect, for "Politics is largely a question of psychology. Economic subjugation brings in its train certain definite psychological results, which, in their turn, colour and dominate politics."(14) For Hobson the over-representation of property in the existing House of Commons proved that political democracy without economic equality was a sham.

The dominance of the wage-system in the affairs of society had never been appreciated by the Labour Movement, which, with the exception of the Social Democratic Federation, had dissipated its energies with proposals for modifying and living with the wage-system instead of abolishing it. Only with the abolition of the wage-system would the workers be liberated from bondage. The first step in this direction was the need to recognise that economic power precedes political power. The second was the ability to distinguish between economic and political power, not as two types of kindred power but as two separate kinds of power springing from altogether different sources. Because these two kinds of power were different in essence it followed that the one (political) could not be transmuted into the other (economic).(15) Hobson drew the conclusion "that economic methods are

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13. S.G. Hobson, National Guilds, p.49.

14. Ibid., p.53.

15. Loc.cit.

essential to the achievement of economic emancipation; (while) political methods are useless, because all political action follows and does not precede economic action; that economic power is the substance and political power its shadow or reflection." (16) Hobson was, in effect, attacking the orthodox Fabian Collectivist view that if the workers were able to achieve political power by organising themselves into a political force in Parliament, and on other elected bodies, this could lead to a transfer of basic economic power through the public ownership of the means of production brought about by legislative means. As he put it himself, "Labour .... in seeking first the conquest of political power, is grasping at the shadow and leaving the substance untouched." (17) Hobson, however, was going a step further than simply registering his opposition to the wisdom of political action. It was, he thought, inappropriate, inadequate and irrelevant. It was inappropriate in that politics could not solve economic problems. "An economic struggle must necessarily be waged in the industrial sphere," (18) that is, by a direct attack on the real problems. It was inadequate because it had in practice failed. While the Labour Party had busied itself in Parliament the real standard of living of the working-classes had decreased. In Hobson's eyes, at least, the political wing of the Labour movement had had a demoralising effect on industrial militancy. This only served to emphasise the irrelevance of the Labour Party which Hobson variously described as "an exhausting deviation and an appalling waste of time and nervous energy" (19) and "a very expensive amusement" (20) full of careerists whose political lives could be ended at the drop of a Liberal hat.

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16. Ibid., p.64.

17. Loc.cit.

18. Ibid., p.5.

19. Loc.cit.

20. Ibid., p.289.

Hobson's answer to the problem of how to create a really just society was to assert that industrial action alone, possibly the general strike, could create the conditions within which the new order of things could be established. It was not the transfer of Capitalism that would lead to economic emancipation but "the complete transformation of all the factors that enter into wealth production."<sup>(21)</sup> This is a clear reference to Hobson's desire to change the status of labour from that of a commodity into the essence of industrial life. However, certain essential preliminaries were necessary if this change were to be brought about. One, in particular, was that the Trade Union movement was to be organised on an industrial basis, with a monopoly of labour power, so as to enable it to confront the Capitalists on better than even terms. The inevitable show of force would at last secure the workers' victory and bring about the new society.

This new social order would be functional in principle. Material life would be the province of the guilds, which would co-operate with the State in the managing of society - subject to the principle of industrial democracy. In fact, Hobson's intention was to allow the guilds complete autonomy on the grounds that the workers should be free to govern themselves and because economic matters should be dealt with by the proper functional authority. "By transferring the conduct of material affairs to the Guilds (not only wealth production but the responsibility for maintainance in sickness, accident and old age) statesmanship is left free to grapple with its own problems, undisturbed and undeterred by class consideration and unworthy economic pressure."<sup>(22)</sup> Functional separation of economic and political power would bring stability to the state. Hobson envisaged a supreme Guild

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21. Ibid., p.11.

22. Ibid., p.256.

Council to co-ordinate the activities of the Guilds and to exercise appellate powers in disputes between the guilds. Other problems such as the Law, Medicine and Defence, which were not suitable to organisation under the guild system would be dealt with by the normal administrative processes of government. As for the structure and role of the State Hobson revealed few details. The State was to be the final arbiter, but given the vast role of the Guilds this could mean very little in practice, especially if Hobson's new society created the new outlook in men that he expected. As to the functions of the State Hobson is hardly the essence of clarity. "The problem of statesmanship," he wrote, "will be to transmute.....economic power.....into the highest possible social and spiritual voltage."(23) Yet when he states that the independence and supremacy of the State depends ultimately on "the moral powers and cultural capacity of nation's citizens"(24) it becomes clear that his idealism has got the better of his emotions. Moreover, when he expands this point by saying that "having solved the problem of wealth production exchange and distribution, we may rest assured that a people thus materially emancipated will move up the spiral of human progress, and that out of that part of this movement will grow a purified political system, in which great statesmanship will play its part,"(25) one is reminded of rhetoric of Ramsay MacDonald - unrealistic rather than idealistic. Nevertheless, what Hobson was getting at was that the State had a spiritual rather than a material role to play in the new society. This was made explicit by his second book, National Guilds and the State.

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23. Ibid., p.259.

24. Ibid., p.263.

25. Loc.cit.

National Guilds and the State set out primarily to answer the points made by critics of his earlier book, in particular those made by G.D.H. Cole, who by this time (1920) was the leading intellectual light of Guild theory. Cole had argued that the economic process fell into two distinct functions, the productive and the consumptive. The Guilds were the organisation for the producers while the State was the organisation specifically designed to act as the protector of the consumer. Both were sovereign in their own spheres, while any disputes should properly be settled by a joint-council representing both consumers and producers. In answer to this Hobson claimed that production and consumption were part of the same economic process and could not be separated in the manner which Cole had done. Cole was trying to artificially balance functions which in the nature of things would balance themselves or be naturally unbalanced. Finally, Hobson asserted the principle of the sovereignty of the State as the basic principle which should determine authority within society.

Hobson first of all distinguished between the nation, the State and the government, by calling them Society, the supreme legislative authority and the administrative organs respectively. The nation was essentially "that pervasive sense of national spirit and consciousness that springs from a life lived in common through many generations." (26) The government, a term which covered a regime, its personnel, and administrative organisation, "derives its authority from and must ultimately have its functions defined by the State...." (27) It is subject to the State which Hobson variously described as "the sovereign authority," "the organised expression of citizenship" and the "vocal organ" of the nation. (28) Though functionless itself

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26. Hobson, National Guilds and the State, p.101/2.

27. Ibid., p.101.

28. Loc.cit.

the State is the ultimate source both of function and of coercive power, deriving its power from two factors. Firstly, its spiritual role.

Because "politics ought to be the expression of the spiritual life of the nation" this means "that the business of the State is essentially spiritual..."(29)

But the spiritual nature of sovereignty also relates to the second factor - that the state is the instrument of a sovereign citizenship. "This citizenship, this sense of nationality operating in the individual consciousness, is the greatest fact in the life of a democratic people.....(and while citizenship contains and comprehends.....lesser motives and interests these motives and interests.....must ultimately merge into the will of citizenship, realising in it the sovereign power. It is not mere rhetoric when we counter 'the sovereign will of the monarch' with 'the sovereign will of the people.' It is a declaration of democracy. It envisages no balance of power; it knows no checks or counterpoises; it is an ultimatum that the will of the citizens, in their civic capacity, shall prevail over every sectional interest, economic or functional. Its decision is the greatest of national sacraments."(30) Thus the State's role as the spiritual leader of the nation is dependent upon what Hobson calls, "the sovereign quality of a completely enfranchised citizenship...."(31) Hence State sovereignty is essentially democratic. The State is "the sovereign representative of democracy," deriving its power from the general body of citizens and acting as "the mouthpiece of the citizen body."(32) Moreover, for Hobson, "the democratic State is a spiritual State to the extent that its citizens realise the vital

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29. Ibid., p.105.

30. Ibid., pp. 102/3.

31. Ibid., pp. 133.

32. Ibid., p.105.

principles of social existence and insist upon their application to all alike without fear or favour."(33) The State is not only democratic but is also naturally practical. Hobson described its role as a mission, a mission which unlike Cole's artificial balance of functions, is obviously correct. That the State should be society's expression of its organic life is apparent "on every ground, historical, constitutional, legal and practical....."(34)

Hobson reiterated his earlier belief that a society which was not dividing itself internally over the question of economic equality, because the basic question of economic freedom had been solved, would be a better society. Unfortunately, Hobson rarely ventures beyond the woolly generalisation to substantiate his assertions. "The new conditions of life adumbrated in a democracy, economically and politically enfranchised, must be reflected in a corresponding change of spirit in the State....compelling statesmen to obey new spiritual truths," he declared.(35) What are these new truths which will give spiritual guidance to future statesmen? Hobson does not expand the point other than to say that they will be "natural, inevitable and democratic."(36)

As a consequence of his exposition of the nature of the State Hobson makes some reference to Parliament. Rejecting Cole's notion of a territorially-based Parliament representing the interests of the consumer and being co-equal with the vocational producer organisations of the guilds, Hobson declares that by relegating the whole of the economic function to the Guilds (i.e., both the productive and consumptive functions) Parliament

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33. Ibid., p.143.

34. Ibid., pp. 108/9.

35. Loc.cit.

36. Ibid., p.109.



would be able to concentrate on the spiritual development of the nation unhampered by selfish economic interests. Besides, the State, as was mentioned earlier, was functionally unsuited to deal with economic questions.

As Hobson put it, "why should the purse rule the political roost when presumably the function of politics is to apply principles of public conduct?

What has the State to do with industry? This answer is, of course, that in the past generation great economic responsibilities have been thrust upon Parliament, which at the present time concerns itself with industrial problems to the exclusion of its distinctively spiritual duties."(37)

Hobson then points out that "if the political State is to undertake these economic functions, then it follows that the economic battle must be fought out in Parliament and its administrative purlieus."(38) This seems to

indicate a definite change from the anti-Parliamentary position Hobson took in National Guilds, although he by no means limited his sights to Parliamentary action. "It is futile to condemn Direct Action in politics," he wrote, "if

politics is degraded from its high estate to an economic class struggle."(39) Parliament, therefore, can be legitimately regarded as being part of the economic struggle.

As was mentioned previously, Hobson regarded the State as the supreme legislative organ. In seeking to define this more closely he wrote, "State organisation is primarily directed to the main purpose of expressing the will of the community, nationally through Parliament locally through the local elected authorities."(40) Later, he became more explicit describing

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37. Ibid., xvi.

38. Loc.cit.

39. Loc.cit.

40. Ibid., p.122.

Parliament as the spine of the State structure. Obviously, the State was to have an important role. It would co-ordinate policy and perform the legislative function. Hobson rejected the Soviet form of government which had many strong sympathisers in the Guild Movement - including G.D.H. Cole - describing the Soviets as "industrial bodies functioning in the alien sphere of politics....."(41) and generally not representing the interests of the community. The latter function was especially important, as Hobson's citizenry was the foundation of his State. In Hobson's Guild State the Guilds had a monopoly of labour power which was held in national trust on behalf of the community. From this it followed that "the disposal or distribution of that product must, in the ultimate, be guided by public policy....."(42) that is, according to the principles of general welfare. In the event of conflict Hobson makes his position perfectly clear. "On any great issue affecting the general welfare, the citizen body will naturally discuss ways and means with representatives of the Guilds - possibly a joint session of Guilds and Parliament and the Guild Congress - but the final decision can only rest with the State, as the formal representative of the nation."(43) However, such occasions are unlikely in the new society where economic problems are of relative unimportance, and would anyway only be used as a measure of last resort.

Although confirming Parliamentary Sovereignty of sorts, Hobson makes it clear that the structure of the institutions of the State will have to be changed in order to enable it to fully express the democratic wishes of the nation. To encourage this he claims that the liaison between State

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41. Ibid., p.84.

42. Ibid., p.110.

43. Loc.cit.

and guilds is best achieved through having the official heads of the guilds represented in Parliament in the same way in which Government departments are represented, implying yet again that although the separation of political and economic functions is the ideal it is impossible to achieve in practice. Therefore, while Hobson set out the Guild theory in a systematic form he did not do so logically. As a result while the same underlying themes are present in both his books (the spiritual nature of the State, the separation of economics and politics) the means of achieving the new society were not fully elaborated. Moreover, although he began from a very definite anti-Parliamentary position Hobson ended up by tacitly accepting the structure of the old political State, the purpose of which he remoulded by changing its environment.

By the time National Guilds and the State appeared Hobson's theories were already a negligible force within the National Guilds League. This is not really surprising. Hobson was never keen on the formation of the organisation in the first place, while Cole's multitudinous books and multifarious activities had, to the outside world, made him "the personification of the Guild idea."<sup>(44)</sup> The battles of the National Guild League will be dealt with later. What will be discussed here is the nature of Cole's contribution to the guild theory as it affects Parliament. Like Hobson Cole's ideas developed under pressure and a comparison of The World of Labour (1913) and Guild Socialism Restated (1920) shows just how far they developed. Nevertheless, the same basic approach as Hobson was evident in Cole's earlier books. Cole declared that the consumer needed special protection and claimed that the State could best fulfill

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44. S.G. Hobson, Pilgrim to the Left: Memoirs of a Modern Revolutionist (London: Edward Arnold, 1938), p.188.

this role. However, he argued the State should be made only of equal rank with the Guilds, proposing a 'joint board' later called 'joint Congress' as the medium for settling matters of dispute and common interest. Like Hobson, Cole believed that political action had not only failed but that it was unsuited to what was essentially an industrial struggle designed to create those conditions within which real democracy could effectively work. Cole, too, hoped to create an active citizenship which would exercise effective control over the governing of society once the basic question of economic equality had been settled. Moreover, Cole found himself at odds with the orthodox Collectivist methods of solving society's problems, a view which was reinforced by the State's role in the suppression of individual liberty during the war. Cole, like Hobson, was convinced that the transfer of capitalism to the State would merely change the personnel involved in administration, but would effect no real revolution in control, which was the basic issue, for, "unless the citizens are capable of controlling the Government, extension of the power of the State may be merely the transference of authority from the capitalist to the bureaucrat."<sup>(45)</sup> What was really needed was structural change but not the type of unjust and sectional change advocated by the syndicalists.

The first preliminary statement of Cole's views was to be found in his book - "The World of Labour" written before he was officially a Guildsman but in which he clearly showed his sympathy with the Guild Socialist movement.<sup>(46)</sup> The main concern of The World of Labour was with industrial self-government which Cole examined with reference to England, America,

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45. Cole, The World of Labour (1917 edition), p.347. Unless otherwise stated subsequent references will be to this edition.

46. Ibid., this point is brought out in the introduction to the 4th Edition, (1919).

France, Germany, Sweden and Italy. Cole argued that the signs of the time clearly indicated the "uprising of the group," with a psychology, ideal and action all its own. Cole regarded this new philosophy of groups as the true principle of working class solidarity. The spirit of devolution evident in the demands for greater Parliamentary control over the executive, Home Rule and the like was evidence of this principle in practice. These two principles had, in turn, been instrumental in producing "a reconstruction of political and social theory." (47) The main emphasis of this new theory was the recognition of the strength of economic power in society and of the need of society, acting in functional groups, to control the most vital factor of economic life - the workplace. Moreover, the paramount importance of economic affairs in the modern world meant that "the whole problem of government is essentially bound up with the control of industry." (48) Control industry and you will control the political life of the nation also.

This view pervaded Cole's discussion of the tactics that would be necessary to create the new society to which he referred. Economic action must come first. This meant that "a Labour Party, at present ought to regard its function as subsidiary to that of Trade Unionism....." (49) but just as this would involve a revamped Trade Union movement (Cole's Greater Unionism), so too would the Labour Party have to change from being a social reform party - that had reformed nothing since 1906 - to being a Socialist party having a revolutionary spirit and constructive policies to offer. From this it appears that Cole expected dual activity in both the industrial and political fields. He makes the point as follows, "Parliament will have,

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47. Ibid., p.20.

48. Ibid., p.394.

49. Ibid., p.423.

in future, not merely to clear the ring for the industrial struggle, but to intervene more and more, to take over control from the capitalist, while on their side the workers are assuming control."(50) Thus encroaching control and the end of a class-dominated House of Commons would secure the workers paradise of a Guild State.

Cole's idealism, though not altogether sound, was expressed in far more cogent terms than that of Hobson. He too, wished to free the State from economic encumbrances. He wrote, "could the control of industry be handed over to the producers, and could all profiteering be eliminated, the State would be set free to work for the deepening of national life, for the realisation of a greater joy and a greater individuality. It would be liberated to work for the liberation of energy, instead of being preoccupied with the sordid task of patching up a false social truce....."(51) Yet while Cole spoke of the hope of 'spiritual regeneration' he was immensely practical in his assessment of the role the State should be playing. "The State's business (is) to distribute wealth and to arrange services, to provide for the well-being of the whole, and to afford to every individual full means of self-expression."(52) This meant, as far as Cole was concerned, that "the State of the future will not be the centralised bureaucratic mechanism of today; it will be the alert and flexible instrument of the General Will."(53) To give effect to the last point Cole asserted, "new methods of democratic government will be evolved, and, instead of the abstract democracy of the ballot-box, there will be a real democracy aiming

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50. Ibid., p.400.

51. Ibid., p.410.

52. Ibid., p.412.

53. Ibid., p.421.

not at increasing the absoluteness of its control, but at delegating functions to self-governing bodies within itself, and at the same time, harmonising their activities with the good of the whole. Parliamentary devolution by means of the Committee system, administrative devolution by the granting of wider powers to local and ad hoc authorities, and industrial devolution, by making the Trade Union a self-governing producing unit, will go hand in hand."(54) Although Cole made references to the role of the joint board of Parliament and National Guilds to settle points in dispute he made it clear, in The World of Labour at least, that the ultimate authority was that of the consumer.

This view changed quite drastically by the time Guild Socialism Restated was published in 1920. Increasingly the role of Parliament was reduced from the protector of the consumer to a mere functional body while the power of the joint body was gradually increased until it played, in effect, the role in the new society that Parliament was performing in the old one. The partnership between State and Labour ended with the abolition of the Sovereign State. This was clear in Self-Government in Industry where Cole assigned to the State the important role of the supreme territorial association of consumers, but denied that its sovereignty applied throughout society.(55) If, Cole asserted, the new division of society has to be on vertical lines in terms of Producers and Consumers rather than the inadequate legislative, executive, judicial division of classical social theory, then it followed that it was impossible for a consumers body such as the State to confer any kind of rights upon a productive body like Trade Unions. Indeed, Cole concluded, rights of associations such as producers and consumers, are derived

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54. Loc.cit. Italics Mine.

55. Cole, Self-Government in Industry, Ch.5.

not from the State at all but by "virtue of their nature and the purposes for which they exist."(56)

Although the State was "primus inter pares" among associations it could not claim the right to interfere in the productive process. As the protagonist of the consumer, however, the State had the right to exercise some control over the division of the national product, the national income and the control of prices. Conflict, that unlikely event for which all guildsmen made allowance but in which none really believed, was to be settled by a machinery of joint control, a joint congress representing equally producers and consumers.(57) By the time the 1919 edition of Self-Government in Industry had been published, Cole had rethought his position, largely as a result of his conflict with Hobson. Hobson, because he could not accept Cole's division of the productive process into two separate parts, had asserted State Sovereignty over the productive process, whereas Cole still took the view that in matters of production the Trade Unions should have complete sovereignty. As a result of the conflict Cole re-examined the role of the State, and concluded that its functions should be still further limited. The State, be it Parliament, Congress or political Soviet (the latter being wrongly interpreted by Cole as an idea similar to that of the Guild) would deal primarily with "the whole question of income" while various ad hoc groups such as the National Co-operative Congress and the Public Utilities and Health Congresses would deal with specialist aspects of consumer protection.(58)

In Social Theory (59) and Guild Socialism Restated Cole gave theoretical justification for the abolition of State Sovereignty and the transfer of its

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56. Ibid., p.128.

57. Ibid., p.238/40.

58. Introduction to the 4th Edition of 1919.

59. G.D.H. Cole, Social Theory, (London, Methuen, 1920).



most important functions to the 'joint board' which became the new functional State. That some form of authority was necessary in any society was admitted by Cole when he wrote, "If by 'State' is meant merely any ultimate body, there is no more to be said; in this sense everyone who is not an Anarchist is an advocate of State sovereignty."(60) What Cole was attacking was the idea of a consumer's association claiming the right to exercise sovereignty in all aspects of social and economic life. Indeed, argued Cole, just because the State does exercise wide social and economic functions this is no reason to suppose that "its social function is pantoprismatic and universal."(61) In fact, when Cole, subjected the supposed functions of the State (coercion and co-ordination) to close examination and analysis, he found them to be illegitimately based. Co-ordination does not fall within the province of the State because disputes among associational groups cannot, by the laws of natural justice, be decided by another associational group. Take co-ordination away and the right of coercion falls too, and with it the notion of State Sovereignty. Of the economic and political activities generally attributed to the purview of the State only that of controlling income and prices remains. The attributes previously allotted to the State are now transferred by Cole to the joint board, which, although it is grandiosely described as the "democratic Supreme Court for Functional Equity"(62) really means that it has become the new constitutionally Sovereign Authority in society. This has implications for Parliament. The functional theory which lay at the heart of Cole's analysis implied that each functional association has its own legislature and executive, illustrating his attempt to create a series of functional democracies within the same society.

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60. Cole, Self-Government in Industry, p.32.

61. Cole, Social Theory, p.83.

62. Ibid., p.137.

Parliament would thus be reduced to a mere administrative role.

In Guild Socialism Restated Cole destroyed the State as a viable political unit in the new society which he envisaged. Throughout his works Cole had regarded the State as "the political machinery of government in a Community." (63) For him there was no distinction between the State and the government that one finds in Hobson. Its functions should be to "express common purposes and undertake common action on behalf of communities." In practice the State had inevitably become the coercive tool of the ruling class - "the social class which dominates the economic life of society." But the war had, in Cole's opinion, created the necessary conditions for the confrontation of guild-inspired working-class organisations such as the Trade Unions and the forces of Capitalism (The State and the employers). Cole was seeking to justify the struggle which he considered was bound to occur. Thus he attributed to the State none of those coercive functions it had claimed and, furthermore, developed a theory of function, derived from Mateazu, (64) which purported to give an understanding of the true nature of rights in society, but which, in fact, transferred to employees the right to coerce the State.

The functional theory of democracy, as Cole understood it, was most thoroughly explained in Social Theory. Briefly, the theory ran as follows. The community (a complex of individual associations, institutions and customs in a varied and multiform relationship) is the widest sphere of social unity. Within the organism some functions are organised while others are not. The paramount principle, underlying all social organisation, is that of function.

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63. Cole, Self-Government in Industry, p.110. Cf. Cole, Guild Socialism Restated, p.22.
64. R. de Mateazu, Authority, Liberty and Functions in the Light of the War (London: Allen & Unwin, 1916).

"Democracy must be conceived in the first place as a co-ordinated system of functional representation."(65) According to Cole, associations are "bodies created by the will of individuals for the expression and fulfilment of purposes which they have in common."(66) "Every such purpose or groups of purposes is the basis of the function of the association which has been called into existence for its fulfilment."(67) The touchstone of valuable associative activity is its relationship to the coherence of society as a whole. As Cole wrote, "the value and full development of Society depends.... on the wide prevalence and diffusion of association in the Commonwealth.... (and) the successful co-operation and coherence of the various associations."(68) Because function is "the principle underlying the unity and coherence of associations"(69) and the key to personal, social and communal well-being, it follows that rights are derived from function not from the State. All associations are equal; all share the same characteristics. No association can represent another function. Thus, "the omniscient, omnivorous, omniscient, omnipresent sovereign State,"(70) with its equally pretentious Parliament is a living lie. "The State, however important, is and can be.....no more than the greatest and most permanent association or institution in Society and its claim even to any such position will have to be carefully considered."(71) An examination which in the event proved fatal to the State.

One of the major faults of the State is its defective representative system. Because function is the essence of representation "all trade and democratic representation (must be).....functional representation."(72) It

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65. Cole, Social Theory, p.108.  
 66. Ibid., p.47.  
 67. Ibid., p.49. Italics in the Original.  
 68. Ibid., p.50.  
 69. Loc.cit.  
 70. Ibid., p.11.  
 71. Ibid., p.81.  
 72. Cole, Guild Socialism Restated, p.33.

is impossible to substitute the will of one man for that of another, as this leads to misrepresentation. This, Cole held, was especially true in the case of Parliamentary representation. In attempting the impossible task of representing the individual in every aspect of his life M.P.'s ended up representing him not at all but obeying the party line. Representation must be functional and limited for men consent to be members of functional associations in pursuit of specific objects and can only be represented specifically not generally. It is impossible to represent the communal body in any form of organisation, a fact which results in the idea of there being one sovereign body going out of the window. Moreover, because the only democratic form of representation is functional representation it follows that the individual must have as many votes as he has points of view and there must be as many separately elected representative bodies as there are functions to be represented. Functional sovereignty lies with the associations, communal sovereignty with the inter-play of associative activities conducted by rational men.

Thus Cole's final version of Guild Society is one in which the State can no longer adequately represent the full consumer interests. Consumers cannot be represented by what is now called "A political body," this task lies with the Co-operatives collective Utility Councils and other "specific functional ad hoc bodies." The productive side of society would be embodied by the Industrial Guilds Congress - "the final representative body of the Guild System on its industrial side,...."(73) The new "state", i.e., the new final authority in society is the 'joint congress', renamed the "Commune" and composed equally of producers and consumers. Cole's "commune" which would be organised on local, regional and national levels with each level

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73. Ibid., p.70.

elected by the one immediately below it, "would be mainly a source of few fundamental decisions on policy, demarcation between functional bodies, and similar issues and of final adjudications on appeals in cases of dispute....."(74) In fact the five duties accorded the commune (problems of finance, questions of functional demarcations and policy, coercions and other questions) confer upon it many of the actual duties of Parliament and in the sphere of legislation so much so that Cole actually designates it "the Constituent Assembly and the constitutional legislature of Guild democracy."(75) All Cole had done in fact was restructure and redefine the State, its institutions and its electoral arrangements. One other point that emerged from Cole's final position on Guild Socialism was the commitment to employ revolutionary methods. The inadequacy of political action was a Guild Socialist dogma, Cole merely gave more reasons for it. He argued that even if a class-conscious working-class could create a majority in Parliament it would take a century before the necessary changes could be made in society. "The complete change which we desire," he wrote in Guild Socialism Restated, "could not be carried through wholly by constitutional means, industrial or political, even if the governing classes were to allow the developments which undermined their power to proceed to the end without resisting them by force; but at the best the unconstitutional "revolution" might be reduced to a mere clearing away of what had already become useless debris of a decayed system....."(76) The irony of this statement is the fact that having committed himself to the revolutionary path Cole was to find that the Guild Socialist movement was effectively destroyed by the activities of the Moscow-inspired revolutionaries.

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74. Ibid., p.136.

75. Ibid., p.149.

76. Ibid., pp.187/8, Italics Mine. Cf. The Guildsman, (September, 1919) where Cole wrote that Guild Socialists "welcome Direct Action and the growth of the social power of Trade Unionism as steps towards economic and therefore also towards political, democracy."

The Impact of Guild Socialism:

The impact of guild socialism was derived primarily from the influence of its leaders, particularly G.D.H. Cole. It was he who led the assaults on the Fabian Society and induced the I.L.P. to look towards Guild Socialism. Coupled with this was the work he put into Union affairs through his position as unpaid research adviser to the Amalgamated Society of Engineers. Taking into account Cole's many books and pamphlets, issued individually or through the National Guilds League, it becomes quite clear why he became identified as "the personification of the Guild idea." (77)

Being a movement comprised, in the main, of intellectual and middle-class individuals (78) it was perhaps natural that the first Guild Socialist attempt to find an outlet for their views should have centred upon the Fabian Society. Attracted by the Fabian Research Department which had been set up in 1912, the Guild Socialists soon captured control of the department and used it as a base upon which they could organise opposition to the Fabian establishment. Cole was elected to the Executive of the Society in April 1914, and carried on a running battle to convert the Society to Guild Socialism, in the Research Committee on Associations of Wage-Earners, and on the Executive, until the final rejection of all his ideas at the annual meeting in 1915, after which Cole resigned to join the newly formed National Guilds League. (79)

Cole made little reference to the Fabian society in his discussions of the propagation of the Guild idea. One point, however, is very clear, the National Guilds League as an organisation had its origins at Storrington in December 1914 and a subsequent meeting at Oxford early in 1915. (80) It is

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77. See Footnote 3, above. Cf. M. Cole, The Life of G.D.H. Cole, (London: Macmillan St. Martins Press, 1971), pp. 76/7
78. M. Cole, Guild Socialism and the Labour Research Department, p.261 Cf. Clayton, op.cit., pp. 151/2.
79. There are good accounts of the various rebellions in M. Cole's The Story of the Fabian Socialism (London: Heinemann, 1961), Ch.XIII, and the same author's The Life of G.D.H. Cole, Ch.Vi.
80. The Storrington document is published in Briggs and Saville, op.cit., Ch.12.

difficult not to draw the conclusion that Cole realised that the coming battle in the Fabian Society was as good as lost and was taking the appropriate steps to provide an alternative platform for Guild Socialist propaganda. At Easter 1915 the National Guilds League was formally inaugurated having among its objects "the abolition of the wage system, and the establishment by the workers of self-government in industry through a democratic system of National Guilds working in conjunction with a democratised State."

The whole direction and tenor of the National Guilds League was propaganda, through lectures, meetings and publications. The latter ranged from appeals to both Trade Unions and public on the guild idea to elaborate schemes for Post Office, Mining, Railway and Education Guilds. From 1917 a regular journal was published monthly under the title of "The Guildsman," later changed to The Guild Socialist. However, the pure propaganda of the League was balanced to some extent by the activities of the Fabian Research Department which produced, in the main, objective and factual information for use by Trade Unions in wage claims. Moreover, the columns of the New Age, which still gave support to the Guild idea were constantly filled with the various debates over Guild theory. Thus it was possible for interested parties to gain more than cursory knowledge of what the League stood for.

The main object of the League's propaganda was the Trade Union Movement where its impact was more apparent than real. Important members of the Trade Union Movement such as Frank Hodges of the Miners' Federation belonged to the movement and attempted to convert their own organisations into Guild Socialist organisations. At the 1918 Miners' Conference Hodges successfully moved a resolution calling for the redrafting of the Mines Nationalisation Bill along Guild lines. Similar success was achieved in the Railway Unions, the National Union of Teachers and the Construction Unions. The Union of

Post Office Workers fully committed itself to the Guild Idea and actually made proposals along those lines to the Post Office which refused as a matter of Government policy. Two further successes were achieved in 1918 when the T.U.C. passed a resolution in favour of the Guild Idea and in 1920 when the Building Guilds were formed.(81)

However, there were many Trade Unionists, leaders as well as rank-and-file, who had little knowledge of the League or of Guild Socialism.(82) Moreover, when it came to concrete proposals in the case of the miners and the railwaymen the final product could hardly be described as Guild Socialism. As E. Eldon Barry pointed out, "though Cole saw this (the proposals for vertical joint-control throughout the industry) as the first step towards a 'Mining Guild', and Frank Hodges, the Miners' secretary was then a Guild Socialist, it is doubtful whether the miners really expected anything more than an equal share in management with the State."(83) Indeed, the Miners' leaders assured Lloyd George that their intention was not to encroach further upon the management of the mines. The Railway Nationalisation Bill also emphasised joint control rather than fully-fledged Guild Socialism.(84)

Several writers have commented on the fact that the Guild Socialist relationship with the Trade Unions was ended by the impact and influence of the Russian Revolution in October 1917 and its British brainchild, the C.P.G.B. (85) This seems to indicate that the actual influence of the Guild

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81. See, for example, the triumphant theme in "Notes of the Month" in The Guildsman, (February, 1920).
82. M. Cole, Guild Socialism and the Labour Research Department, pp.275/6.
83. E.E. Barry, Nationalisation in British Politics; The Historical Background (London: Jonathan Cape, 1965), p.213.
84. Loc.cit. The details of the proposed Miners' Nationalisation Bill are reproduced in F. Hodges, The Nationalisation of the Mines (London: Leonard Parsons, 1920), Appendix II.
85. See, for example, M. Cole, Growing Up into Revolution (London: Longmans Green, 1949), pp. 95/101. Pribicevic, Op.cit. p.149; M. Cole; The Life of G.D.H. Cole, Ch.X; K. Coates and A. Topham (eds.) Industrial Democracy in Great Britain (London: MacGibbon & Kee, 1968), Ch.4. and W. Mellor, "A Critique of Guild Socialism" Labour Monthly, (November, 1921), pp.397/404.



Socialists was derived from their ability to fill the ideological gap left by the pre-war demise of the Syndicalist movement, and their capacity, through the work of the Fabian Research Department, to provide material which the Unions could use in the defence of their members' interests. The emergence of the Bolsheviks as the heroes of the extreme Left and the post-war, post-boom offensive of the Employers and the Government, which put the Trade Union Movement on the defensive, destroyed the functions which the Guild Socialist movement was attempting to discharge.

The fact is that the Guild Socialist success was, to a large degree, fortuitous. The ground for propagating their ideas had been prepared, especially in the Railway and Mining Industries, by the Syndicalists. This was reinforced by the general raising of the status of Trade Unions as part of the governmental machine during the war. "It was these two fundamental factors, the shift towards industrial action and the wartime experience, which prepared the ground for the assertion of the idea of workers' control. Without these basic conditions....Guild Socialism would most probably have remained(a) a small group of militant propagandists without much impact on the trade union movement as a whole."(86) As it was, Guild Socialism was able to achieve some measure of influence because of the intellectual fashion for workers' control, and the impact of governmental policy in industry which constrained many Unions to turn to the Fabian Research Department for information.

Nevertheless, the kind of relationship which the Guild Socialists had with the Trade Union Movement should be kept in perspective. Pribicevic pointedly remarked that, "the primary, if not the only, concern of most unions, including the A.S.E., was the protection of their craft interests

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86. Pribicevic, op.cit., p.163.

which were threatened by dilution."(87) He continued, "there is no evidence that any of the major unions supporting this demand (for workers' control) saw in it a step towards full industrial democracy as interpreted by their guild socialist advisers."(88) Moreover, the Shop-Stewards Movement, with which the Guild Socialists had links in Sheffield and Glasgow, the latter through the work of John Paton, were favourable to Guild Socialism only insofar as it provided an acceptable ideological framework for their own claims. The advent of the Russian Revolution provided a more forceful framework with the result that "as the influence of the Russian Revolution (grew) that of Guild Socialism declined."(89) The functions of the Guild Socialists had been usurped by Bolshevism.

Of course, the most important aspect of the relationship between the Guild Socialists and the Trade Unions was the establishment of the Building Guilds in 1920. This was the outcome of two distinct developments that had taken place within the building industry. The first was the idea of a Builder's Parliament, a Whitley Council type of affair, on which both employers and employees were represented and which was largely the brain-child of Malcolm Sparkes.(90) His idea was to create unity of purpose within the industry so that all sections, masters as well as men, could benefit. The second, was the creation of the famous Building Guilds under the guidance of S.G. Hobson.(91) This co-operative kind of adventure was

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87. Ibid., p.49.

88. Loc.cit.

89. Ibid., p.149.

90. See, Raymond Postgate, The Builders' History (London: The Labour Publishing Co., 1923), pp.440 ff., and Mrs. E. Sparkes, 'Malcolm Sparkes - Constructive Pacifist' Manuscript in the Malcolm Sparkes collection of papers (University of Hull). F. Matthews makes out an interesting, though not entirely convincing case for overlapping motives in "The Building Guilds", in Briggs and Saville, op.cit., pp.284/331.

91. Matthews, op.cit., passim., and the account in The New Commonwealth, (March, 1920). Cf. S.G. Hobson's version in Pilgrim to the Left, Ch.20/21.

possible because of the chronic shortage of houses. Master Builders, however, despite generous subsidies offered under the Housing Act of 1919, found that profits were to be found in greater quantities in other construction work. With the aid of short-term credit from the Co-operative organisations and the acquiescence of the Government the Guilds began operation in several local authority areas to fill the gap.(92) Although not run on entirely democratic lines, the Guilds produced better quality houses at cheaper costs and outwardly went from strength to strength with the formation in 1921 of the National Building Guild.(93) Similar small-scale guilds were formed in the engineering, clothing, furniture and printing industries. Unlike Sparkes, Hobson regarded the guilds as the first step in wresting control from the employers. Unfortunately, the employers took him seriously and applied their greatest possible pressure on a Government already wielding the 'Geddes Axe'. The withdrawal of local authority support under Government pressure and the end of the post-war boom took the virtual strength away from the Unions by ending the conditions of full employment. Their financial position was precarious. As Cole remarked, "as they made no profits, they could stand no losses (and) the Trade Unions, however, sympathetic, could not afford to finance them adequately..."(94) The failure of the Building Guilds, coupled with the collapse of the National Guild League, was the end of the Guild Movement.(95)

However, if Guild Socialism was dead by 1922 it refused to lie down, and, indeed, registered its greatest political victory at the I.L.P. annual

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92. Amy Hewes, "Guild Socialism: A Two Years' Test" American Economic Review, XII, No.2. (June, 1922), pp. 209/37.
93. G.D.H. Cole, A Short History of the British Working Class Movement, 1789-1947, (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1952), p.406.
94. Ibid., p.407.
95. Hewes writing before the collapse of the Building Guilds, also stressed the importance of their continuence to the Guild Socialist movement.

conference of that year. (96) Yet it was to prove a pyrrhic victory for the 'young men' who were attempting to continue to use the I.L.P., traditionally a source of emotional power within the Labour Movement, were in fact gradually alienating it from the bulk of its effective political leadership. Cole had noted in 1920 that the I.L.P. was redefining its objects "so as to bring them into conformity with Guild ideas." (97) in practice the impact of the I.L.P. on the Guild movement was to rehabilitate political methods, a rehabilitation encouraged by the obvious unpopularity of the government, the failure of the Building Guilds and the wider developments in the relationship between the I.L.P. and the Third International.

The reasons why Guild Socialist ideas found a home in the I.L.P. are not difficult to find. As the principal group which opposed the war the I.L.P. contained many Conscientious Objectors who attributed their brutal treatment to the mechanism of a centralised State. These people, of whom Clifford Allen, Fenner Brockway and Bertrand Russell are the best known, were well disposed to pluralistic doctrines. (98) Moreover, the internal divisions of the post-war I.L.P. between the Parliamentary, Second International group consisting of the old-style leaders such as MacDonald and Snowden and the pro-Bolshevik, Third International group, which looked with favour upon direct action in politics also created a fertile market for ideas which could claim an English revolutionary pedigree. (99)

For three years G.D.H. Cole utilised the immense opportunities afforded

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96. R.E. Dowse, Left in the Centre: The Independent Labour Party 1893-1940 (London: Longmans, 1966), p.68. See also "The Progress of Guild Idea 1921-22" Guild Socialist (March, 1922).
97. G.D.H. Cole, Chaos and Order in Industry (London: Methuen, 1920), p.54.
98. Dowse, op.cit., p.67. See Note 1.
99. Dowse, Left in the Centre, p.65.

him in the organs of the I.L.P. press to propagate the Guild idea. His success was evident in the Report of the I.L.P. commission on party policy and the subsequent Constitution in which it accepted the need for the Labour Movement to use its industrial as well as its political power.(100) The emphasis was on the former; "The Parliamentary Party can do good service, but the core of the fighting will be in the workshops."(101) Yet the Guild Socialists failed to win over any of the major political figures in the I.L.P.(102) Consequently, this severely limited its actual impact, to the extent that political Guild Socialism had no permanent affect on the Labour Party of the 1920's. In the final analysis it was the Collectivism of Snowden and MacDonald, however diluted, that proved to be the mainstay of Labour policy.

The importance of individual leaders such as MacDonald and Snowden in opposing Guild Socialism should be borne in mind. Their absence from the Parliamentary Labour Party, though it restricted, did not destroy their influence. Indeed, MacDonald's stature in the party, a product to a large degree of his anti-war stand, was increased by the scandalous tactics of Horatio Bottomley which led to MacDonald's defeat at East Woolwich in 1921. MacDonald's activity in the post-war period was not hampered by his absence from the House of Commons.(103) In the Labour Party of the 1920's it was the Parliamentarianism of the pre-war period that was the dominant policy, a policy hardly affected by MacDonald's flirtation with direct action.

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100. Ibid., p.68. See also Appendix I. pp. 209/11.

101. The Guildsman, (December, 1918).

102. See Note 2.

103. R. Lyman, op.cit. passim. MacDonald, like Snowden, had written a book in the pre-war period hostile to Syndicalism. J.R. MacDonald, Syndicalism: A Critical Examination (London: Constable, 1912).

The basic ideas of the Guild Socialists were simply restricted to their success in a rapidly declining I.L.P. As a creative influence Guild Socialism was hardly more than a pre-occupation with the passing intellectual fad of pluralism. What Guild Socialism illustrates is the fluidity of the situation which faced the Left-Wing of the Labour Party in the post-war period. Basically the choice was one of the political action through the P.L.P. looking to the policy of 'the inevitability of gradualness' with which to finish the job of eliminating a capitalist system on its last legs, or of bringing forward the advent of the inevitable by revolutionary and extra-constitutional means. This choice divided the Labour party at all levels but was particularly acute in such movements as Guild Socialism which attracted a goodly number of individuals who were to form the nucleus of the British Communist Party.(104)

In fact, the National Guilds League was one of the most-broadly based movements of the Left, covering the ground from Christian Socialism to Communism. The Bolshevik Revolution of October 1917 merely polarised the various streams of thought into two major groups. One identifying the Guild idea with the Russian Workers' and Soldiers' Councils, emphasised the need to overthrow capitalism first and then provide the Guild 'blueprint for the re-organisation of society'. The other, led by Maurice Reckitt, was opposed to violence and to foreign ideas such as Bolshevism.(105) "The rift" as Margaret Cole observed, "grew into a chasm."(106) The two

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104. As Cole wrote, "A Communist Party has been formed in Great Britain and a considerable number of members of the National Guilds League have joined it. In this there is nothing surprising." "The Communist Party and the N.G.L." The Guildsman (September, 1920). See also The World of Labour, op.cit., p.422, and Guild Socialism Restated, Ch.8.

105. See Note 3.

106. See Note 4.

sides met head-on at the National Guilds League Annual Conference in 1920, when resolutions welcoming the Soviet form of government and condemning Parliamentary government as an instrument of capitalist domination were passed. A further resolution, proposed by Cole, calling for "the dictatorship of the proletariat" was not accepted but the proposition itself indicated the mood in the League.(107)

This was confirmed by a special conference in December of the same year. The Conference heard and approved, by a narrow majority, 70 votes to 62, the policy pamphlet prepared by Cole, who had been chosen for the task by the Executive, declaring that the 1920 Conference decisions had, "definitely placed Guildsmen in the revolutionary ranks and made definite their breach with reformist ideas and the state machine of capitalism." A 'Programme of Action' which was also approved, provoked the resignation of six Right-Wing members of the Executive.(108) It was the beginning of the end for the N.G.L. Local guild groups, alienated by what was, in effect, a Communist takeover - a deliberate attempt to use the N.G.L. to further the revolutionary cause - withdrew their financial support and the League had to go onto a voluntary basis.(109) Others adhered to the Douglas Credit scheme as the answer to the obvious failure of the League.

Then at the end of 1921 the Communist Party changed its attitude towards the Guild Socialist movement. In November of that year, after Communist

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107. See "Notes of the Month", The Guildsman, (April, 1920) and the report of "The Annual Conference of 1920" The Guildsman, (June, 1920). Cf. "Notes of the Month", (February, 1920). "It seems to us to be the bounden duty of every Guildsman to support the Socialist revolution against capitalism, in this country or any other, however much as he may dislike, or even disapprove of, the methods which it employs.."

108. "The Special Conference of 1920", The Guildsman, (January, 1921).

109. M. Cole, The Life of G.D.H. Cole, p.124. "Resignations (of the Right-Wing at first) began in 1921; before the year was out subscriptions were falling away and the office was given up; the League itself came to an end in 1923, and the Guild Socialist ceased publication. At least the losses were quickly cut."

members had proposed the winding up of the League, William Mellor, by now a prominent member of the C.P.G.B., criticised the failure of Guild Socialists to explain how they were going to effect the revolution.(110) In 1922 all the links between the Communists and National Guilds League were severed. As L.J. MacFarlane has pointed out, by this time the C.P.G.B.'s expectations of riding into power on a revolutionary wave had faded and it could no longer afford to dissipate its small membership in extra-party activities.(111) The N.G.L. was one of several movements to suffer from this change of tactics.

It is perhaps unfair to criticise the N.G.L. as an unwitting tool in the hands of the Communists and too easy to highlight the obvious lack of political judgement which characterised the movement.(112) In the heady atmosphere of the post-war world when social conditions at home and the Bolshevik threat abroad seemed to indicate the imminent collapse of Capitalism, an attachment to the allegedly rational tenets of Marxist philosophy was understandable. In many respects the inadequacy of Guild theory, based as it was on unsubstantiated assumptions and reflecting the atmosphere of the time, is symptomatic of the complete failure of the Guildsmen to understand the political realities of the world around them still less to predict its future development.

Cole himself admitted this in 1929 when he wrote, "We have built Utopias on the assumption that all the irksomeness of.....work arises from defects of social organisation, and that in a world rightly organised each man will find pleasure and some measure of self-realisation in the work which he does on the common behalf. What is more - we have sometimes felt rather

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110. See Footnote 85.

111. MacFarlane, The British Communist Party, pp.36/7.

112. See Note 5.



proud of ourselves for asserting this, on the ground that our ideal was a higher ideal of pleasure in service than our critics could appreciate. That has been our particular form of cant, and it had for a time a great appeal. But the modern world has seen through it." (113)

There were two reasons for this. One was the rehabilitation of the political as opposed to the economic method as the primary means of effecting the transition to Socialism. The second was derived from the fact that Guild Socialism was part of intellectual fashion of pluralism which reflected a revolt against the "idealistic" theory of the state.(114) The essence of this revolt was the preservation of individual freedom in the face of the growing centralisation of the state. (115) One characteristic of this revolt and its Guild Socialist imitations was its devolutionary tendencies. G.R. Stirling Taylor's three main principles for example were those of functional representation, self-management and decentralisation.(116) Cole too favoured devolution on a regional and administrative level as well as by function.(117)

Significantly, the orthodox reply to the Guildsmen was frequently conceived in terms which appeared to favour devolution. It was generally

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113. G.D.H. Cole, The Next Ten Years In British Social and Economic Policy (London: Macmillan, 1929), p.16. Cf. H.J. Laski "Political Science in Great Britain and France" American Political Science Review 19, (1925), p.99. "In 1920, guild socialism was the fashionable doctrine of the time; its influence is now almost negligible."

114. See Bernard Zylstra, From Pluralism to Collectivism: the development of Harold Laski's political thought (Assen, The Netherlands: Van Gorcum, 1968), Ch.I to III.

115. H.M. Magid, English Political Pluralism: The Problem of Freedom and Organisation (New York: Columbia University Press, 1941), pp.5. ff. See also F.W. Coker, "Pluralistic Theories and the Attack upon State Sovereignty" in C.E. Merriam and H.E. Barnes (Eds.) A History of Political Theories: Recent Times (New York: Macmillan, 1924), pp. 80/119.

116. G.R. Stirling Taylor, The Guild State: Its Principles and Possibilities (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1920), passim.

117. See, for example, his reference to the Jowett proposals in Guild Socialism Restated, pp. 148/9.

accepted that Parliament was inefficient, out of touch with the political temper of the nation, and a number of proposals to improve the effectiveness of Parliament as a working institution were made. These issues which will be examined shortly, did not originate with the election of 1919 neither did they cease to be important with the fall of Lloyd George in 1922. They were symptomatic of the widespread feeling within the Labour Party that the institutions of Parliamentary democracy could usefully be improved upon. In one sense this was proof of the underlying faith of the Party in the institution itself - a faith which as has been demonstrated - the main exponents of Guild Socialism did not share, a fact which accounts to some extent for the failure of the Guild Socialists to secure lasting intellectual holds on the Party.

The Guild Socialist theorists had emphasised the two questions of representation and strong government and the essence of the Party's attitude to Parliamentary reform on the two dominant questions of the 'twenties (women's suffrage and proportional representation) is best understood in terms of its commitment to these principles of representation and strong government. According to its theories on representation the Party saw Parliament as the institution in which political groups in society should be properly represented in relative proportions to their strength in society as a whole. It was natural that when faced with an electoral system which discriminated against small parties the Party should emphasise the imperfect nature of the system and stress the need for reforms designed to alleviate its incidence. However, the Party also believed in the principle of strong government. Political power was of little use unless it was used to secure the Socialist ideal, although the vacillating and ultra-moderate MacDonald was happy to excuse weak government on the grounds that the Party did not

have the Parliamentary strength or quality to use its opportunities to the full. In the political situation of the 1920's this was the inevitable reaction to Labour's proximity to power and the increasing polarity of the parties, in numbers at least, in the House of Commons, achieved at the expense of the Liberals. To the Labour Party the necessity of fairer representation was part of the broader aims of ensuring responsible government. In the light of the developing situation the Party's emphasis on strong government at the expense of mathematical perfection was as natural as the Liberal's sudden emphasis on mathematic perfection at the expense of strong government. As will be shown later it would be as easy as it is incorrect to dismiss this change of emphasis as mere opportunism, for the change reflected the realisation, rather than the rejection of social democratic principles according to which Liberals and Conservatives were but different faces of the same Capitalist establishment. It was the peculiar claim of the British Labour Party that whilst it could identify the common capitalist enemy it rejected the notion that the traditional political method of representing various interest in society was tainted or perverted by its social context. True, Parliament was not as representative or as workmanlike as it might have been, but the institution itself was not only an acceptable, it was the most acceptable, mode of securing political power. It was in order to make that institution more receptive to the demands which the Party articulated that it pursued its representative principles along the path of universal suffrage and the abolition of undue influences in electoral decisions. In short, it was to facilitate the pursuit of strong executive government to be exercised in no different manner to that of its "capitalist" predecessors.

In such a context the impact of the Coalition Parliament was almost bound to strengthen anti-Parliamentary movements like Guild Socialism. The

removal of the source of that strength, the unrepresentativeness of Parliament, by the General Election of 1922, destroyed any intellectual credence that Guild Socialism might have had. What emerged were the theories of representation and strong government that were to play such an important part in the inter-party conflicts of the nineteen-twenties. To have succeeded in their aims the Guild Socialists needed to convince the Labour Movement of the relevance of their ideas to the real world of practical politics. By adopting an arrogant intellectual approach they failed to secure this end and became victims of their own political naivety. They failed on the most fundamental issues of parliamentary democracy to convince the Labour Movement that the basic pragmatic philosophy to which the Movement was committed was worth sacrificing for theoretical niceties. By 1922 the time for theory had past, the reality of political power held sway.

CHAPTER THREE - NOTESThe Guild Socialists

1. Among those influenced by Guild Socialist ideas were Clement Attlee and Victor Gollancz. (See F. Williams, As It Happened (London: Heinemann, 1954), p.53. W. Golant "The Early Political Thought of C.R. Attlee," Political Quarterly 40, (1969), 246/55, and Gollancz's My Dear Timothy (London: Gollancz, 1952), pp.312/16. Lionel Robbins also became attached to the theories of the Guild Socialists for a short while. Autobiography of an Economist (London: Macmillan, 1971), Ch. III.
2. The main personalities of the I.L.P. (MacDonald, Snowden, Jowett and Wallhead) were all opposed to Guild Socialism. MacDonald writing in Parliament and Revolution (Manchester: The National Labour Press, 1919), said "if the people do not understand Parliament, better government is not secured by splitting up its functions." p.59. Snowden wrote that many Guild Socialists gave the impression "that they exalted the importance of mere production and placed it in a position coequal if not superior to the social organisation for the satisfaction of the individual's every need." Labour and the New World (London: Cassell, 1921), p.161. See also his article "State Socialism and National Guilds" Socialist Review, Vol. XVI, 89, No. 2., (April-June 1919) pp. 116-123.
3. See M.B. Reckitt and C.E. Bechofer, The Meaning of National Guilds (London: Cecil Palmer, 2nd and revised edition, 1920), pp.212/30. Reckitt and Penty had been amongst the earliest to take a stand against Bolshevism, opposing at the N.G.L. Conference 1917 a resolution welcoming the Russian Revolution. See M. Cole The Life of G.D.H. Cole, pp.121/2. See, too, an article by Reckitt in The Guildsman (November, 1919), and Penty's contrast of the ideas of Marx and Ruskin in A Guildsman's Interpretation of History, (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1920), Ch.XX.
4. M. Cole, The Life of G.D.H. Cole, p.122. "It was the difference, the finally unbridgeable difference between those who when it came to the point supported physical revolution and the 'dictatorship of the proletariat' and those who repudiated both." Loc.cit. Cf. Guild Socialism and the Labour Research Department, pp.279/80, Cole himself had attributed failure to the intellectual complexity of Guild Theory see The British Labour Movement, p.8.
5. Margaret Cole recalled that the Guild Socialists had "a kind of pristine, almost schoolboyish innocence," which she attributed "to the long shelter of the late-Victorian age in England," Guild Socialism and the Labour Research Department, p. 261. See also The Life of G.D.H. Cole, Ch.X. Alexander Gray has written, not unfairly, that "there has probably never been a school of writers so intolerant of the opinions of others, so violent and unrestrained in their language, so extravagantly contemptuous of all and sundry, so assured of their own righteousness as the possessors of a peculiar illumination, so confident that unto them had been committed the oracles of God." The Socialist Tradition, p.436.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### SOME PROBLEMS OF PARLIAMENTARY

### REFORM IN THE 'TWENTIES

Capitalism and Socialism: The dialectics of three Party politics in the 'Twenties.

The aftermath of 1919-1922 on the Labour Movement was remarkably limited. The continued bye-election performances of the Party, the failure of direct action on Black Friday and the return to Parliament of the self-opinionated, self-seeking, pillars of revolutionary conservatism, MacDonald and Snowden, at the election of 1922, helped to rehabilitate the House of Commons as the only legitimate place where Labour opinion might be voiced. Notwithstanding flirtation with direct action that produced the tragic nine days of the General Strike it became obvious that Labour's future lay in capturing political power and effecting the transition to Socialism through legislative means.

To all intents and purposes 1919-1922 had been an unpleasant, frustrating interlude which was best forgotten. What really mattered in the nineteen-twenties was victory in the simple contest between Capitalism and Socialism. One aspect of this contest was the polarisation of parties that it involved, a polarisation which the Labour Party did all in its power to exaggerate and hasten. It was in this context that it used its competitive principles of representative and strong government to advocate the completion of the process of universal suffrage and to resist, in divers manners, the establishment of P.R. as the method of voting suitable to a democracy. In respect of the former principle was supreme; in the case of the latter expediency was forced upon the Party as a result of the three party system.

The Labour Party's commitment to universal suffrage and the elimination of undue influences need not detain us for this was the first essential of

democratic government in Labour ideology which was pursued by a variety of means involving a number of unsatisfactory compromises until the principle of equal suffrage between the sexes was legalised in 1928, and which followed a similarly quasi-devious pattern in the pursuit of the removal of other blemishes against the principle of "one person one vote" in an atmosphere free from undue influence.

The case of P.R. is entirely different. Notwithstanding the Party's supposed bias towards P.R., this device was never accepted in principle by the Party. It was thought of as an expedient means of securing Labour's full and proper representation in the House and, with the exception of the I.L.P. who saw P.R. in the context of Jowett's reactionary proposals for legislative reorganisation, the majority of those in the Party who favoured P.R. did so because they saw it as a means of controlling the kind of irresponsible majority secured by Lloyd George in 1918.(1) Their attachment to P.R. was, therefore, a measure of their resentment against the unrepresentative nature of Parliament under the existing system, rather than an expression of their belief in accurate representative government as a good thing per se. It was understandable that a Party which believed its opponents to be little more than a bunch of reactionary crooks should wish to experience more control over them. It was equally as natural in the situation which developed that they should seek to eliminate the Liberal Party whose relevance to the immediate struggle of Capitalism and Socialism was, at the most, marginal.

Representative government as an end in itself was of little use to the Labour Party, what it demanded was power - the power of strong government.

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1. Robert Williams, for example, argued that Labour had been forced to turn to direct action because it was not properly represented in Parliament itself. The New Labour Outlook, Op.cit.p.108. For a similar argument see "Direct Action" The Guildsman, (September 1919).



Thus when the two underlying principles of representative and strong government were seen to clash it was inevitable that given their understanding of the nature of the Capitalist/Socialist struggle the Labour Party should be only too willing to utilise the opportunities offered them by the working of the electoral system. As one contemporary political commentator noted, "the fact that the electoral system prevalent in Great Britain, simplifies the political situation, works towards the extermination of the politically senescent Liberal Party and clears the way for its own rise to power, is sufficiently legitimate reason for the Labour Party to acquiesce in its retention."(2) True, George Lansbury blandly accepted that the fact that the electoral system which had worked against the Labour Party in the past now worked in its favour was enough reason to dismiss P.R. 'though not the A.V. to which the Party lent some degree of support.(3) It was also true that some like H.N. Brailsford believed "that Liberalism has lived its life and (we) wish to see it disappear but not by these tricks of the ballot box."(4) Yet the most fundamental truth is that "the leaders of the party are sincerely convinced that from the standpoint of practical politics any system that tends towards giving a clear parliamentary majority is preferable to one which necessitates the formation of minority parties and, by a distribution of seats in accordance with laws of mathematical justice, threatens the permanent infliction of Coalition Government and all its attendant evils."(5) The Party was nothing if not true to its pragmatic tradition.

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2. Egon Wertheimer, Portrait of the Labour Party (London: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1929), p.87.
  3. L.P.A.C.R. 1926, p.273.
  4. New Leader, 7 November, 1924.
  5. Wertheimer, Op.cit., p.85/6. Italics Mine.

Underlying all Labour's demands in the 'twenties was the desire to make Parliament a more representative assembly (i.e., an assembly to which more Labour Members were elected) and to use it to effect the transition to Socialism: to accord it an active and progressive role in the economic struggle in society rather than allow it to be the passive and regressive instrument it had been in the past. What changed during the decade was not the Party's beliefs but its tactics, not the Party's demands but the context of those demands, not the Party's knowledge but its experience. Not the least of these experiences was the working of the Parliamentary institution itself and the various proposals made to improve its performance.

B. The Effectiveness of the Institution: Procedure, Devolution and related matters in the decade of three Party politics.

The nineteen-twenties was a decade in which many radical solutions were produced as means by which the difficulties experienced by Parliament in dealing with the multifarious problems it faced could be overcome. A variety of schemes designed to devolve power to subordinate legislatures were suggested in order to secure more adequate treatment of, and control over, industrial and foreign affairs, and regional government and administration. Schemes to improve the working of the Parliamentary machinery brought with them demands for procedural reform, while the Labour Party, in Parliament and Conference, made efforts to remove the financial insecurity that was the lot of the non-union financed Labour Member of Parliament. In all these spheres of reform the Labour Party took the initiative, mainly inspired by the desire to ease the problems which the existing institutions posed for the transition to Socialism, and in particular to remove the conservative bias inherent in the structure and working of the House of Commons. It is this fact which will become apparent shortly but the first problem to be examined is that of electoral administration to which the Party had to respond in the years 1918-1922 and through which it developed and codified its own ideas by the middle of the decade.

Electoral Administration:- The attitude of the Party on this question is demonstrated not simply by the changes it proposed itself but also in the support it lent to the efforts of individual Members to secure change and in the opposition it raised to certain other proposed reforms. For example, the fact that Members of the Labour Party were sympathetic to Bills designed to remove the disqualifications imposed on clergymen in respect of Parliamentary and Municipal elections is indicative of the kind of changes which the Party as a whole wished to see in the direction of the establishment

of the principle of one vote for each person.(6) On the other hand the Party's forceful opposition to the Representation of the People Acts (1918-1921) Amendment Bill in May 1922 was a fair representation of what it thought of the provisions of that particular Bill.(7) The Bill, which was introduced by Archer-Shee, a Conservative backbencher, proposed the extension of plural voting; the disqualification of conscientious objectors for a further five years;(8) increased restrictions on the qualification of aliens to vote; the disqualification of persons convicted of offences which were punishable by a sentence of more than seven days; the abolition of the spring register and an amendment to the scale of election expenses. Doubtless the P.L.P. was right in claiming that it was impossible to take the Bill seriously and correct in using the opportunity to assert their belief that the vote should be based on citizenship not privilege, for only six weeks earlier the House gave Archer-Shee leave, apparently by default, to introduce a Bill providing for compulsory voting (with a variety of penalties attached).(9) Certainly the P.L.P. did not agree with that Bill for they had helped to defeat a similar one two years previously.(10)

The most frequent demand heard from the Tory benches to which the Labour Party opposed was that made for the abolition of the spring register.(11) The Tories' demands were apparently made on the grounds of the cost of the register's compilation. It was this reason that Mr. Dennis Herbert gave

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6. Ben Spoor, for example, supported the Bill presented in 1922 (Parliamentary Papers 1922, I, 877) and George Lansbury in 1924 (Parliamentary Papers 1924, II, 321).
  7. H.C. Deb. 153, cc 1713 et seq. 5 May 1922.
  8. Conscientious objectors had been disqualified from voting for five years under the Representation of the People Act, 1918, Section 9(2) 7 and 8 Geo.5. Ch.64.
  9. H.C. Deb. 152, cc 246/50. 21 March 1922.
  10. See H.C. Deb. 130, cc 2186-90. 23 June 1920.
  11. For example, H.C. Deb. 127, cc 399+872/3.

when successfully asking the House of Commons on 24 May 1922, "that leave be given to bring in a Bill to suspend temporarily the spring register of electors prescribed by the Representation of People Act, 1918."<sup>(12)</sup> The proposed Bill met with solid Labour opposition and despite securing a hefty majority failed to proceed any further.<sup>(13)</sup> Four years later, however, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, Mr. Churchill, introduced an Economy (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill part of which provided for the abolition of the spring register. The Labour Party opposed the Bill as a whole and the abolition of the register in particular, attempting at first to report progress and then to support the reduction of the qualifying period for residence from three to one.<sup>(14)</sup> The opposition was based mainly on the fact that the people most likely to be disenfranchised by the Bill would be the urban poor whose disenfranchisement, it was alleged, would reduce the effectiveness of Parliamentary government.<sup>(15)</sup> The fact that the Labour Party reintroduced the spring register twenty-two years later is evidence of the consistency and strength of this view. Its subsequent abolition after only two years proves that the case was overstated.

In respect of electoral law there is little evidence to show to what extent the tactics adopted by the P.L.P. were consciously dictated by beliefs which were generally held throughout the Party. The nature of these beliefs, however, is clear. The Party not only consistently supported revisions of electoral law (with one specific exception)<sup>(16)</sup> but by 1925 had formulated its thoughts on the inter-related matters involved into a

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12. H.C. Deb. 154, cc 1217-22.

13. Probably because the matter was already under review rather than because of Labour's opposition to it.

14. H.C. Deb. 194, cc 687-726. 15 April 1926. The Bill had proposed to reduce the existing period of six months to three.

15. H.C. Deb. 194, cc 707-10. J.H. Thomas.

16. This was in 1922 when the Government attempted to increase the expense maxima for elections. See D. Butler, The Electoral System in Great Britain Since 1918 (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1963), p.50.

comprehensive resolution which the Executive Committee presented to the Annual Conference in 1925.(17) The resolution called for, amongst other things, a uniform law for all electoral purposes so as to serve as a single franchise for all purposes, applicable to men and women at 21 years of age and based upon the six months' residential qualification; the abolition of both the plural vote and the existing inequalities affecting women as well as the simplification of registration work. The resolution also called for "the strengthening of the Corrupt and Illegal Practices Act with regard to bribery, various forms of intimidation and undue influence, and the issue of election literature, by trading firms or societies representing vested interests."(18) In addition the resolution wished to ensure that all vehicles used for conveying voters to the poll were registered with the Returning Officer who would be responsible for apportioning them equally among the candidates. The main point about these reforms, apart from the issue of proportional representation which requires separate treatment, is that they set out in clear form the major reforms to which the Labour Party was and remained committed from the nineteen-twenties onward and which it eventually translated into legislation in the Representation of the People Act of 1948. It is true, of course, that the technical aspects of electoral law were very largely dealt with by experts in that field but the principle of one man, one vote, exercised by a rational voter in an atmosphere free from undue influence, remained the principle to which the Labour Party was committed in general terms and that in attempting to achieve this aim the Party was in fact seeking to fashion social democracy according to the supremacy of political power exercised through a legally Sovereign Parliament responsible to a politically sovereign and democratic electorate.

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17. L.P.A.C.R. 1925, p.291. Similar resolutions had been passed at earlier conferences.

18. L.P.A.C.R. 1925, p.29. L.P.A.C.R. 1922, p.233. L.P.A.C.R. 1923, p.245.

There were occasions when the demands of government outweighed the logic of democracy and the Labour Party adopted a tactical policy which they later abandoned in the interests of power. Their attitude to the Re-Election of Ministers Bill was a case in point. The original Bill, to obviate the requirement that Ministers appointed to certain offices undergo bye-elections, was introduced in February 1919 (19) at the time when the Labour Party was still smarting from its electoral defeat and society itself seemed to be on the edge of revolution. Thus it was only natural that the Party should claim that the Government's action was based upon the fear of having to justify their policies to the country. It was, in the words of Josiah Wedgwood, who was soon to join the P.L.P., a struggle between "democracy and efficiency."(20) Although the Labour Party accepted the credit for the success of an amendment to the original Bill ensuring that it applied only in the first nine months after a General Election, the Party in fact did little overt work in the House where it was the Liberals who made the running.(21) By 1926, however, it was the Labour Party which led the protest, notwithstanding the benefits which the Act had brought to the first Labour Government, and which caused the N.E.C. to claim in its Report to the 1926 Conference that "they (i.e., the Government) can make whatever changes they like without the electors in any constituency being given the opportunity of expressing their views."(22) Its opposition was based less on obedience to the maxim "that the duty of the opposition is to oppose" as on the belief that it would reap the electoral benefit accruing from the bye-

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19. H.C. Deb, 112, cc 614 et.seq. (2nd Reading), 791 et.seq. (Committee stage).

20. Ibid., cc 652.

21. L.P.A.C.R. 1919, p.58.

22. L.P.A.C.R. 1926, p.87.

elections which could be held under the Act.(23) Yet the Party made no attempt to reintroduce the old procedure when it was returned to office in 1929 and there is no reason to believe that they were against its abolition in principle. It was the timing rather than the principle that was important. The Labour Party existed primarily to secure political power; an object they were determined to achieve and use. In the event of a conflict between the logic of democracy in the form of frequent bye-elections and the use of power it was the latter which was to prove the more attractive proposition.

Personal Security: The Labour Party was always a strong advocate of measures designed to remove the insecurity attached to the profession of being Members of Parliament, a profession which had traditionally been the province of the aristocratic and rich members of society. Consequently, early in the life of the Coupon Parliament they sought for increases in pay for M.P.'s and lent their constant and consistent support to efforts to remove the spectre of personal corruption and financial deprivation from the lives of Members of Parliament and, in so doing, to advance the idea of Parliament as working democratic institution, fully representative of the nation.(24)

The payment of Members had been instituted in 1911 when Members' salaries had been fixed at £400 per annum, of which, since 1912, £100 had been treated as expenses and thus freed from income tax. In December 1920 a Select Committee of the House of Commons reported that in its view £400

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23. H.C. Deb. 191, cc 1417 et seq. 12 February 1926. The Bill went to a standing Committee.

24. See L.P.A.C.R. 1919, p.169. The Miners' Federation Special Conference in the same year recommended substantial increases in the salaries of Federation M.P.'s. Daily Herald. 23 October 1919. The matter was also raised in the House. See H.C. Deb. 113, cc 515/529.



was an inadequate sum, but recommended that no increase be made.(25) The Committee, however, did consider it advisable to recommend that the whole of the £400 be treated as expenses and that first class travel facilities be provided for all Members between London and their constituencies. In addition it recommended that all M.P.'s be granted free postage facilities for official letters. It refused to recommend that free travelling facilities be granted between Members' home and London.(26)

In his evidence to the Select Committee, Adamson, as leader of the P.L.P., stated that in his view £1,100 per annum would be required to meet Members' increased cost of living, although he would be prepared to settle for £800.(27) Labour's two members on the Select Committee (J.H. Thomas and Vernon Hartshorn) made it clear that the Party favoured increased salaries and almost persuaded the Committee to accept that a subsistence allowance of £1 a day be granted to needy Members during the sitting of Parliament. In the end the Committee decided against making any specific recommendations on this point.(28)

The Government accepted the main recommendations of the Select Committee's report, with the exception of that concerned with postages - which it considered to be too much open to abuse. Clynes, recently elected as leader of the P.L.P., wrote to the Prime Minister on behalf of the Labour Party in which he expressed a great deal of concern about the proposed provision of free railway facilities urging that they be extended to include journeys between London and a Members' home, or alternatively, that Members

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25. Report From the Select Committee on Members' Expenses, H.C. 125, (1920), VII, 613, para.14 (p.iv).
26. J.H. Thomas proposed an increase of salary to £600. This was defeated by one vote. Ibid., p.ix.
27. Ibid., Question 90 and 91.
28. Ibid., p.x.

be awarded an open pass on all railways.(29) In addition, Clynes called for a greater part of the allowance to be free from income tax, indicating that if these points could be met agitation for the proposal for free postage might be dropped. It was these representations which, according to Neville Chamberlain, caused the Government to put the question before the House on a free vote.(30)

In the debate which preceded the vote Clynes pointed out that it was impossible for Labour members to visit their constituencies owing to the cost involved while other Members, Sir Frederick Banbury, in particular, had easy, free and unrestricted access to travel facilities. Dan Irving characterised the conservative opposition to the proposal to provide for M.P.'s travel as "aimed at the retention of this House, as far as may be, as a preserve for the multi-millionaire and the landed aristocracy."(31) He argued strongly that the House of Commons would not be fully representative until such time as it recognised the financial burden placed upon Members without their own resources. However, despite some Conservative support, Labour attempts to secure travelling expenses was defeated.(32)

During Labour's term of office in 1924 the Government took the opportunity to re-open the question of travelling expenses for Members. Despite Conservative attempts to delay matters by referring the question to a Committee of the House the proposal was passed by a substantial majority.(33) In further discussions on the subject a small number of Labour Members supported the provision of third-class facilities only, presumably for class-

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29. See Lloyd George Papers. F.10/5/11. 27 April 1921.

30. H.C. Deb. 142, cc 1087/1154. 1 June 1921.

31. Ibid., cc 1137.

32. 197 votes to 171.

33. H.C. Deb. 172, cc 663/740. 10 April 1924.

conscious reasons. However, on the underlying motive of providing a secure basis for the individual Member to discharge his Parliamentary duties the Party was united in its determination to ensure that Parliament was open to all irrespective of their financial circumstances.(34)

Parliamentary Procedure: Although the reform of Parliamentary procedure did not become a major issue in the Labour Party until the 1930's it was considered on a number of occasions in the previous decade. In general, the Party's view on the question was, in the first instance, responsive to events rather than the application of well-thought out principles of reform. Thus when the Government suggested new proposals (35) to refer all Bills other than the Finance and Appropriation Bills and small Bills of a non-contentious kind including some of the Estimates to Standing Committees, to increase the number of Committees from 4 to 6, and, for one Session only, to reduce the number of days for Supply from 20 to 12,(36) the Party responded in a very conservative manner. Ignoring the Government's claims that the new rules would save the time of the House, accelerate the progress of business and improve real opportunities for criticism and discussion, the P.L.P. argued that the proposals would weaken the critical opportunities of Private and Opposition Members. Adamson argued that a change in working hours would be a more useful reform. In Committee they unsuccessfully moved that all debates be published, a motion which though defeated soon became the normal practice.(37) Despite the extra burden that these changes

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34. In 1924 Labour Members supported a Bill introduced by Leslie Hore-Belsha limiting the giving of donations and contributions by a Member to his constituency party. (Parliamentary Papers, iii, 7, and H.C. Deb. 175, cc 1327/1333. 2 July 1924).

35. H.C. Deb. 112, cc 815 et.seq., cc 983 et.seq., and 1213 et.seq., 18, 19 + 20 February 1920.

36. Abandoned in debate.

37. At this time the question of the publication of debates in Standing Committee was apparently part of the prerogative of the individual Chairman.

imposed upon Members, by the time of the Annual Conference in 1919 the P.L.P. was able to report that "the new procedure has certainly resulted in facilitating the discussion of Bills in Committee..."(38) Traditionalism, however, was not confined to the P.L.P. The Times had argued that the changes were irrelevant to the general question of the efficiency of Parliament.(39) For the Times the answer to that question lay in the adoption of more radical solutions such as devolution; a view shared by some members of the Labour Party, but, as we shall see shortly, while such proposed solutions came and went the basic problems of reforming the existing procedure of Parliament remained.

In The Aims of Labour, Arthur Henderson had argued that reform of Parliamentary procedure was not only necessary to deal "with pressing and urgent questions of reform" but to prove that direct action and the dictatorship of the proletariat were unnecessary.(40) In other words reform of Parliamentary procedure was necessary to preserve Parliamentary government. Yet it was not until 1922 that a resolution on the subject was brought before the Party Conference. Indeed, until that time the emphasis had been upon the P.L.P.'s need to master and use existing procedure rather than reform it. Like most parties the Labour Party was more attentive to the rights of Private Members when in Opposition than in Office. Even then the Party seemed to lack a decisiveness on the issue. The resolution brought before the 1922 Conference stated that "an amendment of Parliamentary procedure is long overdue," and instructed the Executive Committee to co-operate with

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38. L.P.A.C.R. 1919, p.58.

39. Times. 15 February 1919. Philip Snowden expressed doubts about the Government's motives for introducing the changes. Labour Leader, 20 February: 1919.

40. A. Henderson, On.cit. pp.71/3. Cf. Philip Snowden "If Parliamentary machinery could be improved so as to work more effectively much of the dissatisfaction which now finds expression in denunciation of Parliament as an institution and in advocating revolutionary methods would disappear." Labour and the New World, p.63. See also J.R. MacDonald, A Policy for the Labour Party (London: Leonard Parsons, 1920), p.167.

the P.L.P. "in reviewing the present machinery with a view to putting forward suggestions for revision and bringing same before Parliament in the form of a Bill."(41) In the following year the Transport Workers' formally moved a similar resolution, emphasising the need for the reform of Parliamentary procedure and stating that "in view of the experience in the House of Commons during the past few months, this Conference declares that the time has arrived when a more modern method of business should be substituted for the medieval machinery of Government which was designed for a different set of circumstances....."(42) The resolution called on the Executive Committee to "deal seriously with this question." Yet little was done and the issue remained one of relative unimportance, emerging only in the wake of incidents in the House of Commons.(43)

The one exception to this general antipathy towards the question of procedural reform was the proposal of the I.L.P. to completely re-organise the structure of the House of Commons in accordance with the Bradford Resolutions. These resolutions - so named because they were first approved at the I.L.P.'s Bradford Conference of 1914 - have traditionally been associated with Fred Jowett, their most prominent advocate, although they did not in fact originate with him. Jowett proposed that all Members of Parliament should be allocated to Committees responsible for the administration of the various Departments of State in a manner similar to that in operation at municipal level. Jowett, like the Webbs in their book on the Socialist Commonwealth, disliked and depreciated the necessity of the "Party Game" preferring instead to rely upon the view that Parliament was, or should be, composed of rational people acting in the common interest. With the Webbs

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41. L.P.A.C.R. 1922, p.239.

42. L.P.A.C.R. 1923, p.246.

43. See Note 1.

Jowett shared a common distaste for the concentration of power, through the Whips, in the hands of the Government. In this sense the proposals made by Jowett were reactionary in that they evoked the "good old days" of the Member of Parliament exercising his independent judgement, although, of course, the emergence of modern political parties had merely transferred the area of decision from the floor of the House or the various caucuses of Members having common interests, to the larger, more formally constituted and organised, Party meetings. In short, the proposals expressed discontent with the House of Commons' loss of legislative initiative and control.

This loss of control was more keenly felt in the P.L.P. owing to its pre-war dependence upon the goodwill of the Liberal government. It was reinforced by the revelations about the extent of Britain's treaty obligations and subsequent involvement in the War. It is not without significance that many of the Liberals who later joined the Labour Party demanded greater control over foreign policy through the establishment of a Foreign Affairs Committee by the House of Commons. Arthur Ponsonby, for example, wrote a book along these lines; a book which represented the views of many members of the Labour Party as well as those of dissident Liberals.<sup>(44)</sup> As a member of the Union of Democratic Control alongside Ponsonby (and Ramsay MacDonald) Henderson, who was by no means a pacifist, was undoubtedly representing a popular Labour view when he wrote, "we desire to bring the Foreign Office more directly under the control of Parliament, and to give the peoples' representatives larger powers of criticism in regard to foreign policy."<sup>(45)</sup>

44. A. Ponsonby, Democracy and Diplomacy: A Plea for Popular Control of Foreign Policy (London: Methuen, 1915). See also Catherine A. Cline, Recruits to Labour: The British Labour Party 1914-1931 (New York: Syracuse University Press, 1963).

45. Henderson, op.cit., p.74. Cf. Sir Charles Trevelyan who called for "The submission of legislation to Parliament to transfer from the Executive to the House of Commons the right of making War, Peace and of sanctioning Treaties with foreign powers." "If Labour Wins" Socialist Review, XX, No.106, July 1921, pp.11-20 (p.17).

By 'larger powers of criticism', Henderson undoubtedly meant the setting up of a "Foreign Affairs Committee", and administrative changes and when the Party published a pamphlet on the 'Control of Foreign Policy' (46) it included these in a wider programme of control, of open diplomacy, an extension of Parliamentary control over foreign policy and a reorganisation of the Foreign Office. The Party argued that the House must be provided with "full, straightforward and truthful answers to questions" and envisaged the statutory right of the Foreign Affairs Committee to "all information at all times, including that of access to papers and documents, and.....when it considers it desirable, to hold public enquiries, to summon witnesses, and to examine them on oath."(47) The Committee itself was to be established on similar lines to those existing in France, Germany and the U.S.A., and would be "elected annually at the beginning of each session by proportional representation, from the House of Commons, and consist of about thirty members."(48) The underlying motive was the need to ensure democratic control through the reinvesting in Parliament of power which it was by implication presumed once to have possessed. In the distribution of power the needs of democracy were presumed to be greater than the requirements of governmental action, in practice it did not work out that way.

It was not the plan of the Labour Party as a whole to abolish the Cabinet, for as Ramsay MacDonald, Jowett's most vigorous opponent in the debates on the question of Parliamentary reform, said, "The Cabinet can be abolished in word; it cannot be abolished in fact."(49) MacDonald had been

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46. Control of Foreign Policy: Labour's Programme (London: Labour Party, 1921),

47. Ibid., p.3.

48. Ibid., p.4.

49. Memorandum on House of Commons Business presented to the Advisory Committee of the Labour Party on the Machinery of Government (1917) reproduced in J.R. MacDonald, Parliament and Revolution, pp.105/116(116). See also Daily Herald, 4 April 1925.

concerned to limit the Cabinet to the exercise of "their proper functions, i.e., powers and responsibilities." (50) He too, had viewed the appointment of Departmental Committees with favour, in order to fully use the abilities of Members, to instruct Parliament and make it a more business-like assembly and to restore to the Executive and the Legislature their proper constitutional functions and inter-dependent relationships. The Committee, he thought, might consult with Ministers rather than determine departmental policy.

Whilst MacDonalld vaunted the rights of private Members and deplored the use of the Whips to compel Parliamentary support, his periods of office as a Labour Prime Minister saw him adopt the traditional mode of Ministerial government. In fact, no attempt was made to implement the Party's policy on the control of foreign policy apart from a motion insisting that treaties and other diplomatic arrangements require the consent of Parliament to be legal which followed the path of predestined failure when discussed in the House of Commons on 11 March 1925. (51) By this time, however, the Labour Party had deserted any notion of Departmental Committee, although intellectuals such as Harold Laski pronounced their necessity to the proper functioning of Parliamentary Government. (52)

Whilst by 1925 the Labour Party as a whole had very largely deserted the idea of Parliamentary control by Committee it was in that year that the I.L.P. heard the Reports of a Committee set up to enquire into and make

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50. MacDonalld, loc.cit. Cf. his suggestions that Parliamentary Committees "attached to the great departments of State, especially to those of Foreign Affairs and Finance, might be a convenient expedient." Socialism After the War, p.47.

51. H.C. Deb. 181, cc 1430 et.seq. During the period of the first Labour Government Parliamentary Control of Foreign Policy had been approved by the P.L.P. but the Prime Minister had not been able to find a day for it. It was resolved "that representatives of the two National Committees co-operate with the P.L.P. in a deputation to the Prime Minister to try and secure a day in Parliament for discussion." N.E.C. Minutes 30 G.C. of T.U.C. and E.C. of L.P. 26 June 1924.

52. H.J. Laski, Grammar of Politics (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1925), pp. 349/51.



recommendations as to what changes were desirable in the existing machinery of Parliamentary Government. Its members included Jowett, Clement Attlee, Willie Graham, Harold Laski and H.B. Lees-Smith. Fenner Brockway, the Committee's Secretary, recorded that "At the first meeting there was general agreement that the House of Commons should be reorganised on the basis of committees, but there was a sharp difference as to the function of these committees. Harold Laski, Lees-Smith and others held that they should be merely advisory and that responsibility should rest with the Minister and the Cabinet. Jowett insisted that there must be responsible committees, with detailed power to survey administration and to consider all legislation relating to the Department." (53)

These two views remained irreconcilable and were consequently embodied in two separate reports submitted by Jowett and Lees-Smith, to the I.L.P. Conference of 1926, the latter in favour of advisory, the former of responsible, Committees. More importantly, Jowett's Report envisaged a fundamental reconstruction (rather than modification) of the relationship between the Cabinet and Parliament. In essence the Report reflected the view that the role of an individual Member and his rational conscience were of greater importance than that of strong effective centralised Government. It was, in short, an exercise in the distribution of political power away from the Cabinet and in favour of the individual representative. The authors of the Second Report held that "The driving force of a Cabinet, far more responsible than hitherto to the will of the Party" was essential both to the introduction of Socialism and the continuing educative role of the House of Commons, arguing that, "If the life of a Government ceases to turn

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53. A. Fenner Brockway Socialism through Sixty Years: The Life of Jowett of Bradford. (London: George Allen & Unwin for the National Labour Press, 1946), p.235.

upon the will of the House, the process of politics, because it will be buried beneath the technical and massed detail of committee work, is not likely to penetrate to the public outside." (54) It was the necessity of strong government which convinced the authors of the Second Report of the inadvisability of responsible committees. (55)

The conflict was, therefore, basically one which was concerned with the very heart of the Parliamentary system; it involved the definition of the role of Parliament in the political process. To Jowett the proposals gave "real control to Parliament of the whole work for which Parliament is supposed to be responsible." (56) To his opponents it diffused power to such an extent as to make decisive Socialist government impossible. The former relied upon the disinterested adherence of the individual members to the principles of voting for issues on their merits whilst the latter recognised the permanent nature of the Party system and its significance for the role of Parliament in the existing and the future Socialist society. "The advisory system," they claimed, "leaves the initiative always in the hands of those whom the Party in power can trust," and continued to insist that it kept "the House of Commons as the pivot of Parliamentary Government..." (57) In the final analysis, although Jowett won the battle at the 1926 Party Conference, the traditionalists won the war.

One of the assertions made by the authors of the first I.L.P. Report on Parliamentary Reform was that Devolution was not a sufficient remedy to meet the failure of the Parliamentary system, although Home Rule might

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54. The Reform of Parliament (London: I.L.P., 1926), p.24. This pamphlet contains both Reports.

55. *Ibid.*, p.25/6.

56. Manchester Guardian, 4 January 1924. Other expositions of Jowett's ideas are to be found in his pamphlet Parliament or Palaver? (London: I.L.P., 1926), *passim.*, and his evidence to the Select Committee as Procedure. See Special Report from the Select Committee on Procedure on Public Business. H.C. 161, (1931), pp. 153/170.

57. The Reform of Parliament, pp. 30/1.

usefully follow from the instituting of a Committee form of government.(58) It had, however, been the most widespread and frequently advocated alternative structure of government supported in the Labour Party since the war. In the main, two distinguishable forms of devolution were advocated, one concerned with devolution along industrial lines and one along national lines. Whilst the latter was the more persistent of the two it was the former which appeared to be more important in the context of industrial unrest in the years immediately after the end of the war and which the Webbs tried to embody in their work "A Constitution for the Socialist Commonwealth of Great Britain."(59)

According to G.D.H. Cole the Webb's Constitution for the Socialist Commonwealth of Great Britain was "in the main an attempt to influence the formation of Labour opinion at a time when political and economic institutions alike seemed to be in the melting pot."(60) It might quite fairly be added that the Webbs' own political thought seems also to have been in the same melting pot. The presuppositions of the earlier Webbian works had been discarded in favour of what can be seen in retrospect as a hybrid solution to the problems of the governance of society and the various suggestions which were being currently advocated as panaceas to those questions. Cole's analysis of the idea of a Social Parliament as an attempt "to meet the attacks of Syndicalists and Guild Socialists on orthodox Fabian Collectivism without sacrificing the ultimate supremacy of the consumer in economic affairs,"(61) succinctly states the Webbs' intentions in broad terms. As for the Webbs themselves they declared their aim was partly to describe "such a reorganisation

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58. Ibid., pp.20/1.

59. Sidney and Beatrice Webb, A Constitution for the Socialist Commonwealth of Great Britain (London: Longmans Green, 1920).

60. G.D.H. Cole, "Beatrice Webb as An Economist" in Margaret Cole, (Ed.), The Webbs and their Work (London: Frederick Muller, 1949), pp.267/282 (p.275), hereafter cited as "Beatrice Webb as an Economist." See Note 2.

61. G.D.H. Cole, Beatrice Webb as an Economist, p.275.

of the principal institutions of our own country as might serve .... to arrest the growing dissatisfaction with these institutions, especially with Parliamentary government .... "(62) In other words they wished to conserve Parliamentary institutions. However, the reorganised institutions they hoped to create could only work in "a free democracy inspired by the spirit of social service...."(63) Thus the Webbs were not describing the changes that were necessary to make Parliament more efficient within its existing environment but the ideal Parliament in the ideal (Socialist) State. Hence their analysis of political democracy and their alternative society were related only in so far as they fitted the Webbs' theme.(64)

The Webbs' critique of political democracy was centred around the nature of political representation. The nineteenth-century Socialists had equated democracy with the possession of the vote. The equality of voting power would, they had believed, secure the success of the Collectivist idea. This idea of an undivided democracy was now rejected by the Webbs. They no longer accepted the view that man's interests could be represented in one multi-functional institution; "the democratic organisation of society must not be based exclusively on the human being as such, but must spring from at least three, or four, as we think, separate and distinct foundations...." (65) The individual could only be represented in relation to his role as a producer; as a consumer; as a citizen with a political interest in defence, police and

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62. Webbs, Constitution for the Socialist Commonwealth. p.97

63. Ibid., p.356

64. This is strongly supported by their labelling of Part I as "A Survey of the Ground" and Part II as "The Co-operative Commonwealth of Tomorrow." The first part deals with a political democracy warped by Capitalist Dictatorship, the second with a new constitution working under a Co-operative Commonwealth. It was intended to be that way. Ibid., Preface, xviii.

65. Ibid., Introduction, xvii.

and justice; and as a citizen with a social interest in the promotion and the maintenance of civilisation.(66)

Political democracy had failed because it had relied on the false premiss that Parliament could represent man's total interests, an idea which the Webbs, following Cole and the Guild Socialists, considered to be invalid. Not only was Parliament not made for the job that it should do, it did not even discharge those functions that it was alleged to be doing. Though theoretically supreme Parliament was in fact the tool of a "Cabinet Dictatorship" which, by destroying the old balance of the Constitution, had vested all power in the Prime Minister, Cabinet, and Civil Service while at the same time reducing the legislature to an essentially negative role.(67) As a result "the elected representatives of the British Democracy are..... practically limited to the function of making and unmaking a government and of criticising, obstructing or amending any legislative projects brought forward by the Government....."(68) Moreover, the existence of disciplined parties had reduced even these functions to the realm of the theoretical. The failure of the institutions of government, especially the House of Commons, to adapt to the increasing role of the State in society and to recognise the demands of functional representation, had further prevented the expression of the general will of the community.(69)

The Webbs' Constitution was not, in their eyes, "a model constitution for an Utopian community"(70) but a practical constitution which incorporated "suggestions that seem to accord with the trend of development towards a fully democratised community."(71) Yet, it was clear, the Constitution itself was

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66. Ibid., Loc.cit.  
 67. Ibid., pp.64/72.  
 68. Ibid., p.66.  
 69. Ibid., pp.79/80.  
 70. Ibid., p.101.  
 71. Ibid., p.102.

constructed on the assumption that the society within which it would operate would be an ideal Socialist society. Thus while the Webbs criticised the way Parliament operated within a Capitalist society and made suggestions for its modification such suggestions were based on assumptions about society quite different from those used in their critical analysis. Thus in effect they argued that Parliament was warped by a Capitalism that was on the decline. In the future society Parliament would function as follows. The Webbs themselves never fully appreciated the significance of the assumptions which they made and it was this failure which made their final proposals so unrealistic.

Their main argument was that because "no one elected assembly can possibly express the General Will of the inhabitants (of a community) on all subjects whatsoever"(72) appropriate institutions must be developed to ensure that provision is made for the representation of the democracies of Consumers, Producers and the political and social aspects of citizenship. A nucleus for the Consumer Democracy already existed in the Co-operative Movement and that for the producers' democracy in the Trade Union and Professional organisation.(73) The distinct nature of the political and social functions of citizenship, however, required the separate representation of each in two equal, co-ordinate National Assemblies - the political and the Social Parliaments.

The Political Parliament, elected on a geographical basis in proportion to population, would have authority in Foreign Affairs, the government of the Empire, National Defence and Justice. Its Executive would consist of the number of Ministries appropriate to the tasks to be performed, and would be collectively responsible to the Assembly for the policies adopted. The

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72. Ibid., p.126.

73. Ibid., pp.104/5.

Webbs envisaged that the type of election adopted and the probable existence of Standing Committees would result in a closer control of the government by the Political Parliament and closer control of the latter by the people.

The restriction of the Premier's right of dissolution and the professionalisation of the legislator's job would also serve to secure this end. Like its counterpart, the Political Parliament would be limited by Statute, the final interpretation of which would lie, as in the United States, with the Courts.(74)

The Social Parliament would control the social and economic activities of the nation, including the administration of existing public services such as health, education, transport, communications and mining, and would have responsibility for Finance. There would be no Cabinet as in the Political Parliament; instead the Executive would consist of a number of Standing Committees along the lines of the London County Council local government model, including a general purposes committee. Each Committee chairman would be individually responsible for the policies adopted by his Committee.(75)

The delegation of the administrative function to the several bureaucracies would exclude responsibility for the details of administration which would in any case be guided by the Social Parliament's general "power of the purse." Thus the social Parliament would control through a Standing Committee, acting on the advice of control departments (which were to be established to produce the facts and figures necessary for rational decision) but would not administer.(76) It should be noted, however, that Price-Fixing was considered

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74. Ibid., pp.111/117.

75. Ibid., pp.117/121.

76. Ibid., pp.173/176.

to be part of the control function. (77) The Social Parliament would be elected for a fixed term of office and could only be dissolved earlier by a majority vote of its own members.

The Webbs described the division of Parliament into two co-equal, constituent parts as "fundamental." (78) It was fundamental to overcome the "magnitude of business (and) paralysis of will," (79) that bedevilled the existing institution. They noted "the failure of Parliament to cope with the collective business of the community, and the dangerous disillusionment with parliamentary institutions and even with Democracy itself, which this failure (had) caused," (80) and concluded that the division they described was necessary to promote the proper kind of efficiency that would flow as the consequence of an easing of the burden on overworked legislators. In a broader context the distinct complexity of the "political" and the "social" tasks in society, representing as they did essentially separate functions, meant that "It is only by cutting the business in two halves, according to its nature, and entrusting each to its own national assembly, with its own executive that the load upon legislators and statesmen can be brought within a manageable compass." (81) Finally, the Webbs insisted that such a division was a necessary part of Socialist development, for it was not simply "the only effective way of remedying the present congestion of Parliamentary business, but (was) also.... an essential condition of the progressive substitution.... of the community for the private capitalist." (82)

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77. Ibid., p.339. "The price at which the products of the national industries and services will pass into consumption or use will be determined by the Social Parliament, on the recommendation of its Standing Committee on Finance, according to the feelings and opinions of the community for the time being."
78. Ibid., p.121. Cf. p.107
79. Ibid., p.139.
80. Ibid., p. 131.
81. Ibid., p.139. See pp. 136/138 for a discussion on the political and social complexes.
82. Ibid., p.111.



Although supreme within their own spheres the Political and Social Parliaments would necessarily have to have certain relations with each other. For the purpose of ironing out disputes the machinery of joint conferences would be set up. On the question of finance the Social Parliament could only object to the level of, for example, National Defence expenditure, it could not oppose the details of such expenditure as that properly belonged to the policy making function of the Political Parliament.(83) Where inter-institutional conflict could not be resolved through joint conferences then the issue concerned would be settled by an aggregate vote of the members of both Parliaments in joint session or, in the event of further deadlock, by referendum or a double dissolution of both Parliament.(84)

It was on the question of conflict that the Webbs began to come unstuck. Herman Finer has argued that control over the aggregate would effectively mean control over the details. Moreover, in joint sessions issues would be settled by mere relative numbers.(85) Furthermore, the Webbs intended that elections should be kept as far apart as possible so as to ensure that the widest possible representation was given to the different opinions that exist within the community at various times. Yet, quite frankly, the Webbs did not really believe conflict would occur. They were after all dealing with the rational Socialist society not the sectional Capitalist society they knew at present. In that society there would be no political parties to advocate selfish interests, and consequently irrational political conflict would also die. They summarised their position as follows:

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83. Ibid., p.125.

84. Ibid., pp.125/7.

85. Herman Finer, Representative Government and a Parliament of Industry: A Study of the German Federal Economic Council (Fabian Society and George Allen & Unwin, 1923), p.27. The Webbs, however, preferred equality of numbers between the Assemblies which made the problem even more acute.

"When.....with the change in heart and the progress of socialisation, our civilisation has ceased to be predominantly capitalist in its basis, and when those who 'live by owning' have sunk to a despised remnant, the cleavage of opinion will necessarily be different."(86)

The position of legislator would change from that of a career for well-meaning amateurs representing the parties' vested interests to that of a professional vocation. Moreover, "those who pursue this vocation in the highest spirit will find themselves relatively impartial as between the ideals of different reformers, in all of which they will discern much that is good, and will be concerned rather to discover how the particular projects of the idealists and half-articulate desires of the electorate can be adjusted to the circumstances, in such a way as to be made, in a democratic community, to work for the common benefit."(87) In other words they would all be good rational individuals - ideal Fabians. Lest this judgement be thought too cynical the words of one astute commentator on the Webbs should be noted.

"The Political Parliament was to retain all the present trappings, and so enable the young gentlemen from Oxford and Cambridge to continue their Union debates in the traditional manner on foreign affairs and other matters that Webb was not greatly interested in. Meanwhile the Social Parliament was to be an enlarged L.C.C. for all England, where the graduates of the London School of Economics would do the real business of governing England."(88)

This is not an altogether unfair description of Sydney Webb's ideas though Beatrice may have harboured other thoughts. However, both of them were keen exponents of the enlarged local government idea and both were anxious to present a Fabian-style collectivist concept of the new Socialist world they envisaged. It is really no surprise that their Utopia was a

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86. Sydney and Beatrice Webb, Constitution for a Socialist Commonwealth, p.144. n.1.

87. Loc.cit.

88. Alan M. McBrier, "Sydney Webb and the London County Council" in Margaret Cole, The Webbs and their Work, pp.75/100 (pp.95/6). Italics in the original.

bureaucratic dreamland, as a glance at Beatrice Webb's definition of her own general political outlook as "bourgeoise, bureaucratic and benevolent," shows. (89)

Before discussing the impact of the Webbs' ideas it should be noted that among other suggestions discussed and rejected in their book were the idea of a national assembly of vocational representatives along the lines of Guild Socialism and regional devolution. The former was rejected as selfish, irrelevant, unnecessary, undemocratic and impracticable. (90) The latter was opposed on the grounds that Great Britain was too homogeneous and closely integrated to be split up into Regions with the consequent and inevitable variations in the standards of public services that would be offered. An extension of local government powers they thought was quite sufficient to deal with the problems cited by the regional devolutionists. (91) Moreover, geographical devolution failed to solve the basic problem of the inadequate representation of the four-fold state of the individual.

Yet the Socialist Commonwealth was a monumental flop. It had no real influence on public or Labour opinion, although the intellectual environment was not unsympathetic. (92) In practical terms its proposals were deemed to be too artificial. Moreover, it failed to reconcile the Utopian assumptions which were in effect, pre-conditions for the making of a successful Constitution, with the fact that capitalism might not collapse. They failed entirely to allow for, or even to recognise, the possibility of Parliamentary changes

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89. See Desmond MacCarthy. "The Webbs As I Saw Them, " in Margaret Cole, The Webbs and their Work, pp. 119/128 (126)
90. Webbs, Constitution for the Socialist Commonwealth, Ibid., pp. 309/317.
91. Ibid., pp. 131/134
92. Philip Snowden also wrote in favour of the separation of industrial and political work, "to do this it may be necessary to create a subordinate representative body, possibly elected on a somewhat different basis of representation to deal with industrial questions." Labour and the New World, p.63.

under the existing system, which is why their constitution lacked reality. Furthermore, the Webbs were misled by their intellectual contacts into misunderstanding the relevance of the issue of functional representation. Far from being the central issue in political theory it was quite peripheral and indeed has proved to be no more than a passing academic fad. The assumption that Parliament should control the government was a reactionary look to a non-existent "ideal" state, while the notion that Parliament could or should not interfere in economic affairs, though widespread, proved to be part of a transitory phase. The Webbs were quite simply out-of-touch with the significance of political developments.

This, Beatrice Webb would never admit. "No-one will like our constitution," she wrote, "we shall offend all sides and sections with some of our proposals. But someone must begin to think things out and our task in life is to be pioneers in social engineering." (93) She explained away the book's lack of success by asserting that it was "too full of new ideas and detailed application to be a popular work." (94) The ideas, however, were not new, they were merely the rephrased compromises of several old ones. One contemporary commentator intimated that other suggestions such as an Economic Council as a Second Chamber, subservient to the House of Commons, were much better solutions to the existing situation. (95) Certainly, the idea of an industrial Parliament lasted longer, including among its many advocates Winston Churchill. (96)

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93. M. Cole (Ed.) Beatrice Webb's Diaries 1912-1924 (London: Longmans Green, 1952), p. 179. 11 May 1920.
94. Ibid., p. 203. 1 January 1921.
95. Herman Finer, Op.cit., passim.
96. W.S. Churchill "Parliamentary Government and the Economic Problem" Romanes Lecture. 19 June 1930, reprinted in Thoughts and Adventures (London: Odhams Press 1947). See also Christopher Hollis Can Parliament Survive? (London: World Affairs Book Club, 1950). It should be remembered, however, that Churchill advocated a sub-Parliament composed of technically qualified people and Hollis a third Chamber, rather than the co-equal division envisaged by the Webbs.

Regional devolution had a longer and far more respectable life inside the Labour Party, boasting advocates as late as 1948. By 1920 it had been endorsed by the most prominent Labour leaders. Ramsay MacDonald, W. Adamson and J.R. Clynes had all written favourable of the principle. MacDonald had declared that "Devolution is required in order that the citizen may keep in touch with his Government and may feel, through a gradation of widening groups, an identity with his Government."(97) In 1919 Adamson had headed the Labour Party section of an official Parliamentary delegation to Lloyd George which had asserted that devolution was "A solution of our national difficulties which all sections of our people are beginning to recognise as absolutely necessary."(98) In a two-day debate on Federal devolution in 1920 J.R. Clynes had spoken in favour of the advantages accruing to Parliamentary institutions, through the applicability of the principle of devolution to the work of Parliament.(99) At grass-roots level, particularly in Scotland, many Labour supporters were advocates of devolution. It is not without significance that the most active advocates of devolution came from Scotland or that they maintained their beliefs in and out of season. Thomas Johnston, James Barr and David Kirkwood all fell into this category.(100)

Yet this is not to claim that there was complete unity on the application of the principle of devolution. In response to the success of the motion on Federal Devolution (101) the Government set up a Conference on the question

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97. J.R. MacDonald, Parliament and Democracy (Manchester; National Labour Press, 1920), pp. 72/3.
98. Lloyd George Papers F/74/26/B. Report of a Joint Deputation from the Houses of Parliament to the Prime Minister on Federal Devolution, 26 June 1918.
99. See H.C. Deb, 116 cc 2088/92. 4 June 1919. See cc 1873/1974, 2063/2128 for the whole debate. Also Forward, 5 April 1919. Report of the 1st Annual Meeting of the Scottish Home Rule Association in 1921. See Note 3.
100. See, for example, Willie Graham's speech to the House of Commons. H.C. Deb, 127, cc 2038/42.
101. See Note 4.

under the Chairmanship of the Speaker. Its Report was concerned not with the principle involved but "to consider what, if devolution is accepted, is the most practicable way of putting it into operation."(102) The Report put forward two alternative schemes which differed as to the character and composition of the sub-legislative bodies. The first, presented by the Speaker, came out in favour of grand councils, whereas a scheme advocated by Murray MacDonald wished to distinguish far more between the personnel of the local and central institutions through the setting-up of subordinate legislative bodies with separate elections. The majority of Labour Members of the Conference supported the Speaker's scheme "on the ground that it provides an immediate proposal for securing a considerable measure of Devolution on National lines and at the same time paves the way for the larger scheme of subordinate Parliaments, which in our opinion can alone satisfy the national aspirations of both Scotland and Wales."(103) They considered that the Speaker's scheme gave "a practical trial of the working of devolution by responsible persons with political experience."(104) In addition, while they approved of the fundamental principle of MacDonald's scheme (which Willie Graham was the only Labour member to completely support), they were "prepared in the meantime to accept the Speaker's tentative proposals in the event of its being found impracticable to set up National Parliaments at an early date."(105) In the event the argument was academic for as R.W.S. Pollard pointed out the Report was not even discussed in Parliament - a fact which

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102. Conference on Devolution. Letter from Mr. Speaker to the Prime Minister, Cmd. 692, (1920) p.3.
103. Ibid., p.12.
104. Ibid., p.9. The phrase was that of the Speaker.
105. Ibid., p.15. The other Labour Members were Charles Edwards and W.T. Wilson.

he attributed to the unreadiness of public opinion. (106)

During the 1920's the Scottish Members of the P.L.P. managed to introduce half-a-dozen Bills in favour of devolution, of which only two were discussed in the House, each in its turn being counted out. (107)

The first on 9 May 1924, provoked such scenes of disorder when the Speaker for reasons best known to himself, refused to accept "that the question be put" that after a great deal of interruption he adjourned the House. (108)

In retrospect the Speaker seems to have accepted his judgement was at fault, and it is clear that the Scottish Members were upset by his breaking an

unwritten agreement he had made with them. (109) As for the debate itself it well established the need for a Scottish Parliament to deal with Scottish

problems. "It is because this Parliament cannot devote the time to the work," declared George Buchanan, "and .... because it has no knowledge of the

problems with which we are confronted" that a Scottish Parliament was necessary. (110) The P.L.P. generally supported the line and the Government came out in its favour. (111)

In the event the Government took note of the debate and Clynes drew up a Memorandum on the question of devolution which he had indicated during the debate, should best be examined by a Committee. In his Memorandum to the Cabinet, however, Clynes doubted whether such a Committee could be set up in view of the failure of the Ullswater Committee and the attitude of the

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106. Robert S.W. Pollard, Reconstruction Then and Now (London: Fabian Publications, Research Series, 98, 1944), p.37.

107. A Liberal Bill received a majority, partly though Labour support in the Division Lobbies, on Second Reading by 65 votes to 52 on 16 April 1920, but failed to proceed because it had not received the prescribed majority. H.C. Deb. 127, cc 2005 et.seq. See also H.C. Deb. 150, cc 1609 et.seq. 26 May 1922 for another Liberal Bill on Devolution.

108. H.C. Deb. 173, cc 789 et.seq. The second occasion was on 13 May 1927 H.C. Deb. 206, cc 865/878.

109. H.C. Deb. 173, cc 871. It was unfortunate too for as the Labour Leader pointed out, the Bill "could not have gone farther this session" 16 May 1924.

110. H.C. Deb. 173, cc 794.

111. Ibid., cc. 868/70.

Tories towards proposals to set up a Select Committee to investigate the situation concerning the Poor Law and that of Ex-Ranker Officers. In addition Clynes thought that a Select Committee would have "serious disadvantages" so he advocated a Royal Commission although it too was open to objections. (112) After discussion the Cabinet came out in favour of an inquiry on the question but did not seemingly set one up, instructing instead the Prime Minister to see the Labour and Liberal Home Rule groups first. (113) The proposed Committee in fact never got off the ground, lapsing in the wake of the Zinoviev Election of 1924.

The various Bills designed to secure the devolutionary solution were based on the same general principles. There was to be a single chamber national Parliament for Scotland with full rights to legislate in local matters, except where specifically prohibited. It would consist of 148 members representing the existing constituencies (two per constituency) returned by the existing electorate. Scottish representation in the House of Commons would continue until provision was made for devolution in England and Wales, or in later Bills, as soon as the Scottish Parliament was constituted. Finance was to be the prerogative of the Scottish Parliament. In short, the Bills advocated Home Rule with accommodation for geographical imperatives.

Later experience seemed to confirm Scottish Labourites in their view of the necessity of the devolutionary solution but the Party as a whole seemed less interested. True, the Executive Committee resolved that the Machinery of Government Committee should be asked to consider the general question of devolution but it never reported. (114) Labour and the Nation came out in

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112. See CAB. 24/167. CP 324(24) and CP 329 (24)

113. CAB. 23/48. 36(24)2.

114. NEC Minutes, Vol. 34, E.C. 5a 1924/5. 28 January 1925.



favour of "the creation of separate legislative assemblies in Scotland, Wales and England, with autonomous powers in matters of local concern," (115) but the issue was essentially regarded by the bulk of the Party as a minor matter. Labour's Election manifesto repeated the pledge but the King's Speeches of 1929 and 1930 contained no reference to them. Although there were some in the P.L.P. who were in favour of the principle of devolution the Party never proposed anything of substance along these lines. (116) Significantly, although it was the Scottish I.L.P. Members who were strongly in favour of devolution they were more concerned with the major economic questions of the day than with the political and administrative reforms to which Jowett had firmly established his particular views.

The main failure of the devolutionary solution to the problem of Parliament was its ability to be anything more than a temporary expedient. It was always overshadowed by what were regarded as the primary problems of economics. It was this sphere that numerous suggestions were made echoing the Webb's Socialist Commonwealth. (117) Not all of these suggestions were by Socialists. Churchill and Mosley, for example; although Mosley's ideas for a more passive role for Parliament did have its sympathisers in the Party. Thomas Kennedy was one who argued that Parliament's role should be as a more efficient instrument for carrying out the policies, wishes and intentions of the Government of the day. (118) The inability of the Second Labour Government

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115. Labour and the Nation (London: Labour Party, 1928), p.46

116. See, for example, the answers of MacDonald and Kennedy to the Select Committee. H.C. 161, (1931), Questions 14, 15 and 828. MacDonald told the N.E.C. in June 1931 that he "was awaiting an opportune moment to set up a Committee on the matter, but had trouble with respect to drafting the terms of reference of the Committee." N.E.C. Minutes 10, 1930/31, M.348, 23 June 1931.

117. Beatrice Webb revised her old proposals. See "A Reform Bill for 1932" Political Quarterly, II, (January-March, 1931). They had already received general support from George Bernard Shaw: see his introduction to the 1930 Reprint of the Fabian Essays (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1931).

118. H.C. 161, (1931), Questions 880-892.

to deal with the economic problems of its day reinvigorated short-lived demands for devolution to a functional Parliament on the one hand and a decrease in the power of the Executive viz-a-viz the Private Member, whether by increasing his legislative initiative or introducing an element of participation in the form of legislative Committee, on the other. This last suggestion, however, ignored the hard pull of party ties and overstated the objectivity of Members' views. Such naivety was destroyed by the events of August 1931.

The underlying motive behind the Labour Party's broad commitment to the devolutionary solution was the feeling that Parliament was declining in public prestige - a simplistic view which reflected an interpretation of the wider world rather than a recognition of the facts of British political life in the 1920's. In addition the three-party system which bedevilled any contribution the Labour Government of 1924 and 1920-31 might have made towards the use of Parliament as an efficient instrument for the Executive's use only heightened the feeling that Parliament was useful only to those who wished to prevent reform. "The procedure of the House," E.F. Wise told the Select Committee of 1931, "has become a by-word.....in obstruction."(119) Obstruction by a Labour Opposition was one thing, opposition to a Labour Government was quite another. The advent of the Second Labour Government and its unfortunate relationship with the Liberals destroyed for all but the Idealists the notion that Parliament could be used by men of goodwill with little reference to Party ties. If the origins of the quarrels over procedure in the 'Thirties are to be found in the political difficulties of the Second Labour Government and the electoral disaster that followed it the collapse of devolution as a worthwhile alternative was just as much a product of those events.

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119. Ibid., Question 2202. Cf. J. Duncan "Time Wasters at Westminster" Forward (Glasgow), 7 March 1931.

c. Women's Suffrage:

The history of the Franchise in the years following the first World War has been extensively traced by David Butler in his book The Electoral System in Great Britain Since 1918 (120) but whereas Butler was concerned with the general process by which the Franchise was extended, the focus of this study is primarily concerned with the attitude of the Labour Party to the equalisation of the Franchise among men and women. The following pages will thus seek to trace the attitude of the Labour Party as seen in its Parliamentary tactics, its arguments and consistency in the years 1919-1928 during which it was a prominent exponent of the claims of women for the vote.

The conferment of the vote upon certain women over the age of 30 by the Representation of the People Act 1918 had been as much a triumph for the Labour Party as for the Feminists, for the P.L.P. was the only one of the three pre-war parties in Parliament that had consistently supported as a party the idea of universal suffrage.(121) This is not to say that the fact that women had been given the vote can be attributed to the actions of the Labour Party for the main force of change had been the war, but the Labour Party did play a significant role in keeping the issue a live one.(122)

The election debacle of 1918 produced not only the most unrepresentative Parliament of the century it also pushed the Labour Party forward as the most likely alternative government to the Coalition. Although the Parliamentary Labour Party numbered only some 60 members - none of whom could be described

120. See Footnote 16 above.

121. Though not without some internal dispute. Constance Rover, Op.cit. 146/167.

122. On the Second Reading of the Bill that finally assimilated the Franchise, Baldwin admitted that it was the war that knocked the heart out of the opposition to women's suffrage. H.C. Deb. 215 cc 1474. 29 March 1928.

as intellectual powerhouses - it was a party of honest endeavour and was supported by Labour organisations several millions strong. It claimed to be the party of the masses of underprivileged people, to be on the side of justice and used every opportunity - admittedly not always to the best advantage - to state its particular case and its general beliefs.

One of the tactics used by the P.L.P., particularly on the issue of women's suffrage, was to utilise Private Members' time in the House to put forward reformatory measures. This particular tactic had a double-edged effect. In the first place it brought the party welcome publicity on a measure likely to arouse general sympathy and secondly, helped to show individuals who were attracted to the Labour Party, particularly in the Liberal Party, that there was some ground for common political allegiance.

The P.L.P.'s awareness of the advantages was made clear by its introduction, in the name of Ben Spoor, of the Women's Emancipation Bill which sought to equalise the position of men and women as far as civil and judicial appointments, the franchise and admission to the House of Lords were concerned. William Adamson, the leader of the P.L.P., moving the Second Reading of the Bill in Spoor's absence, used the opportunity to state that the introduction of the Bill by the Labour Party was "simply the natural sequence of all our past work and past efforts on behalf of the enfranchisement of the women of the country. We have always contended that in order to give fair and equitable treatment to the women folk it was essential that the existing restraints and disabilities should be removed."(123) It was a claim that was to provoke some angry Liberal reactions, but for the moment Adamson continued uninterrupted to argue that the Bill was the logical outcome of the vast

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123. H.C. Deb. 114 c.c.1561. 4 April 1919.

changes that had recently taken place in society, of the response of women to the needs of the state in war-time and of the measures already taken towards securing the complete emancipation of women. (124) Mr. Lunn, seconding, noted the absence from the King's Speech of any reference to the Coalition government's election manifesto's promise to equalise the franchise. (125) The principles of the Bill he claimed were widely supported by women's organisations as well as the Labour Party; no new arrangements could or need be adduced in its favour. The situation where a woman could sit in but not vote for Membership of the House at 21 was ludicrous. The equalisation of the franchise at 21 was essential to the establishment of democracy, he added, and appealed to the government to allow the Bill a Second Reading and make any changes it felt were necessary in Committee.

The Bill found wide support from all sides of the House, most of the contributions bearing out Lunn's contention that the principle of the measure was generally accepted. A number of Liberals took the Labour Party to task for its claims that it was the champion of women's causes, while a number of Conservatives countered with the argument that as the Trade Unions did not apply equality as a principle, why should the State? This line of argument caused so much confusion in the Labour ranks that the Conservatives were quick to use it again with greater effect on the Third Reading. Robert Young, for example, spent as much time defending Trade Unions as he did defending the principle of the Bill. (126) Moreover, the P.L.P.'s attack on the opponents of the Bill and their delaying tactics, lacked co-ordination. Whereas Young was not prepared to admit that the Speaker's Conference was a compromise which ought to be given

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124. H.C. Deb. 114 cc. 1564/5.

125. See Note 5.

126. H.C. Deb. 114 cc. 1595/8. Young was a member for Newton, Lancs.

greater time before a proper assessment could be made of its recommendations, or that the last changes in the franchise were too recent to contemplate further additions to the suffrage, another Labour Member, Captain Albert Smith, gladly accepted the validity of these arguments.(127) Most Labour Members probably thought like Tom Cape that, "if we have all made up our minds that the principle of the Bill is right why should we delay any longer?", and concluded with him that, "the Bill is receiving more opposition because its introduction has fallen to the lot of the Labour Party than for any other reason."(128)

Dr. Addison, President of the Local Government Board, pointed out that no Government could be expected to do everything at once. However, although he argued that the Bill was badly drafted and would constitutionally require a General Election if passed into law, he recommended the House to give the Bill a Second Reading on the understanding that the Government would seek to delete the clause extending the franchise to women and to put other clauses into an acceptable shape. After the closure was successfully moved by 119 to 32 the Second Reading was given without a discussion. Only one third of the membership of the P.L.P. managed to find their way into the division lobbies.(129)

The Government's inaction in Stading Committee E to which the Bill was remitted was indication of its intention to kill the Bill on Third Reading, an intention soon confirmed by Major Astor, Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Health, when he moved the Bills rejection on the grounds that it was too badly drafted to be amended and that the government would redeem its election pledges by bringing in a similar measure of its own but without the suffrage clause. He made it perfectly clear that it was the timing not the

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127. Ibid., c.c. 1576/8. Smith was Labour Member for Nelson.

128. Ibid., c.c. 1610/11.

129. Ibid., c.c. 1625/8. Eighteen members of the P.L.P. voted while two others acted as tellers.

principle of the Bill that was the point at issue, repeating the claim that the latest compromise was too recent to be overthrown and reiterating the notion that the conventions of the constitution would require such a change to be followed by a general election, which he rationalised as being bad for efficiency in government and public opinion in general.(130) By the time the Major had made his final substantive point that the coming enquiry on legislative devolution could lead to a fuller wide-ranging discussion of the franchise question the House was clearly roused to anger and the P.L.P. was presented with a golden opportunity to exploit the government's embarrassment for propoganda purposes.

Unfortunately, the P.L.P. failed to rise to the occasion. Its speakers made all the appropriate points; the government had not pressed its amendments in Committee because of the strength of feeling in the House; the government had the facilities to rectify any alleged bad draftsmanship; if it was true that there was wide agreement on the principles of the Bill then the Government's action was based on expediency alone. Tom Shaw tried to polarise the issue by declaring "either the government intends to give these women votes or it does not," but lack of co-ordinated P.L.P. effort made his speech sound more like a virtuoso effort.(131) The Liberals, by comparison, utilised their Parliamentary experience to quietly lambast the Government for the way in which it was attempting to circumvent the control of the House. Few Labour Members' speeches compared with that of George Thorne who riddled the Government's case with holes.(132) No doubt part of this failure was due

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130. H.C. Deb, 117, cc 1283. et.seq. 4 July 1919.

131. Ibid., Col. 1311/13.

132. Only Shaw and George Spencer, who, like Thorne, had served on the Standing Committee, contributed speeches of comparable quality and relevance. Thorne's speech is to be found in Ibid., cc. 1300/3, Spencer's in cc 1315/8.

to lack of experience on the part of the P.L.P. members, but the main reason for it was the fact that more than half of the P.L.P.'s contributors were defensive in tone, concerned more to defend Trade Unions against the claim that the forthcoming 'Restoration of Pre-War Practices' Bill was unfair to women than to advocate the principle of women's suffrage. This Conservative tactic was an obvious red-herring, a convenient excuse to vote against women's suffrage, but only Tom Shaw seemed to recognise its intellectual weakness and political irrelevance. "If women are entitled to the vote," he asked, "why should the alleged inequalities of Trade Unions prevent them from having it?"(133) Moreover, the P.L.P. attack was blunted by its contradictory tone. Shaw claimed that the Labour Party did not want (though they would welcome) an election while Ben Spoor claimed that current industrial unrest demanded one. Furthermore, the cogent argument that the measure was needed to head off direct action and restore the people's faith in Parliamentary democracy was used only once.(134) Overall the P.L.P.'s contradiction to the debate was an indistinguished failure, out of which only Tom Shaw and George Spencer could be proud of their efforts. Ironically, too, it contained one of the best expressions of the Labour Party's commitment to women's suffrage by Jack Jones who under pressure from hostile government back-benchers declared,

"We of the Labour Party stand for the fullest possible expression of political rights, apart from sex, for equality of opportunity, the right to govern, and the right to take part in the election of Governments, because we cannot expect to have any kind of real government if we divorce a great mass of people from the possibility of taking part in the election of the Government."(135)

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133. Ibid., cc 1311.

134. By Spencer, Ibid., cc 1315/6.

135. Ibid., cc 1296. Jones was the Member for Silvertown.



Despite the Government's refusal to take off the whips the Bill was given a Third Reading by a combination of Conservative defectors, Liberal individuals, half-a-dozen nationalists and 34 Members of the P.L.P.(136)

The victory was, of course, meaningless in terms of securing the passage of the Bill into law. Within three weeks the Government had introduced its own Bill into the House of Lords, containing all but the suffrage clause and had defeated the original P.L.P. Bill without discussion. The extension of the suffrage was deferred, at least until the next session.

On 27 February 1920, Mr. T.W. Grundy, Labour Member for Rother Valley, moved the Second Reading of a Bill which sought to equalise the franchise between men and women, abolish plural voting, enfranchise those under 21 who had been given a vote as servicemen in 1918 but had lost it on demobilisation, and to abolish the registration requirement for the university franchise.(137) The Bill, which was supported by Henderson, Clynes, Adamson, Spoor and Shaw (clearly it was an official Labour Bill), contained a number of new and lasting ideas regarding the Labour Party's view of women's suffrage. Firstly, emphasis was placed on the abolition of the existing franchise and its replacement by one based on residential qualifications alone. The basis of the electoral qualification was to be changed and extended not merely equalised. The second point is that the extension of the franchise was linked with other issues of franchise reform. Women's suffrage was no longer an end itself, but part of a wider process of reform. This fact is reflected in the kind of resolutions placed before and approved by the Labour Party Annual Conference. In 1921, for example, a resolution was passed advocating the equalisation of the franchise between men and women but by 1925 the equivalent resolution called for general reforms in Parliamentary and local

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136. Ibid., cc 1343/6.

137. H.C. Deb. 125, cc 2067 et seq.

governmental electoral law. It called for:-

"A single franchise for all purposes, Parliamentary and local government, applicable equally to men and women at the age of 21 years, based on the existing six months' residential qualification thus abolishing plural voting and the so-called 'business' vote, and removing the present inequalities affecting women, simplifying registration work and securing one register for all elections."

Other proposals included the strengthening of the Corrupt and Illegal Practices Act with regard to bribery, various forms of intimidation and undue influence, the issue interests, the registration of all vehicles used for the conveyance of voters to the poll with the Returning Officer not later than 72 hours before the opening of the polling, and the enactment of legal provisions making it the duty of the Returning Officer to apportion vehicles equally among the Candidates, irrespective of party. (138)

Clearly such changes were of fundamental importance, identifying the Labour Party with a whole series of reforms designed to secure a uniform democratic franchise free from external monetary influences. They ensured that the realisation of one aim would be followed by the pursuit of the realisation of others. Consequently, they proved to be a great impetus for reform. On the floor of the House, however, they were to prove a hindrance in that they provided opponents of the female suffrage with a ready-made excuse for opposing the Bill on grounds other than anti-feminism. Though not always apparent at first this tactic became standard practice for opponents of female suffrage as time went on.

In 1920, however, Mr. Grundy successfully moved the Second Reading of his Bill in the House of Commons with little difficulty! Unlike Mr. Adamson, the previous year, Mr. Grundy did not base the claims for female suffrage on

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138. Cf. L.P.A.C.R. 1925, p.291 and L.P.A.C.R. 1921, p.211. Similar Resolutions on the same subject were passed at the Annual Conferences of 1927, 1931 and 1933.

their effort in the war but as a right per se. Tom Myers cogently added to Grundy's case "on the ground of equality, simple justice and social progress the case is definite and clear for this Bill to go forward."(139) It is not clear whether Myers meant this sentence to apply to the whole Bill or to women's suffrage alone, for he, like other P.L.P. speakers (other than the mover) made no reference to the abolition of the business qualification which seemed in effect to be an appendage waiting to be used as a bargaining-counter. A couple of Labour speakers (Robert Young and Morgan-Jones) did make reference to the disenfranchised ex-servicemen but most P.L.P. contributions were concerned primarily with female suffrage. The arguments that were put forward against female suffrage (women were too emotive to vote at 21; to enfranchise more women than men would give women greater opportunities than men whom they could then outvote on various issues), were once again superbly answered by Tom Shaw who argued that his experience and commonsense showed the ridiculous nature of such claims. Will Carter, careering off on a well-used tangent, made the usual reference to the Parliamentary standpoint of the Labour Party, declaring, "I am supporting this because I am a constitutionalist. I believe in the constitution. I am not one of those who go about preaching anarchy and advocating all sorts of new ideas."(140) Neither apparently was Dr. Addison who told the House that the Government would allow a free vote whilst retaining the right to bring forward those amendments they considered necessary and that he personally would vote in favour of the Bill. The closure was moved by 122 to 38, the Second Reading passed without a discussion and the Bill sent to Standing Committee.(141)

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139. H.C. Deb. 125 cc 2082.

140. Ibid., cc 2120.

141. 36 Members of the P.L.P. and 2 Tellers were present at the count, i.e., two-thirds of the total P.L.P. strength in the House, and one-third of the 124 Members in the division, (including tellers).

In Standing Committee the Government and its supporters, led by Sir Frederick Banbury, utilised every available procedural device to obstruct and limit the scope of the Bill. Amendments to limit the Bill to the equalisation of women over 30 was defeated 21 to 13, while another amendment setting the age at 25 was defeated 15 to 6. The Committee then decided to adjourn discussion of the Bill as it had no hope of passage into law (the Government's support of this course of action made that quite clear).(142)

John R. Clynes for the Labour Party raised the matter by Private Notice Question but was unable to get Bonar Law to admit it was the Government's policy to kill the Bill (its attitude in Committee had been more hostile than on the floor of the House) and indeed was met by the claim that it was the Bill's supporters' own fault for not turning up to the Committee's meetings.(143)

Although the Bill was considered by the Committee early in May, it was as good as dead and shortly afterwards Mr. Grundy surrendered to the forces of inaction.(144) The only result of the Bill was the introduction of a one-clause Act enfranchising what few ex-servicemen under 21 that there were.(145)

Its effect was only minimal but the passage of the Bill did indicate that anomalies could be eradicated by bringing them to the attention of the Government.

For the next three years the Labour Party introduced and supported measures conferring the franchise. No Labour Bills were read on Second Reading but both Lord Robert Cecil and Isaac Foot introduced Bills under the 10 minute rule which the Labour Party supported, without any legislative result.(146)

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142. Parliamentary Papers 1920, VIII, p.477.

143. H.C. Deb. 128, cc 576/9. The P.L.P. however did not have the 15 Members necessary to prevent the adjournment taking place.

144. See Note 6.

145. 10 and 11 Geo.5. ch.15.

146. H.C. Deb. 151, cc 1286 (Cecil), 8 March 1922. H.C. Deb. 163, cc 469 (Foot) 25 April 1923.

The advent of the first Labour government, however, raised distinct hopes that a franchise Bill would be proposed, not simply as a Private Members Bill with government support, but as a Government measure. Whatever hopes did exist were dashed by the absence of any reference in the King's Speech to the equalisation of the franchise, despite its recent confirmation in Labour's election manifesto.(147) Consequently, it was a Private Member, W.M. Adamson, who proposed a Bill reducing the age of enfranchisement to 21, based solely on residence qualifications (except for the university franchise) - thus abolishing the 'business vote'. The Bill also sought to abolish registration for University franchises and to remove certain other disqualifications.(148) Moving the Second Reading of the Bill, Adamson reminded the House of its previous discussions on female suffrage, the favourable conclusions that they had reached and of the fact that all Labour, Liberal and some 60 Conservative Members were pledged to the equal franchise. He made it perfectly clear that he was not prepared to jeopardise the equalisation of the franchise, which was the main purpose of the Bill, by pushing the other proposals too far. He was prepared to leave such matters to the sense of the House and concluded by appealing to the Government to provide the necessary facilities to ensure the passage of the Bill. Miss Jewson,(149) seconding, pointed out that the compromise of 1918 had been temporarily accepted by women's organisations and would have been ended if the Coalition had fulfilled its election pledges by allowing legislative facilities for the measures passed in the House in 1919/20/22 and 23. Women who were adversely affected by economic conditions should have the right to have control over the system

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147. "Labour stands for equality between man and woman, equal political and legal rights....." Craig, *Op.cit.*, p.23.

148. *H.C. Deb.* 170, cc 859 et. seq. 29 February 1924.

149. *Ibid.*, 863/6.

that affected them. Expressing the view that there was widespread support for the Bill she voiced her "shock and disappointment" that the Government had not taken the matter up officially and pleaded that the Bill should receive full facilities.

The weakness of Labour's case was in presenting a complex Bill, for both the Government and the Opposition seized on this to declare that while they were in favour of the Bill they could not officially support it because several of its measures were so contentious. The Duchess of Atholl who moved an amendment to refer the question to an all-party Conference along the lines of that of 1918 argued that the Bill, despite the press build-up, was not merely, or even mainly, concerned with women's suffrage but was designed to "drastically and radically" alter the whole electoral basis of Government. Several other speakers accused the Labour Party of attempting to secure illegitimate electoral changes in the guise of a women's suffrage Bill and for that reason declined to support the Bill. For the Government the Under Secretary at the Home Department Rhys Davies, (150) argued that the return of the parties to their old political allegiances made an agreement along the lines of 1918 impracticable. The Government was in favour of the Bill but he refused to "give any indication now as to what the attitude of the Government would be if the Bill is sent to a Committee upstairs." (151) Questioned further on the matter by Ben Turner, Davies replied, "Every Member realises that the Government is in a minority, and it will be a question for the House itself as to the exigencies of Parliamentary time." (152) Evidently the,

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150. Member for Westhoughton.

151. Ibid., cc 884. In accordance with the Cabinet's decision of 28 February 1924. CAB 23/47.17(24)16.

152. H.C. Deb. 170, cc.885.

Government was feeling its way. Davies' answers, however, did not suffice to calm Labour fears and it was left to John R. Clynes(153) to point out that if the Bill had been a simple matter of women's suffrage then there would have been little difficulty getting it through the House, though he did not explain why, if this were the case, the Government did not introduce the measure itself. He did say, however, that the Government's weak parliamentary position had influenced its thinking on the matter. "We have not the same power for closure," he declared "that has been possessed by other Governments which have had a majority behind them. We are more in the hands of the House than any other Government has been. As far as I understand the procedure and practice of this House, if I had made a declaration.....that we will take over this Bill, make it our own and take full responsibility for it in its later stages, it would probably be killed this afternoon."(154) If the whole Bill had been adopted that may well have been the case but if female suffrage alone had been advanced, even with changes in the basis upon which qualification was to be allowed, the fact that it was a Government Bill would hardly have affected the decision of the House.

The reasons for the Government's refusal to propose a Franchise Bill, in the circumstances of 1924, reflects a degree of insecurity upon its part. Unfortunately, this political insecurity occasionally conveys itself as political cowardice. Members of the first Labour government were not generally noted for their vigorous leadership and frequently they sought the easy, i.e., the least controversial, way out of any issue, particularly when it involved the party's relations with the Liberals. This is clearly seen in the contrasting manner in which they dealt with Adamson's Bill and the

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153. Lord Privy Seal in the first Labour Government.

154. H.C. Deb. 170, cc 927.

Liberal P.R. Bill which was due to be read on 2 May 1924. Adamson's Bill, so far as it was concerned with the principle of women's suffrage, was widely supported in the House. All sections of the Labour Movement had been committed to the principle since the party's inception at the turn of the century. Despite this, the first Labour government hesitated in introducing the measure and, indeed, gave the matter very little consideration in Cabinet. Its arguments in defence of its actions were weak, its tactics poor and its support somewhat less than whole-hearted and dogmatic. By comparison the P.R. Bill received inordinate attention from the Cabinet. Arthur Henderson submitted a memorandum to the Cabinet pointing out that some 80 Labour M.P.'s had expressed themselves in favour of the principle, which had wide support in the Labour Movement.(155) MacDonald read a letter from Asquith emphasising the importance of the measure from the Liberal point of view. The Cabinet decided by a considerable majority to recommend to the P.L.P. support for the Second Reading of the Bill in the House.(156) Accommodating the Liberals was held to be more important than adhering to egalitarian principles for, despite Henderson's assertions, P.R. did not have a deep hold upon the P.L.P. or the rest of the Labour Movement. The Cabinet's advice was rejected by the P.L.P. which insisted on a free vote, and then proceeded to help vote the measure down, and within two years P.R. had been officially condemned by Party Conference. The least the first Labour Government could have done was to have arranged support for P.R. as a means of securing the equalisation of the franchise. But that was not their way. They had insisted on following the moderate rather than the Socialist way and women's suffrage was just another casualty of weak leadership. Political

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155. CAB. 24/166/275.

156. CAB 23/48, 29(24)5. 1 May 1924.



ideals were not reinforced by political courage. Arther Henderson admitted the P.L.P.'s tactical error when he said in a similar debate twelve months later, "It was repeatedly stated (in 1924) that if..... (the proposer of) the Bill had contented himself with a single Clause to bring about equality of political rights there would have been a more friendly disposition towards the Bill than was shown in the Committee - though.....the disposition of the Committee, as a whole, was not altogether unfriendly.....We have responded to the appeals made to us on the last occasion and have restricted the Bill on this occasion to the one principle of placing men and women on an equality before the law so far as the franchise is concerned."(157)

Unfortunately, this admission of error was twelve months too late, although one suspects that its recognition occurred much earlier. However, until the introduction of the Conservative Government's Bill in 1928 the P.L.P.'s tactics were to press in Parliament for equal suffrage alone.

Adamson's Bill meanwhile continued on its procedural way to Standing Committee A where, after a short period of open and then secret bargaining Adamson following a course of action encouraged by the Government, succeeded in securing Conservative promises to accept an equal franchise at the age of 21, though all the other clauses were lost. Unfortunately, Conservative ideas of what constituted a promise conflicted with those of the P.L.P. and the Bill was subjected to a number of delaying and sometimes ridiculous amendments.<sup>(158)</sup> One amendment giving the vote to the wives of business voters

157. H.C. Deb. 180 cc 1487/8. In the 1924 Parliamentary Report it was stated that "In Committee it was soon made evident that if all the provisions of the Bill were adhered to, it would never get through, and eventually it was agreed to confine the Bill to equality in the franchise." L.P.A.C.R. 1924, p.103.

158. See Butler, op.cit., pp.23/4 and Standing Committee Reports 1924, cc 490 et.seq. See Note 7.

was accepted ~~without~~ a division (thus doubling the business vote at a stroke). The Bill was eventually reported out of Committee on 19 June 1924 but was not discussed by the House during the summer and duly disappeared with the first Labour Government, in the wake of the Campbell case and the Zioviey letter election of that year. (159)

Back in opposition the Labour Party once again took up the fight for an equal franchise when Mr. Whiteley, Labour Member for Blaydon, introduced a Bill which sought to extend the vote to women on the same terms as men. (160) Its Second Reading on 20 February 1925 was to prove a momentous occasion for it was on this Bill that the Government effectively, if unwittingly and reluctantly, committed itself to the principle of female suffrage at 21.

Moving the Second Reading, Mr. Whiteley invoked Baldwin's pledge, denied that alterations in the franchise necessitated a general election and claimed that all that was at issue were the details not the principle of women's suffrage. (161) Joynson-Hicks for the Government agreed with Whiteley's sentiments but moved an amendment declining to give such a measure a Second Reading so early in a Parliament, involving as it would a General Election with its disruptive consequences and recording its opinion "that a considered scheme of franchise reform should be brought before this House at a suitable opportunity within the life-time of the present Parliament." (162)

The P.L.P., however, had organised its case quite well. They submitted that there was no real constitutional precedent demanding that changes in the franchise necessitated a general election and refurbished Whiteley's other points. Arthur Henderson forcibly argued that the Bill should be given a

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159. The Government felt committed to the measure (CAB: 23/48.45(24)3 30 July 1924).

160. H.C. Deb. 180, cc. 1479 et. seq.

161. Loc.cit. See Note 8.

162. H.C. Deb. 180, cc. 1496.

Second Reading but its date of operation be postponed until the next general election. In the meantime a Conference, presided over by the Speaker, could deal with other related questions such as redistribution, election expenditure, corrupt practices and, if necessary, methods of voting. The only other conclusion Henderson thought could be drawn from the Government's actions was that it intended to kill the Bill on this occasion so as to bring in a similar measure later in the Session in order to obtain the credit for extending the franchise to women.

There is little doubt that this was one of the Government's reasons for adopting the tactics it did, but, unfortunately, Joynson-Hicks was not prepared to make such a damaging admission. Instead he claimed that the Bill could not be passed without an accompanying measure of redistribution.(163) The Government, he declared, did intend to carry out the Prime Minister's pledge within the life-time of the present Parliament but that pledge should be carried out by inter-party agreement secured through the medium of a Speaker's Conference to be set up in 1926. Under pressure Joynson-Hicks expanded his views by saying that "no difference will take place in the ages at which men and women will go to the poll at the next election," and, questioned further, admitted that it would be virtually impossible to raise the age of male suffrage to 25 - a common Conservative backbench idea.(164)

The implications of Joynson-Hicks' remarks were not, however, fully appreciated on the Labour benches. Ramsay MacDonald was one of the several Labour Members who pressed for an explicit declaration by the Home Secretary on the question of age, which Joynson-Hicks on every occasion refused to do.

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163. The 1928 Act, of course, was passed without any such accompanying measure.

164. H.C. Deb. 180.cc. 1504.

"Mr. MacDonald: .....It is no use the Government asking for an agreement on this subject if its own mind is so.....open, regarding matters which we regard as absolutely essential to a democratic franchise.....we shall not yield one single shadow of an inch on a privilege which democracy has gained by years of agitation. So essential is this to the democratic position that it would be a waste of time and a farce for two or three people to go into consultation with a principle like this left open..... My hon. Friend behind me, in an unguarded moment, expressed satisfaction at an interruption made by the Home Secretary when he said, "It is all open!"

Sir W. Joynson-Hicks : I have never said it is going to be 25.

Mr. MacDonald : Has he said it is going to be 21?

Sir W. Joynson-Hicks : No.

Mr. MacDonald : Then it may be anything and thirty is open as both these ages....." (165)

However, unwittingly or not, Joynson-Hicks had committed himself as a political realist, as Pethick-Lawrence had shrewdly noted;

"he is not quite sure whether the age should be fixed at 21 for men and women. He did not say that but that is the inference from his remarks.....If that be so, I do suggest to hon. Members opposite.....that, as a matter of fact they cannot seriously contemplate taking votes away from men at the present time. They may think.....that it would be a good thing to do, but.....I do not believe they will be able to do so. Therefore, I suggest to them that.....the position which the Government are taking up on the principle cannot really be differentiated from that which is put forward in this Bill." (166)

W.M. Adamson, however, was not so convinced and recalled moves by Conservative back-benchers in the previous Parliament to raise the voting age on his Bill to 25. Most of the other P.L.P. contributors were content to attack the Government's party political motives, though virtually no-one on the Labour side attacked the claim that a general election would be

165. Ibid., cc. 1558/9.

166. Ibid., cc 1529. See Note 9.

required if the Bill were passed, despite its extensive use by Conservative back-benchers. It was all to no avail: the Government comfortably carried the amendment by 220 to 153.

The Labour Party kept the issue alive throughout the next eighteen months. The Party Conference passed favourable resolutions. Labour Journals, referred particularly in 1926, to the failure of the Home Secretary to call a Conference and the P.L.P. raised the matter in the House (167) though no Bills were debated on the issue and whenever women's groups protested that the Home Secretary was being slothful in the discharge of his duties the Party gave the groups its support. The omission of any reference to the subject in the King's Speech of 1927 brought a sharp reaction from the P.L.P. In the debate on the Address three members of Labour's leadership, MacDonald, Thomas and Snowden all referred to the matter, pointing out especially that the time was now very short before the next election was due and accusing the Government of attempting to go back on its promises. (168)

On 8 March 1927 a number of prominent Labour women were members of the Equal Political Rights Campaign delegation which visited 10 Downing Street, where Baldwin promised them a statement before Easter. The well-informed political columnist of the Times reported that the Cabinet was split. In fact a number of Cabinet rebels led by Churchill were arguing that they should repudiate the "unauthorised" pledges given by Joynson-Hicks in 1925. Both in the Equal Franchise Committee of the Cabinet and then in the Cabinet itself they argued against the adoption of an equal franchise. It was

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167. But not excessively. Only 7 questions (out of a total of 14) were asked by the P.L.P. in 1927 on the question of women's suffrage. Most of the others were from Liberal Members.
168. H.C. Deb. 202, cc 21/2 MacDonald; cc 130/1, Thomas; cc 253, Snowden; see also cc 42, Pethick-Lawrence. On the 11 February 1927 the P.L.P. had introduced its own bill designed to "assimilate the Parliamentary franchise for men and women, and to reduce the qualifying age for the university and local government franchises for women." (cc. 440).

known, or assumed, that the Speaker would not preside over any Conference on the matter but this did not prevent Cabinet die-hards from advocating such schemes as a voting age qualification of 25 so that they could have room for manoeuvre and concession at some future date. On 12 April 1927 the Cabinet decided after a full discussion not to call a Conference but to introduce a Bill extending the franchise to women over 21 on the same terms as men. Churchill placed his dissent on record.(169)

During the period immediately preceding the final decision rumour had it that Baldwin was sounding-out the Labour Party on the idea of a Conference and MacDonald indicated that he had been approached.(170) The Manchester Guardian reported on 14 April 1927 that the P.L.P. had refused nine days' earlier to participate in a Conference. Unfortunately, there is little documentary evidence to back up these claims and one is forced to the conclusion that Baldwin was merely checking out his options rather than seriously proposing that the Conference be held.(171)

The Bill was finally introduced in March 1928 (172) to a warm welcome from the P.L.P. which immediately changed its "single-objective" tactics which had prevailed since 1925 to the broader issue of equalising, rather than simply assimilating, the franchise. The new franchise, Snowden pointed out, would be based on two irreconcilable principles - personality and property. "If," he declared "you are going to have manhood and womanhood as the basis of your franchise, you have no logical justification for maintaining in your electoral

169. CAB. 23/54. 26/274. 12 April 1927 and CAB. 23/90B.

170. See Note 10.

171. Most Tory Party opposition appears to have been assumed rather than proved, that is, it was generally held that the Tories did not want the measure but saw its political necessity. There was little positive proof for this assumption.

172. The Representation of the People (Equal Franchise) Bill: H.C. Deb. 215, cc 1359. et.seq., Second Reading, 29 March 1928.

system a qualification of a different character .... if equality is what the Government are aiming at then there cannot be equality so long as a vast mass of the electors are able to exercise two votes." (173) The notion of university representation was an anachronism, "it is archaic, and like the plural vote should find no place in a democratic constitution." (174) He said that the P.L.P., would bring amendments forward in Committee on these matters. Arthur Henderson, winding up for the P.L.P., indicated its misgivings over the effect of the increased franchise upon election expenses and said they would propose that the scale be reduced by 1d. from 7d. to 6d. in the case of counties and 6d to 5d for boroughs. He also raised the general question of corrupt practices in relation to the use of motor cars at elections, which he hoped would have to be registered with the Returning Officer. Now that the Government was clearly committed to the principle of equality between the sexes in the exercise of the vote at 21, the P.L.P., felt free to reintroduce its other reformatory measures which had been reserved, for tactical reasons, for this very occasion.

The main provisions of the Bill were for the assimilation of the parliamentary and local franchises for men and women and a clause allowing women to vote on their husband's business qualifications. Sir William Joynson-Hicks spent most of his time trying to convince his own Party's die-hards that the 'ten-year' experimental period of compromise allegedly initiated in 1918 had been successfully concluded, thus justifying the full assimilation of the franchise between the sexes on the basis of residential and business qualifications. Women should be able to vote in the Universities, on payment of the registration fee, on equal terms with men. Those who could qualify on all three grounds would have a maximum of two votes - 'though only

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173. Ibid., cc. 1373/4.

174. Loc.cit.

1½% (420,000 out of 26 million) of the new electorate would be plural voters. A special provision would be made for a register of all voters to be prepared in time to become operative on 1 May 1929, after which eighteen months would elapse before a new register would be compiled, which would after that be every 12 months.

The opposition to the principles of the Bill came from the die-hards who proposed an amendment rejecting a measure which regrettably gave women a majority in the electorate and unfortunately contained no provision for comprehensive franchise reform or redistribution. They argued for a number of changes ranging from the disenfranchisement of recipients of poor relief to raising the voting age to 25.

The P.L.P.'s strategy was three-fold. In the first place it supported the Government on female suffrage while attacking the timing of the measure and its failure to take other necessary reforms into account. Secondly, it used the opportunity to score propaganda points against the Government for its past opposition to the principle and present opposition to Labour's details of reform. Finally, it spent some time attacking the die-hards' philosophy. The P.L.P.'s general line of attack has been noted above. They were content to assert that the measure promised equality but did not provide it, 'though they were well aware that the Government was assimilating, not equalising, the franchise. For the rest of the time they asserted the correctness of the Labour Party's beliefs. The Party, according to Snowden, had "from its inception .... been united, unanimous and whole-hearted in its support of the political equality of the sexes." (175) He asked why the Prime Minister had not called a conference as he had promised. Arthur Henderson took a slightly different view. For him the Bill was, a logical, fair and honest interpretation of the Prime Minister's pledge but he was critical of the fact that the

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175. Ibid., cc 1371.



Bill had not been introduced at an earlier stage of the present Parliament. Indeed, had the Home Secretary seen fit to accept the Equal Suffrage Bill in 1925, making it non-operative until that forthcoming General Election, questions such as redistribution could have been the subject of an official Commission, but the time had now passed. The measure was a reinforcement of democracy at a time when democracy versus dictatorship was a burning issue. The House should trust democracy.

The die-hards were particularly vilified by two Labour women M.P.'s. Ellen Wilkinson attacked the ludicrous examples used by Colonel Applin to buttress his case. The Colonel had pictured a woman Chancellor of the Exchequer receiving disturbing news about her child and drew images of the dire effects this would have on the Budget speech she was in the middle of delivering. Miss Wilkinson could not see that the effect on a woman Chancellor would be much different from that on a male Chancellor. She could not see any sense in the fact that a woman could not vote for the House, although she could sit in it. Margaret Bondfield made a particularly incisive contribution to the Debate. Using the rhetoric of conservatism she argued that the vote was an opportunity and an obligation rather than a right or a privilege. The practical experience of those who saw the economic effects of society at first hand made them more appreciative of their obligations than those who by their artificial existence in the Universities were divorced from reality but nevertheless entitled to vote. She saw no problem raised by the problems of international affairs and argued that they should have the opportunity to vote as human beings, not as a female sectional group. She recognised that the Bill was not based on the principle of equality but on the assimilation of existing fancy franchises. Prophetically she ended by saying, "we shall not come to the end of the story until we have the simple single franchise conferred on men and women, not on the ground of sex.....(or) property, but on the ground

of their common humanity."(176)

Baldwin ended the Government's contribution to the Debate by explaining that there had been no conference because the Speaker had declined to preside at any such meeting. As there was no quarrel between the Parties on the question of female suffrage anyway nothing would be gained by holding one. By 387 votes to 10 the Amendment was defeated and the Bill remitted to Committee.(177)

At the Committee stage the Government accepted, without overt opposition, an instruction empowering the Committee to insert provisions in the Bill relating to the maximum scale of election expenses. Discussion of the general merits of plural voting and the question of University representation were both ruled out of order by the Chairman. The P.I.P., therefore, concentrated its efforts on attacking the provisions rather than the principles of the Bill. Four questions were discussed; the voting age, the provision of plural voting for certain categories of women, the registration arrangements and the scale of expenses.

The die-hards attempted to raise the age for voting to 25, "the age of responsibility and prudence" on the grounds that this was a popular proposal which sensibly recognised that people were too young, immature and uninterested in politics at 21. Several Labour Members emphasised the contrast between the life-style of the leisured classes whose education continued well beyond the age of majority and that of the working-class who had already experienced seven years of employment at that age. The former may still be on the edge of childhood but the latter were often married with families of their own. "Our

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176. Ibid., cc 1418.

177. For what it is worth, 3 of the 12 die-hards (including tellers) were defeated (Boyd-Carpenter very heavily at Coventry) in the 1929 General Election; 1 (Sir William Bull) did not stand but his successor was defeated; 5 were returned with reduced majorities; 2 did not stand but their successors were elected and one, Sir Charles Oman, was returned at Oxford University with an increased majority.

young people have learned from bitter experience .... that they are (enveloped) in economic conditions imposed upon them by the system of government of the country .... (they) have demonstrated their keen interest in social and political questions." Social and environmental differences were fundamental. "We represent almost .... a different kind of civilisation altogether," claimed Margaret Bondfield. (178)

Yet although the P.L.P. was full of invective about the back-bench "mediaeval theorists" they could not match the destructive skill of the Home Secretary. He wrote off opponents of the Bill's provisions as reactionaries who represented a minority opinion, that would ensure their re-election to the House. Joynson-Hicks' intervention was a good example of the assertion of Parliamentary conventions over the overt political divisions. These conventions had an inhibiting effect on the P.L.P. who could not match the sneers of the Home Secretary against his own backbenchers. The Amendment was defeated by 359 to 16.

The P.L.P. then attempted to delete the paragraph in the Bill which enabled spouses of voters with business qualifications to vote twice at General Elections. Confessing a desire to abolish all forms of plural voting, Miss Bondfield argued that this particular fancy franchise, which carried no dignity, was designed solely to perpetuate existing anomalies and privileges for a very small number of voters. Pethick-Lawrence anticipated a Government claim that the deletion of the Clause would be depriving some women of a vote by pointing out that the "only right we shall be taking away from (them) .... is the very thin right of having two votes or more in by-elections." (179)

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178. H.C. Deb. 216, cc. 236.

179. Ibid., cc. 270.

Under the circumstances this was justifiable. The Government did not agree and, indeed, did not even refrain from using the argument,

Sir V. Henderson:

".....if we accept the Amendment we disenfranchise a large number of women voters amounting to about 130,000."

Mr. Pethick-Lawrence:

"You only take away from them the second vote."

Sir V. Henderson:

"We deprive them of the choice of election which they now have and that, in a sense, is a disenfranchisement."(180)

Sir Vivian restated his position a little later with a slightly different emphasis,

"to omit (this) paragraph would be interfering with the rights of those women, (who already possessed the double qualification) and it would be going beyond the terms of the Bill itself in so far as assimilation is concerned. It would also be a definite breach in the existing law with regard to plural voting, and for those reasons the Government cannot accept the Amendment."(181)

Clearly the Government had no intention of equalising the franchise. Moreover, they made a most telling point against the P.L.P. by pointing out that the clause as it stood was substantially the same as that accepted by the Labour Party in 1924 when its Bill was discussed in Committee. More was to be made of this point on the Third Reading, though the P.L.P. apparently made no attempt to come up with a convincing answer for its reversal of tactics. The Amendment was lost by 70 votes, 114 of the 138 dissidents being members of the P.L.P.

Rhys Davies then moved another amendment designed to limit the validity of the first register to a period of six months only, instead of the eighteen months provided for in the Bill. All succeeding registers would revert to the existing twelve month period. Eighteen months, argued Davies,

180. Ibid., cc. 275.

181. Ibid., cc. 278.

was much too long a time for a register to be in force. Indeed, it had been only comparatively recently that the annual register was introduced.(182) For the Government it was claimed that the cost (£600,000) and the extent of the new enfranchisement (5½M.) made acceptance of the Amendment impossible. The Labour response was vociferous and hostile. Refusal to accept the Amendment would disenfranchise migratory labour forces, any mistakes would result in effectual disenfranchisement for those missed off the list as far as the coming General Election was concerned. A couple of M.P.'s on the Labour side blamed the Government for not introducing the Bill earlier and argued that £600,000 was a trifle compared to the benefits of the Bill. "The performance of a citizen's function of voting ought to weigh more heavily with us than so-called economy," claimed S.P. Viant.(183) The extent of P.L.P. pressure caused the Government to respond with a promise to consider the points raised but they would give no definite assurance that they could do anything positive to alleviate the problems which the Labour Members had highlighted. In the event nothing was done about the problems which had been raised.

The final issue to be raised was the new clause, proposed by the P.L.P., reducing the maximum scale of election expenses from 7d. and 5d. to 5d. and 4d. for Counties and Boroughs respectively. The crux of the Labour Party's case was that the increase in the total electorate would provide an additional burden on candidates by raising the level of expenditure allowable under the Act. This, argued Arthur Henderson, would be inimical to the interests of democracy: "if you are going to carry out democracy logically you ought to be able to make it as easy as possible for candidates to be returned to this

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182. Ibid., cc 290/2. Under the Economy Miscellaneous Provisions Act, 1926.

183. Ibid., cc. 229; Viant was M.P. for Willesden West.

House without any poverty bar."(184) Other P.L.P. speakers did not add to Henderson's claims but spent their time making acrimonious comments about bribery and corruption on the Conservative side and defending the Labour Party against charges that they were controlled by the Trade Unions. After a weekend adjournment, Joynson-Hicks announced that the Government was divided on the question and had decided to leave the matter to a free vote of the House. Should the new clause be approved it would be open to any amendment brought forward by the House. The Commons immediately approved the Clause by 220 to 71 with the P.L.P. voting solidly in its favour.

Sir John Simon then moved that the amount for Counties be reduced still further to 5d. (much to the Home Secretary's dismay). The P.L.P. lent its support to the Liberal Amendment, defending itself against charges of 'Machiavellian' conduct by claiming the right to change its mind in the light of new evidence. Snowden's advocacy of the P.L.P.'s case was most unconvincing, even though he pointed out that 5d. was still way above the average expenditure incurred by P.L.P. candidates. The Government voted the amendment down by 215 to 111 (the latter including 81 Members of the P.L.P.).

Conservative Members then moved an amendment to leave the borough maximum at its original figure of 5d. The Government abstained from intervening against or for the amendment in the division lobbies. Arthur Henderson did claim that the Labour Party was in favour of a figure of  $4\frac{1}{2}$ d. rather than 4d. but had been persuaded that  $4\frac{1}{2}$ d. would be too difficult to apply in practice. They were opposed to the amendment and would like to see it withdrawn in favour of an amendment inserting  $4\frac{1}{2}$ d. In response to Henderson's plea the Home Secretary said that the P.L.P. appeared to be changing its mind, whereas he stood exactly where he had at the beginning of the Debate.

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184. Ibid., cc. 304.

The free vote saw the amendment approved by 181 votes to 173 with Labour's "Big Five" leading the P.L.P. into the 'No' lobby.

The question was brought up again on the Third Reading when Thomas Kennedy moved that 4½d. be inserted for 5d. No new arguments were used to defend the change and the amendment was heavily defeated by the Government, 214 to 100. It was small comfort to the P.L.P. that informed opinion was in agreement with their claims.(185)

At the Report stage the P.L.P. also attempted to abolish plural voting only to find itself hoist with its own petard. The P.L.P. started badly with a less than forceful speech from Philip Snowden who again claimed that plural voting was "inconsistent with the democratic basis of this measure."(186) The Home Secretary retorted that only 400,000 voters were involved, that the Bill was designed to assimilate not to equalise the franchise and that when the P.L.P. had introduced its Bill in 1924 it had been quite willing to accept an amendment incorporating the principle they were now opposing. Snowden protested that the amendment had been accepted reluctantly to save the Bill but was sarcastically met by the retort that his courage was greater in opposition than in office. W.M. Adamson, proposer of the 1924 Bill, said that after consultation with the Conservatives they had concluded that the Bill would be defeated if they resisted the amendment and had accordingly accepted it.(187) Adamson was in effect recognising that the mixing up of several

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185. The Economist, for example, noted "if the old ratio of 7:5 between the expenses of a rural and urban constituency was fair then 4½d. is a generous figure for the latter and 5d. too high." 12 May 1928, pp. 972.

186. H.C. Deb. 217, cc. 57.

187. The authenticity of Adamson's remarks, it seems to me, should dispel David Butler's doubts as to whether the Labour Party's action in 1924 was not due to inadvertance. The P.L.P.'s error had been tactical not procedural. Butler, op.cit. p.34 n.3.

measures in one suffrage Bill had been a tactical error. It was left to a Conservative back-bencher, Sir Frank Meyer, to ask, "It is common knowledge that the Labour and Liberal parties were in the majority, and as long as they agreed, were able to have their way.....How (was) it..... (therefore) that (the Labour Party) was not able to get (its) own way and eliminate plural voting?" Apparently, there was no attempt to reach agreement on the question. The debate petered out with P.L.P. charges that the only constituencies to be seriously benefitted would be the Conservative-dominated central business constituencies. The amendment was defeated by 216 to 78 and the Bill received a silent Third Reading.

Thus the Bill went to the Lords where the P.L.P.'s handful of Peers supported it. By the time the Bill became law however, more urgent problems were pressing the Labour Party and its attention was concentrated elsewhere. Throughout the ten-year period the P.L.P.'s tactics and varying stances had served to confirm the power of the Executive over the Legislature when the former was in the possession of a strongly-led party. 1928 was less of a triumph for the Labour Party than for Joynson-Hicks the Conservative Home Secretary. The P.L.P.'s attitude to female suffrage was consistent, though its tactics were not. Female suffrage, however, was the first of several measures advocated by the Labour Party to fully equalise the franchise; it was to be another twenty years before their remaining objectives were achieved.



CHAPTER FOUR - NOTES

1. Such as Maxton's famous "murder" scene which according to J. Paton had been carefully planned and deliberately concerted in advance as a demonstration of protest against the futile palaver in Parliament, Paton, op.cit., p. 163 and J. Scanlon, op.cit., pp 52/3. (for details of the "Murder Scene" and its political consequences see J. McNair, James Maxton the Beloved Rebel (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1953), pp. 118/126. In a later incident involving David Kirkwood, it was discovered that Standing Order 18, under which he had been suspended from service in the House, had been left incomplete in 1902. It was amended the following year, see H.C. Deb. 181, cc 708/14; 1139/42 and H.C. Deb. 193, 1991-2006.
2. The Webbs' book was produced in response to a request from the Secretary of the International Socialist Bureau (M. Camille Huysmans) that all constituent bodies should furnish reports upon "the socialisation of industries and services and upon the constitution that should be adopted by any nation desirous of organising its life upon Socialist principles," Preface to A Constitution for the Socialist Commonwealth, p.v.
3. Clynes supported a Bill "to provide for the relief of the Parliament of the United Kingdom by establishing subordinate Parliaments in England, Scotland and Wales by making provision with regard to the exercise of executive or judicial authority and for other matters related thereto." See Parliamentary Papers 1921, i. 593.
4. The terms of the resolution were as follows:- "That with a view to enabling the Imperial Parliament to devote more attention to the general interests of the United Kingdom and in collaboration with the other Governments of the Empire, to matters of common Imperial concern, this House is of the opinion that the time has come for the creation of subordinate Legislatures, within the United Kingdom, and that to this end the Government, without prejudice to any proposals it may have to make with regard to Ireland, should forthwith appoint a Parliamentary body to consider and report -
  1. Upon a measure of Federal Devolution, applicable to England, Scotland and Ireland, defined in its general outlines by existing differences in law and administration between the three countries;
  2. Upon the extent to which these differences are applicable to Welsh conditions and requirements; and
  3. Upon the financial aspects and requirements of the measure."
 See H.C. Deb. 116, cc. 1873-1974 and 2063-2129. 3 and 4 June 1919.
5. In fact the Coalition Manifesto had stated that, "It will be the duty of the new Government to remove all existing inequalities of the law as between men and women." Not surprisingly this was popularly interpreted to mean equal political rights. As we shall see the Government had something different in mind. For the Manifesto see F.W.S. Craig (Ed.) British General Election Manifestos 1918-1966. (Chichester: Political Reference Publications, 1970), pp. 2-4. Lunn was Member for Rothwell in Yorkshire.

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6. Amongst the proposals made by those forces were amendments to limit the franchise to women between the ages of 23 and 75, to prohibit unmarried women not paying rent the vote and to disqualify aliens for five years subsequent to the date of naturalisation. One successful amendment extended the vote to a husband by virtue of his wife's qualification. The Labour Members did not oppose it, although why is not clear.
7. One amendment was designed to give two votes to those over thirty-five years of age (not 40 as suggested by Butler). Another, postponing the operation of the Bill until the expiring of the ten-year agreement, i.e., 1928, deserves special mention as an example of the effective use of myth in politics. During the Second Reading of the Bill Sir William Bull had claimed that the vote had been conferred upon women in 1918 on the general, unwritten, understanding that there would be no more agitation for further reform for a period of ten years. Sir William's vague generalisations were, of course, pure fabrications desperately designed to resist the inevitable by introducing new bargaining-counters. Its effect was tremendous for as David Butler had noted, "Before this debate, no reference to it can be traced. After it, the question of women's suffrage was never discussed without some reference to the subject. At first, only the opponents of equal franchise used it as an argument, but before long its advocates while denying that any such agreement was binding, began to refer to it as an historical fact." Butler, op.cit., p.22. Its falsehood, which Butler implicitly demonstrates, is very evident from the Speaker's undisputed comment that the age limit was fixed at 30 simply to prevent the number of women electors out numbering the men. (H.C. Deb. 114, cc. 1612). Sir William's true colours, of course, were proved by his place amongst the 12 die-hards who opposed female suffrage to the very end.
8. Although the Conservative Election Manifesto had not contained any reference to Women's suffrage, Baldwin had publicly pledged that "The Unionist Party are in favour of equal political rights for men and women and desire that the question of the extension of the franchise should, if possible, be settled by agreement. With this in view, they would, if returned to power, propose that the matter be referred to a Conference of all political parties on the lines of the Ullswater Committee." (Times 18 October 1924. Quoted in Butler, op.cit., p.24)
9. This was also felt by Conservative hard-liners (such as Churchill) who argued that Joynson-Hicks had gone beyond his Cabinet instructions or, as one unidentified Cabinet Member claimed, had never received any. (See Butler, op.cit., p.30 n.2). In fact the Cabinet had discussed the question as a matter of importance two days before the Second Reading and had instructed the Home Secretary to state that the Government intended to give effect to Baldwin's pledge later in the life of the present Parliament by proposing a Conference of all political parties. CAB 23/49. 9 (25)11. Unfortunately, from the die-hards' point of view,

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Note 9 cont'd.

Joynson-Hicks did not leave the Government's intentions in the realms of political rhetoric (as did the 1918 Manifesto) which would have given them the opportunity for further delay, but interpreted it in such a way as to effectively prevent them from retracting their promises contained in Baldwin's pledge. The attitude of the die-hards suggests in fact that they were seeking to rationalise their own position, for not one of them raised the matter in the Cabinet after the events of 20 February 1925 until the issue was finally considered in 1927. How could they when Baldwin had fully supported Joynson-Hicks in the Debate? (H.C. Deb. 180, cc. 1561). They might be annoyed at conceding so much without a struggle but their arguments needed time to be formulated.

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Daily Mail 20 April 1928. This appears to be confirmed by a reference in Tom Jones' Diaries. K. Middlemas (Ed.,) Tom Jones: Whitehall Diary II, 1926-30. (London: Oxford University Press, 1969), p.98. On 5 April 1927 the National Joint Council issued a statement calling upon the Government "to introduce legislation forthwith to confer the franchise on women on the same terms as now applying to men." N.E.C. Minutes, Vol. 42, 1926/7, N.J.C.6. - G.C. and E.C.G. M.45. Times 6 April 1927. The statement declared that "no useful purpose would be served by the reference (of equal franchise) to a Conference at this late stage...."

CHAPTER FIVE

THE LABOUR PARTY AND PROPORTIONAL REPRESENTATION 1919-1931.

Although the question of P.R. was one which occupied some of the energies of the Labour Party throughout the decade of three party politics its greatest impact on the Party occurred in the Second Labour Government's period of office. The question of the equalisation of the franchise had already been settled but that of fair representation was brought to a head by the Labour Government's dependence on Liberal support. Thus, whilst the general context of the 'twenties is applicable to both women's suffrage and P.R., the chronological development of the latter requires detailed examination in order to relate it to the crisis of 1931 and the effect of that crisis on the Labour Party and its attitude to Parliamentary Government.

The issue of proportional representation is important not only as an example of the changes that take place in political fashions but as the major cause of friction between the Labour and Liberal parties during the period when both were contenders for the leadership of "progressive" political opinion. Indeed, it has been frequently claimed that Labour's attitude to P.R. was dictated by the advantages inherent in the adoption or rejection of P.R. as a new method of voting. In this respect the Labour Party has been depicted simply as an opportunist party which committed itself to P.R. when it was itself under-represented but changed its view as the existing electoral system began to work in its favour. As a general thesis this view has a great deal of validity and, indeed, many in the Labour Movement expressed themselves in these terms, but it fails to accurately describe the Labour Party view on the question of P.R. The bulk of Labour support for P.R. was based on an emotional idea of political justice - few Labour members supported P.R. as a matter of principle. Moreover, in the Labour Party there were individuals whose minds were changed by events and who saw in the collapse of the Liberal Party the achievement of those ends which they had previously sought through

the introduction of P.R. and other procedural devices. Thus while it may be true that the Labour Party, on the assumption that they were about to supplant the Liberals, could use the P.R. issue to rationalise their views, there were within the Party as a whole several currents of interacting opinion which united in opposition to the Liberal Party's sudden adoption of P.R. in 1923/4 as the means of their salvation - an obverse reaction which too many historians, particularly Liberal historians, have overlooked. Moreover, the Labour Party's adherence to P.R. was effectively ended by 1926 at the latest and their promotion of any variety of change in the electoral system later than this date, especially that associated with the alternative vote, was a measure of their continuing political weakness rather than their overall electoral strength.

P.R. had been widely approved of in the Labour Party, both before and during the war, as a means of securing greater representation for the Labour viewpoint. W.C. Anderson spoke for many I.L.P. Members when he wrote, "If Parliamentary government is to continue the parties in Parliament must correspond to their strength in the constituencies."(1) Philip Snowden was its most passionate advocate, Ramsay MacDonald its most consistent opponent. The former regarded it as, "the subordination of the individuality of the candidate and the exaltation of party and party principles,"(2) whereas the latter dismissed it as "an elaborate set of paper perfections of beautiful but intangible delicacy."(3) These positions were more or less maintained

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1. "The Election and After", Labour Leader, 9 January 1919.
  2. H.C. Deb, 101, cc 1688 30 January 1918. Cf. footnote 4 below.  
See Note 1.
  3. J.R. MacDonald, The Socialist Movement (London: Williams & Norgate, 1909), p.154.

until 1921 when MacDonald appeared to accept the inevitability of P.R. "Proportional Representation, with all its deficiencies, alone seems to afford a practical working scheme, and the political parties will have to be left to work out for themselves the various electoral problems which this method will present to them."(4) But this pessimism (MacDonald still thought Parliament would be worse off under P.R.) was as short-lived as it was widespread in the Party. Its origins lay in the massive victory secured by Lloyd George in the Coupon Election and the weakness of the 60 strong P.L.P. in a Parliament containing nearly 500 Government supporters. The effect of the election was to raise considerable doubts in the Labour Movement as to the efficacy of the political method and in this respect P.R. was as much an attempt to restore the creditability of the political method as it was an end in itself. To MacDonald, in particular, the restoration of Parliament to its rightful place as the critical, constructive, body checking, if not controlling, the Executive, was the dominating motive behind his readiness to consider P.R. as a technique to be used in the modern political world, although his very elusiveness arouses caution.

This is not to deny that P.R. was capable of standing on its own merits. It had been unanimously approved by the war-time Speakers' Conference; it was reasonably well supported in political circles and it was constantly advocated by the highly-proficient P.R. Society. Moreover, as David Butler points out, reform seemed inevitable if only for the fact that "the survival of the existing system (during the debates on the Representation of the People Bill in 1917 and 1918) plainly expressed not so much an endorsement of its merits as a failure to agree upon the remedy for its faults."(5) Such disagreement

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4. Socialism: Critical and Constructive (London: Cassell, Rev. Ed., 1924), p. 244/5. See Note 2.
  5. Butler, op.cit., p. 39.

was not confined to the Liberal and Conservative Parties. In the Commons debate on whether the Lords' P.R. Amendment to a House of Commons free vote in favour of the A.V. as opposed to P.R. should be accepted, Snowden openly attacked Adamson's view that the Labour Party was committed to the A.V. rather than P.R. Few Labour Members held Snowden's strong convictions on P.R. as a whole (a point frequently overlooked by historians) and on this occasion Adamson, MacDonald, Thomas and Henderson all voted in favour of the A.V.(6)

The intellectual claims of P.R. as opposed to that of the A.V. were strengthened as a result of the 1918 Election and the Party quickly became identified with a policy of P.R. which it never properly discussed or accepted but which took the form of a fashionable remedy - along with the Direct Action - for the ills perpetrated by the "hard-faced" men of the Coupon Parliament.(7) If the Labour Movement was committed whole-heartedly to P.R. its leaders in the House of Commons rarely declared their colours. Thus when Sir Thomas Bramsdon's P.R. Bill was debated in the House of Commons on 8 April 1921 only one P.L.P. member spoke in its favour while 15 others followed him into the Lobbies where 87 Members were outvoted by 186 opponents, 4 of whom belonged to the P.L.P. If the Labour Party was against the prevailing system it was not necessarily in favour of the P.R. solution.

The debate itself was a rehearsal of things to come with the advocates of P.R. claiming that it would mean smaller but truer representation which would in turn facilitate a stronger democracy in which individuals were chosen for their personal qualities, rather than their party lines - an analysis which

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6. H.C. Deb. 101, cc 1592 et seq. for debate: cc 1686/9 for Snowden's intervention. Cf. Wertheimer, op.cit., pp. 85/6.

7. See Note 3.



struck at the heart of Labour representation.(8) The one Labour Member in favour, Robert Young, declared that "the present system is not an encouragement to constitutional action outside. We are now in the position," he said, "of finding ourselves called upon to say whether we are prepared to make this House thoroughly representative of the people as a whole." He went on - "it will be admitted.....that this House has in the past times been and is today largely not representative of the people as a whole." The answer to direct industrial action was to make the composition of the House "a truer reflection of the opinion of people outside."(9)

Among the 16 Labour Members who supported P.R. in the Lobbies were J.R. Clynes.(10) W. Graham and Arthur Henderson, while 4 Labour Members opposed the measure. However, support for Bramsden's Bill by Arthur Henderson and J.R. Clynes did not mean acceptance of the principle by the Movement. Half the P.L.P. had not even bothered to vote and at the Annual Conference that year a resolution advocating P.R. proposed by the Workers' Union was defeated without discussion by the immediate use of the "previous question."(11)

The result of the General Election of 1922 had very little influence on the P.L.P.'s attitude. Many of the new members were favourable to P.R. or some other change in the electoral system as a means of securing greater political justice for Labour and almost all of these supported a permissive Bill, introduced into the House of Commons on 23 February 1923, allowing local

8. H.C. Deb. 140, cc.613 et seq. Cf. Footnote 2 above. The Bill provided for the election of Members for constituencies with 3, 5, or 7 representatives (the arrangement which the Lords had rejected in 1917) made allowance for redistribution and was to come into operation at the following General Election.

9. Ibid., cc. 645/8. Member for Newton 1918-31 and 1935-51. Young, like Snowden, remained a life-long advocate of P.R. The italics are mine.

10. Clynes was a Vice-President of the P.R. Society during the 'Twenties and was joint author with John Simon and L.S. Amery of P.R.: The complement of Franchise Reform (London: P.R. Pamphlet, 52, July 1922).

11. L.P.A.C.R. 1921, p.211.

authorities the option of using P.R. A number of these enthusiasts, such as Jimmy Maxton, were later to change their minds because of the actual experience of the working of P.R. under the provisions of the Scottish Education Acts. In this light, Willie Graham, who remained a consistent supporter of P.R. acted as a seer when he said,

"Many Members who favour proportional representation would not be nearly so enthusiastic in their support if it could be said of the existing system of election that provided in any case for the representation of minorities in the bodies elected." (12)

The Bill, though defeated 169 to 157, secured 72 votes in its favour from the Labour Party and only 11 in opposition. (13) A number were young M.P.'s securing their "wild oats" and a large section consisted of the I.L.P., which at this time was still in favour of the complete re-organisation of the system along the lines of the Bradford resolution, and as Willie Graham admitted the Party was very much divided on the issue. (14)

Most Labour M.P.'s, however, were simply following the fashion in their support for P.R. Few of them really distinguished between P.R. and the A.V. and although Butler is right in asserting that "the arguments and the voting in this division see, to a large extent, to have paralleled members' sympathies on the larger question," (15) this gives no indication of the P.L.P.'s attitude to P.R. on the national scale. Certainly there is no reason to believe that a Labour Government would support any such measure of its own volition. In fact, when it came to a straight

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12. H.C. Deb. 160, cc. 1454.

13. Not 69 as suggested by Butler, *op.cit.*, p.43. The minority was "led" by George Lansbury and Stephen Walsh.

14. H.C. Deb. 160, cc. 1452.

15. Butler, *loc.cit.* The Economist concluded that the Labour Party was "more likely to find time for a measure of proportional representation than for a Bill for the transferable vote...." "Electoral Reform" 12 January 1924.

clash between politics and P.R. the P.L.P. placed politics first and foremost. The divisions that Graham referred to were made very evident in the following month when over a hundred Members of the P.L.P. voted in favour of an Alternative Vote Bill which was being introduced under the ten-minute rule.<sup>(16)</sup> The pro-Lobby was led by the 'Big 5' (Clynes, Henderson, Snowden, MacDonald and Thomas) while Willie Graham led the half-a-dozen P.L.P. dissidents into the victorious 'No' lobby. The vote was indicative of the desire for changes held by the Labour Party as well as of the P.L.P.'s willingness to support any measure of change (P.R. or A.V.).

The conflict between the two parties was brought to a head after the "Protection" election of 1923 and the period of the first Labour Government. It is important to note that the most recent histories of the period have been written by pro-Liberal historians rather than by historians of the Labour Party and that as a consequence the Labour Party has been depicted as an ungrateful Party which used the statesman-like Liberals to secure themselves in power and then responded by doing everything possible to secure the downfall of the Liberals.<sup>(17)</sup> Trevor Wilson, for example, referring to the failure of the first Labour Government blandly stated that "for this the overwhelming responsibility lay with Labour. Requiring active Liberal support to retain office, Labour responded not by conciliating or even ignoring the Liberals, but by seeking to pulverise them."<sup>(18)</sup> Ramsay MacDonald, in particular, was singled out for his "hysterical" attitude towards the Liberals. "At no time,"

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16. H.C. Deb. 161, cc 501. et. seq. 7 March 1923.

17. For Example, Trevor Wilson (Ed.) The Political Diaries of C.P. Scott 1911-1928 (London: Collins, 1970), hereafter cited as Scott's Diaries... and the same author's The Downfall of the Liberal Party, op.cit. See also Roy Douglas, The History of the Liberal Party, op.cit....

18. Wilson, Downfall of the Liberal Party 1890-1970 p.268, and Scott's Diaries, pp. 447/8.

commented Wilson, "did he make a practice of informing the Liberal leaders about government business, and his studied offensiveness towards them made their task of keeping him in office peculiarly difficult.(19) In this Wilson is merely representing what Vivian Phillips had said years earlier.

"Our people became increasingly restive and this was intensified by the Government's attitude to them in the constituencies. On the platform in the country not only was there no acknowledgement of the fact that it was largely through our support that they were able to maintain themselves as a Government, but there was a constant stream of ill-natured criticism and frequently of abuse of the Liberal Party."(20)

Few of these criticisms in fact stand up to careful analysis. The main point about the Liberal and Labour Parties was the fact that both were claiming to lead the progressive, democratic section of the nation and that the Labour Party was clearly winning the battle. It was true that in December 1923 their vote was little more than that of the Liberals but Liberal support was already in the process of being eaten away by the democrats on the Left and reactionaries on the Right - a polarisation of opinion which the Labour Party attempted to master. The possibility of a Labour Government simply hastened this process which had already caused bitter exchanges between rank and file of both Parties in the 1922 Parliament. Indeed, as Dr. Douglas noted, after the 1922 Election for the Liberal Party it was a matter of "how to survive.....in the face of the challenge from Labour."(21) A battle from which many across the whole political spectrum expected only one victor.(22) The bitterness of this fight to the death ruled out the possibility of a Lib-

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19. Wilson, Downfall of the Liberal Party, Loc.cit. Italics Mine.
20. Vivian Phillips: My Days and Ways (London: Pullans & Wilson 1943), p.104. The book was privately circulated. Phillips was the Liberal Whip in 1924.
21. Douglas, op.cit., p.165.
22. See, for example, Amery's letter to Geoffrey Dawson quoted by M. Cowling, op.cit., p.341.

Lab coalition although the Nation advocated the formation of a Labour Government dependent upon Liberal support followed by a Liberal Government dependent upon Labour support.(23) It was a bitterness exacerbated by the mistrust which followed what the Labour Party considered to be the sham unity the Liberals had managed to effect shortly before the 1923 Election which left Lloyd George pretending rather ludicrously that he could change overnight from the leader of the reactionary Anti-Socialist bloc to the leader of "progressive" opinion.(24) The hysterical antics of the Rothermere Press, aided and abetted by right-wing Liberals, and the loose-Churchillian talk of an Anti-Socialist Coalition only served to increase the mistrust with which the two wings of the Capitalist Party (Conservative and Liberal) were viewed from the Labour ranks.(25) The attempt by contemporaries, apparently shared by Douglas, to confuse a straightforward constitutional situation only irritated a Labour Movement so close to power.(26)

In such a situation the Labour response was bound to be as arrogant as that of the Liberals was pathetic. Labour was the second largest party in an established "pecking" order - the Liberals were third. If the Liberals supported the Conservatives they would stay in office otherwise it would be Labour's turn. The only chance for the Liberals to gain office was to secure a short administration for Labour followed by a Liberal Party picking up the

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23. Nation; "The Sequel to the Election," 1 December 1923.

24. "We have not forgotten his (Lloyd George's) abortive arrangements with Lord Beaverbrook on the eve of the last General Election for the formation of a centre group....." New Leader 2 May 1924. Lloyd George's manoeuvres can be seen in Cowling, on.cit. Ch.XII. During his most anti-Labour period he accused the Labour Party of being no different from a Communist Party. Times 31 March 1920.

25. See Note 4.

26. See Note 5.

pieces before going to the electorate.(27) The Liberals did not want a quick dissolution; what they wanted was to prove that Socialism did not work but Liberalism did, whether as the formal Government or as the power behind the throne; hence their great boasting about their independent support for a Labour Government following Liberal policies.(28)

The real weakness of the anti-Labour case is, however, summed up in the italicised phrase of Wilson's - "their task of keeping them in office."(29) Asquith and his party did not view this as their task for as the Nation noted on 3 May Asquith had claimed that they, like the Conservatives, were not going to "compromise in any direction (the) unfettered freedom (of the Liberal Party.)." Their support of the Labour Government was conditional, based upon the principle of supporting issues on their merit. As long as this was the case the Labour and Liberal Parties were not allies and the truth was that "Liberals have not a leg to stand on in claiming to be treated as allies against a common enemy."(30)

Moreover, the tactics of running candidates in previously uncontested seats was not limited to the Labour Party. Wilson, for example, complained that the Conservatives were elected to the Liberal seat at Oxford City on a minority vote (31) whereas he neglects to mention that it was Liberal intervention in Holland-with-Boston that cost the Labour Party the seat on 31 July 1924.(32) Clearly, independence in the country was accepted by all parties whatever their pretensions to alliances.

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27. For an examination of this as a Liberal strategy see Ibid., pp.86/7 and Nation: 15 December 1923 pp. 422 and 426: Manchester Guardian 22 December 1923. For a Labour view of the doctrine that a MacDonald ministry could not be followed by a dissolution see H.J. Laski; "The Position of Parties and the Right of Dissolution" (London: Fabian Tract, 210, 1924).

28. See Note 6.

29. Wilson, Downfall of the Liberal Party, p.268.

30. "Liberalism and Labour;" Nation, 3 May 1924.

31. Wilson, Downfall of the Liberal Party, pp. 269/70.

32. See Lyman, The First Labour Government, p.249. The New Leader had accepted the logic of the situation commenting, "We can contemplate no arrangement which would debar us from contesting Liberal seats and we make no complaints when Liberals apply the same logic to us." 2 May 1924.

However, if Lib-Lab relations were poor before the advent of the Labour Government they could only have been worsened by the events that followed. The 1922 Labour Party Conference had passed a resolution opposing "any alliance or electoral arrangement with any section of the Liberal or Conservative Parties." (33) Such opposition was likely to be altered by the Liberal decision not to fight Burnley which they could hardly expect Henderson to lose, however bad his electoral record. (34) The real irritation in Lib-Lab relations came not from a Labour Party which maintained its independent stance, despite its minority position in the Commons, but from the Liberals who seemed to believe that their qualified support for the P.L.P. entitled them to be treated as allies, in complete contradiction of their professed independence. To their cost the Liberals had found themselves in a void, divided between their left and right wings, near to, but completely without power. The "patient oxen" as Lloyd George called his party in an intemperate speech were tired of "fetching and carrying" for an ungrateful government. They clearly wanted some reward for shouldering the burden and that reward, so it appeared, was for the Labour Government to support the Electoral Reform Bill - a P.R. measure introduced by a Liberal back-bencher. (35)

The Labour Government was far more accommodating to the Liberal Party on this issue than is generally admitted in Liberal circles. Despite the Liberal ultimatum that their future support for the Government might depend on its response to the P.R. Bill the Labour Government responded favourably

33. L.P.A.C.R. 1922, p.210. The resolution was moved by Robert Williams. See also John Wheatly in Forward (Glasgow) 8 December 1923.

34. Wilson, Downfall of the Liberal Party, p.267. There was no reason to assume that the Liberals would have gained the Seat, or have obtained sufficient votes to have jeopardised Labour's hold upon it. Politically, of course, it would have been unwise to have attempted to defeat the Home Secretary one of whose tasks was to ensure the passage of favourable legislation to the Liberal cause.

35. See Note 7.

to Asquith's letter asking that the Bill be given facilities to pass into law.(36) Before the Cabinet Meeting on 1 May 1924 Henderson had circulated a memorandum stating "In my opinion it is essential for the Government to take a more definite attitude than it has done hitherto on the question of Electoral Reform. Over 80 Members of the Labour Party committed themselves definitely in favour of proportional representation at the General Election and the Annual Conference has also expressed itself in the same direction."(37) At the meeting MacDonald concluded by emphasising the strength of Liberal feelings that the Bill should receive considerable Government support, giving little indication of a desire to "pulverise" the Liberals by rejecting a Bill which he must have found personally distasteful. In fact the Cabinet decided to meet the P.L.P. on the same night at 7.30.p.m. and by a considerable majority to recommend to the Party that the Bill should receive a Second Reading.(38) The Government's position was, therefore, one of at the least, benevolent neutrality. Unfortunately, for the Liberals the Labour rank and file incensed by the Liberal ultimatum was distinctly hostile. The P.L.P. meeting turned down the Cabinet's proposal and left the Bill to a free vote thereby expressing their contempt for Liberal politicising. The Labour Magazine had spoken for many in the Labour Movement when it said in response to Lloyd George's outburst, "It is for the Liberal Party to decide whether it will work with the Labour Government or against it, not for the Labour Government to make up its mind whether it will work with the Liberal Party or against it."(39)

36. See Note 8.

37. CAB 24/166/CP.275 (24). 29 April 1924. Italics Mine. Henderson's paper gave a concise survey of the situation since 1918. See footnote 7, however, for a basis of a different interpretation.

38. CAB 23/48.29(24)5, 1 May 1924, Italics in the Original. It is not clear whether the probable hostility of the P.L.P. rank-and-file was taken into account by the Cabinet.

39. The Labour Magazine, Vol. III, No.1. (May, 1924), p.24. Cf. (Ibid., II, No.11, March 1924). "A large section of Liberals have apparently set themselves to discredit and break up the Ministry by systematic mischief." Members of the P.L.P. felt resentment against Liberal claims that they controlled the Ministry. See also speech by J. Toole, M.P. for Salford (Manchester Guardian 12 February 1924.)



The Government's duty was to govern the country not to be governed by the Liberals. Such resentment, under the circumstances, was understandable and indeed partly accounts for the resolution which Ernest Bevin proposed to the 1925 Conference advocating that the Labour Party should never again take office as a minority government.(40)

The Debate on the Second Reading of Rendall's Bill brought the party political issues to the floor of the House.(41) Rendall introducing the Bill to extend P.R. as the system of representation generally took a detached line discussing only the general principles involved and the justice of his case. Herbert Morrison was bound by no such inhibitions. Seconding the Duchess of Atholl's motion of rejection Morrison reminded the Liberals of their more than apparent haste (in the light of the previous election result) to have the Bill hurried through and noted too their attempted use of threats to secure its passage. He rightly argued that the Labour Party had not settled its attitude on the question (and in this his analysis had more validity than that of Henderson) and recalled from pre-war days "some exciting Debates on the subject between the present Prime Minister and the Chancellor of the Exchequer, the result of which was that the Prime Minister converted me.....against proportional representation. The Party policy has not been very clear. There have been various decisions - some in favour of proportional representation and in other cases the very convenient expedient of the 'Previous Question' has been resorted to. In recent years certainly, no definite decision had been made."(42)

40. "This Conference is of opinion that in view of the experience of the recent Labour Government, it is unadvisable that the Labour Party should again accept office whilst having a minority of Members in the House of Commons." L.P.A.C.R. 1925, p.244. This is not to say that governing the country and being governed by the Liberals are mutually exclusive just that the two were regarded as such by the Labour Party as a whole.

41. H.C. Deb. 172, cc. 1987 et. seq. Butler, op.cit., p.44. describes the debate as "the best that the system of voting ever provoked after 1918."

42. H.C. Deb. 172, cc 2016 Italics Mine. Morrison was a prominent member of the Anti-P.R. Committee. Some details about the Parliamentary Anti-P.R. campaign can be found in the papers of Sir William Bull which are deposited in the House of Lords Record Office.

Morrison was, as usual, correct, no official decision had been, or in fact would be taken for a couple of years and until that time the matter was one of trial and error with P.R. gaining a superficial hold in some places while in others, such as London and Scotland, the Labour Movement had finally come out against P.R. Morrison went on, "the case from a party point of view is strongest for proportional representation in the interests of Liberalism, and that probably accounts for the decision come to during the recent crisis."<sup>(43)</sup> Proportional representation," he declared, "is a philosophy which is not unnatural to small new parties struggling to get a footing on the electoral field. It is also perfectly natural to decaying political parties, who are doomed to extinction in the course of time, and who can only retain their position by elevating the power of the minority and subjecting the power of the majority."<sup>(44)</sup> Clearly, Morrison thought that the Labour Party had grown out of its infantile attraction to P.R. which as an institutional device was inefficient, ineffective and served only to secure the representation of special interests, the aggregation of minorities and to perpetuate the coalition mentality and with it "dishonesty in Parliamentary tactics."<sup>(45)</sup>

For Morrison, and the majority of the Labour Movement, this ran counter to their view about government. "I believe," said Morrison, "that Government ought to be strong, so strong that it can make concessions to minorities and meet their points of view. It is all very well to say that the present system is a dictatorship and a tyranny. It is not.....Public opinion, if it is

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43. H.C.Deb. 172, cc.2017.

44. Ibid., cc. 2022. Cf. Herman Finer The Case Against Proportional Representation (London: Fabian Society, Fabian Tract, 211, 1924), p.3.

45. H.C.Deb. 172, cc. 2019. See Note 9.

intelligent, if it is energetic, can always bring pressure to bear upon Governments and can get things done." (46) The power of Parliamentary Government was making itself felt.

The I.L.P.'s representatives took a number of views; G.D. Hardie claiming that P.R. without a change in the Cabinet system was a half-hearted measure while J. Maxton tore the heart out of Liberal pretensions with a well-timed interruption of Asquith, who had been illustrating that in the 1906 Election 368,000 votes had secured the return of 60 Liberals while 12 Conservatives required 235,000 votes to find them seats in the House. "Can anyone justify that?" he asked. "Each Conservative on the average represented 19,000 votes and each Liberal Member represented 6,000. That is a case in which the Liberal party got an unfair advantage from the loading of the dice."

"Mr. Potts: Which you did not complain of.

Mr. Asquith: We made the best of it.

Mr. Maxton: So will we." (47)

Arthur Henderson, speaking for the Government, admitted their unhappiness with the existing situation, commenting that it might have evoked a different response if the Bill had been concerned with the A.V. whilst twitting them for their demands on the Government. The Bill was defeated 238:144 with the Labour Party split 90:28 against. (48) The Cabinet Members who voted were 4:2 in favour of the Bill. (49) It is quite clear that the rank-and-file responded out of resentment against the attitude of the Liberals, an attitude criticised by their own journal The Nation, (50) and which in the following

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46. H.C. Deb. 172, cc. 2021. Cf. Economist "Those who believe that we must get back to the two party system naturally regard electoral reform as of slight importance." "The Riddle of the Political Triangle," Economist, 18 October 1924, p.599. Cf. Manchester Guardian 2 May 1924. "Of course the introduction of P.R. would mean the perpetuation of the three party system ...."

47. H.C. Deb. 172, cc. 2025. Italics mine.

48. Wilson has it 91:28. The total strength of the P.L.P. was 192.

49. In favour: C.P. Trevelyan; F.W. Jowett; P.Snowden and J.H. Thomas. Against: J. Wheatley and S. Webb. MacDonald later made it clear that he was not an advocate of P.R.

50. "The Temper of Liberalism" Nation, 10 May 1924. See Note 10.

weeks was still further criticised by Liberal M.P.'s. The change of opinion in the Labour Movement was a genuine change undoubtedly encouraged, but not caused, by the sight of the evident decline of the Liberals in the fight for survival. The Liberal tactics clearly seemed to indicate their concern along these lines and their sudden conversion to P.R., mentioned by Morrison, was further evidence of their agitated state of mind. What justification the Labour Party had for adhering to a change in the electoral system, and the A.V. was by no means a dead issue in the Party, had been destroyed as far as P.R. was concerned by the events of April and May 1924. The collapse of the Liberal Party in "Red Letter" election was merely the coup de grace.

The issue was more or less decided in the Labour Party at the Annual Conference in 1926. In 1925 the Executive had set up a Committee of Inquiry in response to two motions at the Party Conference on the subject of electoral reform - one advocating P.R. and the other condemning it and calling instead for the second ballot.(51) At an N.E.C. meeting on 23 June 1926 "considerable discussion took place with regard to the proposal that the Machinery of Government Committee's Report on Electoral Reform should include Proportional Representation. The Secretary reported that opinion on this matter was so divided that he thought it should be left an open question resolved. That the Advisory Committee be informed that the Executive Committee propose, at the forthcoming Annual Conference, to introduce a motion disagreeing with Proportional Representation."(52)

On 9 October 1926 a Report on Proportional Representation was presented from the Advisory Committee on the Machinery of Government expressing no opinions -

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51. L.P.A.C.R. 1925, p. 292. An article on P.R. by Erailsford in the New Leader whilst recognising that the Liberals were using a P.R. to save them from extinction saw it as a device for controlling the Cabinet. 9 May 1924.
52. N.E.C. Minutes, 39, E.C. 11 1925/26. Min.276. 23 June 1926. Italics in the original.

on the merits of the case, and suggesting that the subject should be enquired into further during the ensuing year, but the N.E.C. resolved to register its opposition to P.R.(53) At the 1926 Annual Conference the delegates heard Egerton Wake announce that the inquiry had not, in fact, been undertaken but that the N.E.C. had concluded "that it was their duty in the interests of the Party to pass the resolution which was opposed to Proportional Representation."(54) The resolution condemning P.R., and by implication favouring the A.V., was passed.

"The Conference affirms that, while Electoral Reform is needed to remedy the existing defects, the proposals of the Proportional Representation Society, involving large constituencies and numerous representatives for each constituency are not in the best interest of democratic government and ought to be opposed."(55) None of this prevented Philip Snowden from continuing to advocate P.R. though few shared his enthusiasm.(56) By 1926, therefore, the first real settled position of the Labour Party on the question of P.R. and the A.V. had been achieved.

The Labour Party, of course, still believed in reform along the lines of the A.V. In one of the few debates on the subject in the House of Commons a Liberal Member, Mr. Wiggins, introduced a motion advocating changes in the electoral machinery of the country arguing that A.V. was the most likely system to succeed but proposing that the whole matter be referred to a non-political Conference. Thomas Johnson (Labour's only participant in the debate) expressed the view of many Scottish Members of the Labour Movement when he declared

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53. N.E.C. Minutes, 40, E.C. 14 1925/26. Min. 380. 9 October 1926.
54. L.P.A.C.R. 1926, p.240 and p.273.
55. Loc.cit. It should be pointed out the question had been constantly reviewed by the N.E.C. In 1919, for example, MacDonald, W.T. Wilson, Jowett and Webb were approached with a view to preparing a Memorandum on the question for future discussion. N.E.C. Minutes, 16, 3 April 1919. However, on every occasion the matter reached the N.E.C. the divisions on the question proved to be irreconcilable.
56. See Reynolds News, 3 April 1927. Criticism of Snowden is in Forward (Glasgow), 9 April 1927,

himself in favour of some alternative to the existing system but not P.R. which, in the case of the Local Authorities in Scotland, had worked against minority viewpoints.(57) The Motion was lost by 205 votes to 41 - 8 of the minority belonging to the Labour Party.(58) By the time the second Labour Government was elected in 1929 the position was clearly established that the Labour Party favoured some reform, not P.R., and that if persuaded it would introduce reformatory measures. The inconclusive result of the 1929 election made it certain that the life of the Labour Government would depend very largely on its willingness to consider changes in the electoral system.

According to David Butler, "one of the main problems of the historian of the Second Labour Government is to discover what action the Liberals took to exact the fullest return for their support in the division lobbies."(59) Butler had little doubt that some bargain did exist although he was never able to conclusively prove the point. Recent evidence of Cabinet deliberations, however, has clarified the issues involved and while it is clear that a formal bargain as such was not agreed upon, the co-operation between the two parties at an early stage in the life of the Second Labour Government was sufficient to designate Liberal support for Labour as being exactive.

It has already been shown that the Party leadership and some rank-and-file membership of the P.L.P. supported the idea of electoral reform along the lines on the alternative vote and that the Party as a whole was not unfavourable to the question of reform. The result of the 1929 election may have modified the

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57. H.C. Deb. 215, cc. 1248 et. seq. 28 March 1928. (1273) Cf. "Proportional Representation in Scotland" Socialist Review, Vol. 16, No. 90, (July-September) 1919, pp. 225/8.

58. 10 including Arthur Henderson and 2 Labour Members (S.P. Viant and W.J. Baker) who had approved P.R. in 1924, while on the other side 5 P.L.P. Members who voted for P.R. in 1924 voted against it on the Liberal Motion. The terms of the motion read, "That this House considers the present method of Parliamentary election unsatisfactory, and is of the opinion that such changes in the electoral machinery of the country should be made as will enable the political opinions of the voters to be reflected in the composition of the House of Commons."

59. Butler, On.cit., p.58.

notions of the more uncommitted members of the Government against further reform of a system that was working in favour of the Labour Party, but in general it can be assumed that the reference in the King's Speech to proposals "to institute an examination of the experiences of the election so that the working of the laws relating to parliamentary elections may be brought into conformity with the new conditions (of complete adult suffrage)"(60) was a reflection of genuine Labour concern to reform the system along the lines of the A.V. (61)

The Labour Party, however, was not only concerned with the method of voting used in the electoral system but with a number of other questions which it had raised for some ten years or more and which had been constantly articulated as demands to be placed before an all-Party Speakers' Conference. Thus when the inquiry referred to in the King's Speech was set up in July 1929 (62) it was given wide and undefined terms of reference within which it was to work. The attitude adopted by the Labour Party representatives on the Ullswater Conference, (63) was perfectly consistent with what had gone before. Although not in favour of the A.V. per se the Party was prepared to accept it, if it was accompanied by a number of other reforms, most of which had been advocated by the Party in the past. (64)

1. A reduction of expense maxima by 1d. per elector.
2. Publication of Political Party Accounts and the limitation of election expenditure by Parties in addition to that which appeared in the Election Returns of Candidates and Agents.
3. Legalisation of Speakers' expenses subject to the conditions laid out in 2.

60. H.C. Deb. 229, cc. 49.

61. MacDonald quickly put his opposition to P.R. on record. Manchester Guardian, 5 June 1929.

62. H.C. Deb. 229, cc. 887. Not 10 June as stated by David Butler, op.cit. p. 59. The Session did not begin until 25 June 1929.

63. See Note 11.

64. Conference on Electoral Reform: Letter from Viscount Ullswater to the Prime Minister, Cmd. 3636, (1930) Parliamentary Papers 1929/30, xiii, 341. Cf. Marion Phillips H.C. Deb. 247, cc. 1735 and the Clynes Memorandum (see Footnote 84 below).

4. Restricting the use of cars to convey people to the Poll.
5. Abolition of all plural voting and the Business Premises and University Franchises.
6. Reintroduction of half-yearly registers.
7. Reduction of the quota of votes required to save a candidate's deposit from one-eighth to one-tenth.
8. The division of two-member constituencies into single membered seats.
9. Simplification of the petition procedure.

All these preconditions of Labour Party acceptance of the A.V. were consistent with the Party's previous arguments. Attempts to reduce election expenditure were made, with only partial success, during the Second Reading of the Representation of the People (Equal Franchise) Bill in 1928.(65) Revision of the Corrupt Practices Act was a frequent Labour demand throughout the 'twenties.(66) The abolition of plural voting was one of the provisions of the pre-war Reform Bill and was constantly repeated as a demand during the various debates on the extension of the franchise to women. The occasion of the extension of the University franchise to the University at Reading in 1928 had seen a split in the Party with MacDonald, C.P. Trevelyan, Sidney Webb and 7 other Members supporting the logic of an unjust system while 41 others led by Tom Johnston and W.M. Adamson registered the P.L.P.'s opposition to the principle involved. The Bill was passed by 90 votes to 45.(67) In 1925, Pethick-Lawrence had proposed a Bill under the ten-minute rule banning the party use of cars and making the Returning Officer responsible for getting the infirm to the poll.(68) Although defeated by 212 to 122 the Bill

65. See Chapter 4, pages 196/8.

66. See Note 12.

67. H.C. Deb. 218, cc. 1364 et. seq. 15 June 1928. Jimmy Maxton spoke in the debate but was prevented by his own laziness from voting in the division with the dissidents.

68. H.C. Deb. 182, cc. 443/8, 25 March 1925. This issue had been raised by the Scottish Advisory Council which had sent a resolution to the N.E.C. (7 May 1921, Vol. 17, N.E.C. Mins.) expressing the opinion that vehicles conveying voters to the poll should be prohibited.



was only formally opposed on the floor of the House. Finally, as has already been noted, the Labour Party vigorously opposed the abolition of half-yearly registers under the Economy (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act in 1926 (and, in fact, was to reintroduce them in 1945) on the grounds that despite a reduction in the qualifying period to three months, an annual register would disenfranchise many of the mobile poor - most of whom allegedly voted Labour.(69)

Moreover, the Party was consistent in its opposition to compulsory voting and, in view of the Party Conference in 1926, to P.R. as well.(70) Thus Lord Ullswater's complaint that "the main purpose of the committee - namely some general agreement as to the amendment of our electoral laws - had failed, as no agreement had been reached or was likely to be reached,"(71) was due not to the Labour Party's insistence on its demands but on the use that was being made of the Committee by the Conservative Party to advocate a selective system of P.R. in which they hardly believed and with the sole intention of embarrassing the Labour Government. Philip Snowden's assertion that the Labour Members "deliberately set themselves to make the Conference abortive"(72) is more an example of his commitment to P.R. than of his detached judgement. David Butler supports Snowden to the extent of claiming that "the conditions upon which they were prepared to consider the alternative vote were wholly irrelevant to the question" and attributes part of this to the "pressure from above" which forced the Labour delegates "to countenance discussion of a reform which almost all of them disliked."(73) What Butler

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69. The cost of preparing two registers (half of which was borne by the local authority and half by the Government) had been a frequent cause of Tory discontent.
70. MacDonald excluded compulsory voting from discussion: See H.C. Deb. 230, cc. 1285: 24 July 1929. A Bill on the subject had been defeated by 158 votes to 74. (23 June 1920) with those members of the P.L.P. who bothered to vote opposing the measure. See Chapter 3 footnote
71. Cmd., 3636, passim.
72. Philip Snowden, Autobiography, II, p. 886. It is a moot point as to who was responsible for the breakdown. From the Labour Party's point of view the coincidence of their principles and political advantage was fortunate.
73. Butler, op.cit., p.62.

fails to realise, of course, is that the "conditions" laid down by the Labour Party were part and parcel of a broad perspective of electoral reform which he, by concentrating solely on systems of voting, has overlooked. Moreover, the N.E.C. Minutes clearly reveal that the Labour delegates were told by the N.E.C. to stick to the nine points, so Butler's claim that "there appears to have been a tug-a-war between the anti-Liberal feeling in the rank-and-file of the party and the desire of the leaders to stay on good terms with the Liberals....."(74) is a figment of a vivid imagination. The Labour Party's position far from being "equivocal" was the logical one of demanding all the reforms that it had previously wanted and which were necessary to equalise the franchise along simple principles of electoral justice.(75)

The collapse of the Conference brought to a head the growing conflict that had been developing between the Labour and Liberal Parties. Earlier in the year Lloyd George had in effect demanded a measure of electoral reform as a condition for Liberal support (76) and as Snowden records discussions took place in September 1930.(77) Recent evidence has more or less confirmed Snowden's version of events.(78) At the Cabinet meeting the week after the eventful meeting MacDonald stressed the real possibility of a Liberal/Tory alliance, the effects of Liberal non-cooperation in the House of Commons on

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74. Ibid., p.62. See Also N.E.C. Minutes, Vol.55. E.C.9 1929/1930 M.407 (20 May 1930). There was some division in the Executive on the subject. The policy was approved by 11 votes to 6.
75. In fairness to Butler it should be pointed out that Viscount Ullswater himself had taken the view that some of the questions raised by the Parties were outside the purview of the Conference. See Butler op.cit., p.61. and Cmnd. 3636.
76. Times, 21 January 1930. An undated document in the Lloyd George Papers would appear to refer to the pre-meeting discussions in the Liberal Party on this subject or possibly represent the Liberal agenda for discussion. Lloyd George Papers (G/84/11).
77. Snowden, Autobiography, II, 883/5. The Secret note (below) seems to refer to this meeting which apparently took place on 19 September 1930.
78. CAB 23/65.56(30) 13. 25 September 1930 and Secret Note CAB 23/90.B. (Fol.18/24) "If the Government could not agree to some reform based on proportional representation or the alternative vote, the Liberal Party did not see how they could continue support." CAB 23/90.B.Folio 22.

the Government, and the fact that commitment to a measure of reform would take two years to complete - a point that Lloyd George had put to MacDonald during their conversations. MacDonald, of course, emphasised that during this period the Government would be able to pursue its Parliamentary programme and the electoral situation might improve. The Cabinet authorised MacDonald and Snowden to attempt to reach an agreement with the Liberals though any conclusions they reached would be implicitly subject to its acceptance by the Labour Executive and Party Conference.

The extent to which this Lib/Lab understanding can be called a bargain has been treated so judiciously by David Butler that little more need be said about it.(79) Two points should, however, be made. In the first place a general agreement was formally entered into between the Liberal and Labour Party under which the Government should consult the former before the introduction of legislation into Parliament.(80) Secondly, as we shall see, the Liberals were informed of the changes that took place in the Bill following its introduction in "dummy" form in December 1930. Furthermore, when the Liberals effectively mangled the Trade Disputes and Trade Unions Bill in February 1931 the Cabinet decided that "at that time it would be politically desirable for the Government to fulfil its pledges to the letter."(81) All this seems to suggest that the "bargain" was a general understanding rather than a specific deal, an understanding geared to the needs of political survival with which the Labour Government found itself confronted. As David Butler succinctly put it, "The Labour Party would certainly not have sponsored the alternative vote for its own sake."(82)

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79. Butler, op.cit., pp.65/6.

80. CAB. 23/65.65(30)24. 29 October 1930.

81. CAB. 23/66. 15(31)10. 25 February 1931. See also below footnote 102.

82. Butler, op.cit., p.66.

The result of the discussions between Liberal and Labour leaders were too inconclusive by the time of the King's Speech in October 1930 and the subject was only vaguely broached in the oration from the throne with the words "a measure of Electoral Reform will be submitted to you." (83) During the next three months, however, the subject was discussed in depth by the Cabinet, which appears to have taken its own decisions quite independent of official Liberal pressure, although obviously they must have borne it in mind. In a memorandum on the proposed Electoral Reform Bill the Home Secretary restated the position of the Labour Party "that some of them were prepared to accept (the A.V.) on condition that other reforms were adopted at the same time." (84) With this in mind Clynes submitted "that if the Bill is to deal at all with the system of electing Members of Parliament it must be on the lines of substituting the alternative vote for the existing system."

Anticipating Conservative opposition to the unscientific basis of the A.V. system and as a political device for Lib/Lab use against the Conservatives, Clynes pointed out that the A.V. was recommended by the Royal Commission of 1910 and was operative in Australia, though the circumstances of each was different now. He might, of course, have added that the Labour Party had introduced an A.V. Bill into the Commons in 1911 or have referred to the implicit resolution in favour of the A.V. passed at the Party Conference of 1926.

What, however, is important is the fact that the alternative vote was to be accompanied by a number of other reforms in accordance with Labour's stated position at the Ullswater Conference and, unless Clynes was deliberately out to deceive future historians, the obvious conclusion must be that Snowden's

83. H.C. Deb. 244, cc. 7.

84. CAB 24: 217:407 (30) 4 December, 1930. Italics Mine.

interpretation of the adoption of the alternative vote by the Labour Party as being implicitly at the behest of the Liberals should be discounted in favour of the view that the Labour Government used the A.V. as a means of securing the passage - or so they hoped - of the Trades Disputes and Trade Unions Bill. In Clynes' opinion the legalisation of speakers' travelling expenses, if included in candidates elections returns, the reduction of the quota of votes required to save a candidates deposit (with the possible exception of the City of London) would meet very little opposition. The other reforms advocated by Clynes however were expected to be opposed in varying degrees.(85) In the case of the provisions regarding motor cars Clynes had decided to wait until discussion of a motion proposed by a Labour Member, Mr. Toole, due for consideration on 10 December, had been completed.(86) At the Cabinet Meeting on 10 December 1930 it was decided that Clynes should have the Bill drafted without waiting for the Cabinet decision on the alternative vote and the other proposals mentioned in the Memorandum.(87)

Two days later Clynes submitted a further Memorandum which discussed the three main forms of the alternative vote (that devised by Professor Nanson, the method recommended by the Royal Commission of 1910 and the proposals made by Lord Craigmyle to the recent electoral conference) before coming to the conclusion that the latter, which the Liberals were expecting would be in the Bill, was the most suitable method to adopt.(88) The memorandum and one

85. Reduction of election expenses: publication of political parties' accounts (aimed especially at pressure groups); restriction on the use of motor cars at elections and abolition of plural voting, business premises and university qualifications; two registers and the alteration and simplification of the petition procedure. An excellent discussion of the Electoral Reform Bill in general and the P.R./A.V. debate in particular is to be found in H.J. Laski: "Why Electoral Reform was wanted: An analysis of the New Bill," Labour Magazine, Vol. IX, (1930/1) pp.439/443.

86. The motion was withdrawn by Toole after assurances by the Government that the subject would be included in the Bill.

87. CAB 23/65.72(30)3. 10 December 1930.

88. CAB 23/217/419. (30). 12 December 1930. *Italics Mine*. This document provides a full description of each system. Clynes accepted that all forms of the A.V. were inaccurate.

submitted by William Adamson, Secretary of State for Scotland, stating the case for the inclusion of adequate polling facilities for remote islands, including where necessary a later date of polling, were both considered in the Cabinet on 17 December. Another memorandum from Clynes considered by the meeting was concerned to have the Cabinet agree to the "long title" of the Bill so that it could be introduced into the House before Christmas in accordance with MacDonald's announcement.(89) On the 18 December the P.L.P. agreed, with the exception of twenty dissidents, presumably the I.L.P. group, consented to adopt the Bill - though there was evidently very little enthusiasm for the measure - on the principle of the A.V. which the N.E.C. had passed the previous day.(90) On 19 December the Bill was introduced in dummy form. It was "to amend the Law relating to Parliamentary elections and electors by requiring such elections to be on the principle of the alternative vote and in that connection making provision with respect to the division of two-member constituencies, abolishing university constituencies, and the business premises qualification for registration, facilitating the recording of their votes by electors who change their residences, enabling the holding of the poll to be postponed in those portions of a constituency which are separated from the mainland, making provision with respect to speakers at election meetings, regulating the use of vehicles at elections and reducing the maximum scale of election expenses; and to restrict the purposes for which the funds of political organisations may be applied; and for other purposes consequential upon the matters aforesaid."(91)

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89. H.C. Deb. 245, cc. 2393, 4 December 1930. See Note 13.

90. Minutes of this meeting can be found in N.E.C. Minutes, 57, E.C.4, 18 December 1930, M.160.

91. H.C. Deb., 246, cc. 1631.

The only glaring omission was the half-yearly register although a number of other provisions, including one dealing with absent voters, were eliminated by the Cabinet during the drafting stage. It is important to note, however, that the Bill still not discussed in great detail by the Cabinet and that behind the "long title" there was little of substance that could be called a Bill, primarily because of technical difficulties in drafting. The Bill was only completed in first draft on the 16 December 1930, revised by 30 December 1930, and then discussed with the Liberals on 5 January 1931 - discussions which were deemed by the Cabinet to be "very desirable."

Apart from the Liberals the reaction to the Bill had been to say the least, lukewarm. The Conservatives pledged themselves to total opposition to the Bill while it was not clear that the P.L.P. would support the Bill with anything more than apathetic resignation. The Cabinet, however, had still not completed their deliberations on the Bill. Following discussions with the Liberals, it was agreed that a small body of the Cabinet (92) should review the situation, which they did, submitting a memorandum stating "our view is that if it is essential to reduce the scope of the Bill and to lessen its controversial character for reasons of Parliamentary time, some, if not all of the following four Clauses could be dropped, as from the Labour point of view they are the least important and valuable." (93) The clauses involved were the provision for facilitating voting for electors who changed their residence during the currency of a register; the clause dealing with the postponement of polls on remote islands; the authorisation of the employment of speakers at public meetings held for promoting or procuring the election of a

92. Clynes, Henderson, Shaw and Kennedy.

93. CAB 24/217/432, (30) Italics Mine. At the Cabinet Meeting of 6 January 1931 "it was deemed that it was essential .... to reduce the scope of the Bill and lessen its controversial character for reasons of Parliamentary time ...." CAB 23/66. 1(31)1.

candidate and the clause dealing with the proposal to restrict expenditure by political organisations in connection with elections. The group recognised that dropping these clauses might be politically embarrassing. Embarrassing or not the Cabinet agreed to omit three of the four clauses, retaining the one dealing with remote islands, and took the final decision to abolish the business clause rather than allowing a dual franchise to be restricted by limitations on the number of votes to be exercised to a single one only and the alternative vote was specifically drawn up to restrict the vote to two candidates. The Cabinet also decided to exempt the City of London from the abolition of the business premises vote although those who exercised their vote there would not have a second vote. The group were also asked to look into the question of limiting and preventing "the use of such new methods as broadcasting of political meetings and 'talkie' films, except so far as included in candidates expenses" but it was decided later that the application of such a limitation would be too complex to follow through.(94)

On 22 January 1931 the Representation of the People Bill was withdrawn and the Representation of the People (No.2) Bill introduced the following day,(95) with the alterations agreed to included or omitted as the case required. The Second Reading took place on 2 and 3 February(96) when Clynes said that it was the duty of a Government to accept the responsibility of introducing measures upon which the Ullswater Committee had failed to agree. He frankly accepted that "the proposals mentioned in the original title but deleted from the Bill, might have been found to give rise to considerable controversy and would certainly have taken up more Parliamentary time than we could possibly

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94. CAB 23/6. 2(31)7. 14 January 1931.

95. H.C.Deb. 247, cc. 344/6 and 509/10.

96. Not 24 February as stated by Butler, op.cit., p.69. H.C.Deb. 247, cc. 1467. et.seq.



afford" and he denied allegations that it was the Liberals who had forced the changes.(97) The proposals concerning the amendment of the Corrupt Practices Act were to be found in "Labour and the Nation" in which the party "reserved to itself the right to promote legislation to secure a more fitting political instrument to implement the party's programme."(98) The alternative vote was not a perfect method of election but a "fair and reasonable" way of securing a representative Parliament. Plural voting was castigated as "the symbol of wealth, of good fortune, of position (and) of vested interests."(99) Apart from the harmless exception of the City of London the Government intended to abolish all forms of plural franchises. Vehicles to be used at elections were to be the responsibility of the Returning Officers who should have the power to "allot whatever vehicles or motor cars (that) are placed at his disposal on an equitable and a fair and reasonable basis."(100)

The weakness of the Government's case was highlighted immediately by the opponents of the Bill. It was irrelevant to the economic situation, the measure was not wanted by the Labour Movement, university representation had proved its worth and no longer represented "the closed boroughs of the rich," despite the abolition of the business vote the City of London, "the very centre of business representation" had been excluded. Conservatives in particular referred to the alleged deal with the Liberals and the party political motives that were involved. The P.L.P. representatives took different lines within a broad framework of agreement with the principles of the Bill; few joined Arthur Henderson Jnr. in full-fledged support of the measure. Sir Ernest Bennett, who had been a Labour Party representative on the Ullswater Committee,

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97. The Liberals had in fact agreed to the changes even if they did not initiate them.

98. H.C. Deb. 247, cc. 1469/70.

99. Ibid., cc. 1473.

100. Ibid., cc. 1478.

spoke in favour of the alternative vote whilst attacking the University franchise. (101) Mr. Lang, Member for Oldham, thought the Bill gave the opportunity to halt the decline of Parliament, expressed doubts about the practicability of the clause concerning motor vehicles and thought the abolition of university franchises was a mistake. Few Labour Members shared the latter conviction, while front Bench spokesmen emphasised the extension of democracy under the Bill, MacDonald going out of his way to state that P.R. was too representative of minority interests rather than majority rule. A number of speakers, including Marion Phillips and Jimmy Maxton, preferred no changes to be made because they were either unnecessary or (in Maxton's case) irrelevant to the pressing problem of unemployment, or the more fundamental problems of a Parliamentary machinery which stifled minority opinion. Cecil Wilson, (102) an executive Member of the P.R. Society, advocated P.R. as the only solution, quoting an old article by MacDonald, to back it up. Mr. Wilson abstained from voting but the second Reading received a 295:230 majority.

Any understanding that might have existed between the Labour and Liberal Parties was effectively destroyed by the Liberals' effective destruction of the Trade Disputes and Trade Unions Bill late in February 1931. More than anything this action by the Liberal Party completely alienated backbench Labour Party opinion and produced the kind of disaffection that the Conservative Press had previously conjured out of their imagination. The Cabinet, however, was in no position to do much about the situation. If they were to drop the Electoral Reform Bill the charges of a bargain would have been substantiated and the chances of Liberal co-operation on other, more important, measure could have been

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101. Ibid., cc. 1523/4.

102. Member for Sheffield Attercliffe. See his letter in the Times, 15 January 1931. Mr. Wilson remained an active member of the P.R. Society throughout the 'thirties. See Times, 10 November 1933 and Manchester Guardian, 12 September 1936.

fatally reduced. As a result the Cabinet decided after a short discussion of the situation, "that at this stage it would be politically desirable for the Government to fulfil its pledges to the letter."(103.)

Thus on 3 March MacDonald moved that discussion of the Bill be limited to five days in Committee and three (104) days for the Report stage and third reading. Despite vigorous opposition MacDonald's case against unnecessary repetition of the arguments at all the stages remained unanswered, and in the end the offer of an extra day at the Committee stage was accepted as a sufficient Governmental response to the demands made.

The long process of discussion began on 4 March with a refusal by the Speaker to accept instructions which would have dealt with the redistribution of seats and proportional representation. The latter instruction was a political move initiated by the Conservatives but the former was introduced by G. Raynes, a Labour Member, who had tried to raise the issue - with little success - during the Second Reading.(106) The Liberals then moved an amendment which would have applied the alternative vote to Northern Ireland - a provision which had been dropped from the Bill after representations from the Northern Ireland Government. Clynes resisted the amendment on grounds of political expediency. It was not wanted by those concerned and was not worth the trouble that would be caused by its inclusion in the Bill.(107) The Home Secretary's appeal for the amendment not to be pressed was successful. On the wider issue

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103. CAB 23/66, 15(31)10. 25 February 1931. Italics Mine. See Also f.note 81 above.

104. Not two days as stated by Butler, op.cit., p.71.

105. H.C.Deb. 249, cc. 229 et.seq.

106. H.C.Deb. 247, cc. 1701.

107. Clynes used the curious argument that the Unionists in Northern Ireland had majorities so great that the application of the alternative vote would make no difference to the situation. H.C.Deb. 249, cc. 442/3.

of the alternative vote the Government's appeal for support was not well received, for although Sir Ernest Bennett and Mr. Muggeridge argued in favour of the alternative vote those Labour Members who spoke in the debate attacked the Government's line. Commander Kenworthy attacked the alternative vote in a manner which implied that he accepted the bargain theory and apparently abstained from voting in the lobbies. John Beckett was far more forthright on behalf of the I.L.P., "The Labour Party do not want (this Bill) and it is a most astonishing thing that a Labour Government in defiance of their own policy.....are going to put on the Whips in support of a Measure which..... is brought in against their own judgement."(108) For the Government Clynes argued that the alternative vote was a politically just solution to an unjust situation. Unlike P.R. the change was not a big one and thus it required no mandate from the electorate, but it was vital to the Bill and could not, therefore, be the subject of a free vote. "Our purpose is to enlarge the liberty of the individual elector and in no sense to lessen the freedom or the right of any candidate or any party."(109) The clause was passed but with the I.L.P. contingent and John Bromley voting against with some 27 others absenting themselves.

On 5 March the division of double member constituencies, except the City of London and University constituencies, proved to be uncontroversial and it was approved without a division after a discussion which centred on the question of securing impartiality in the drawing of the boundaries. This was followed by a lively debate on the abolition of the business vote on the Clause which abolished the business vote, other than in the City of London, and provided that

108. Ibid., cc 484/5. Cf. Fenner Brockway "The Labour Party is spending hours on an Electoral Reform Bill for which there is no enthusiasm and the central purpose of which - the Alternative Vote - it would reject if it were honest with itself. Everyone knows that the Bill is only a tactical device to tie the Liberals to the Government." New Leader, 20 March 1931.

109. H.C. Deb. 249, cc.533.

no person should vote at a general election in more than one constituency. The clause was widely resented in the Labour Party and an amendment was moved by Oliver Baldwin to remove the City's exemption from the abolition of the business vote, an exemption which Clynes had justified on the grounds that without the business vote the City could not be preserved as a constituency. The dissidents, in which the I.L.P. played a prominent role, were not particularly concerned to maintain this blatant piece of sentimentality which had been illogically inserted into a Bill allegedly designed to regularise the rational working procedures of the democratic principle. The City, they argued, was an anachronism; finance could claim no special place; the exemption was out of place in a democratic Bill. Clynes argued that the preservation of the City was the lesser of two evils,(110) the inclusion of which in the Bill, though inequitable, was harmless. The paucity of the Home Secretary's argument was measured by the size and quality of the 206 dissidents who entered the 'No' lobbies. Although the Government voted against the amendment a number of Junior Ministers led by Clement Attlee, Tom Johnston and Hugh Dalton supported it.(111) The embarrassment that this caused MacDonald and Clynes, who had been given freedom to determine points which might arise regarding free votes,(112) forced the Cabinet to decide to get Arthur Henderson to make it clear that a free vote on the Government side meant abstention or support of the Government's policy. The vote on the whole clause took the form of a straight party division, though there had been very little discussion of the merits of plural voting per se.

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110. Presumably the preservation of the business vote on the one hand and the destruction of the City as a constituency on the other.
111. Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster: Under Secretary of State at the Scottish Office and Under Secretary of State at the Foreign Office, respectively.
112. CAB. 23/66. 16(31)4. 4 March 1931. See also N.E.C. Minutes, 58, E.C.8 1930/1. M.262, 10 March 1931.

The abolition of the University constituencies was considered in Committee on 16 March when an amendment to the relevant clause was moved exempting its application to Queen's University Belfast on the grounds that this would affect the Irish political settlement which had been exempted from all the other clauses under the Bill. The Government claimed that the University was not represented in Parliament at the time of the settlement and that with only a 3,300 electorate it was too small to be represented. To make an exemption in Northern Ireland would be indefensible and would not be an interference in the internal affairs of Northern Ireland. The Amendment was narrowly defeated by 178 to 168, with one Labour Member, Major Church voting in favour. On the Clause itself Lord Hugh Cecil moved its rejection on the grounds that the principle it represented (equalitarian democracy) was a fallacy. The system was not chosen by the people exercising their electoral rights but for the people who legitimised the process by the performance of the public function of voting.

Representation in the country was not based on democracy but on communities in which the few led and the many obeyed. The University, as a community, ought to have the right of representation in Parliament. They were obvious leaders in thought and action. He was supported by Major Church who argued that a university education entitled individuals to special representation in the House. University education had long been an ideal of the Labour Movement as the contributions of Tawney and Cole had illustrated. The modern universities were no longer upper-class preserves; the freedom of party enjoyed by the University Member should be maintained. He appealed to the Government to allow a free vote on the issue and to let graduates keep their privileges in the University constituencies.(113)

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113. The weeks preceding the discussion in Parliament had been thick with the activities of a strong retentionist lobby. See Butler, op.cit., p.74.

Clynes took Cecil to task on his theory that special interests rather than localities should be represented - which is what Cecil meant in essence.

Clynes: "The mere possession of a degree does not distinguish a man from his fellows. As education becomes more widespread the arguments for separate representation of universities become less and less plausible. If university representation is to be retained, it would be equally sensible and fair to give representation to the great professional interests such as law, medicine..... and even to trade unions....."

An Hon. Member: "They are represented at the present time!"

Clynes: "Yes, trade unions have representation, but they are represented through the ordinary procedure of popular election."(114)

The Labour case was based on the necessity of elections as a proving ground for potential members. The anti-democratic nature of special franchises, the reactionary nature of the franchise and its electorate (implying the class bias in the system) were unacceptable and it was, Clynes pointed out, foolish to suggest that University Members were the only Members of rare intellectual distinction.(115) Tactically this was an error because as MacNeill Weir acidly commented, "Nobody proved, or indeed, attempted to prove the justice of allowing a man or woman to vote because they had a University degree."(116) It was the principle not the theory built upon that principle to which the Labour Party was opposed. The Government was defeated by 4 votes (277 to 273) with 2 Labour Members (Major Church and Josiah Wedgewood) voting with the Opposition, while 20 other Labour Members were absent unpaired. The 20 Members were afterward subject to a good deal of criticism as were the Liberals who had been evenly divided on the issue. The Daily Herald declared, "Few people in the Labour Movement will fail to deplore the defeat of the Government on the issue of

114. H.C.Deb. 249, cc. 1744/5.

115. Loc.cit. Cf. Greenwood, "men of unquestioned intellectual eminence have been refused representation in Parliament by university graduates." cc. 1802.

116. Forward (Glasgow), 28 March 1931.

university representation in the Commons. It is an issue on which the Labour Party should have been unanimous."(117) Rumours that the Government might drop the Bill were quickly stifled with the Government's announcement that it would proceed with the Bill after the Easter recess.(118) The same day the Cabinet was informed that the Opposition Parties would apparently not challenge them if they refused to accept the consequences of that defeat(119) but in the following month decided not to reopen the issue.

The clause providing for the postponement of polls in remote islands was carried without a division. The clause dealing with the restriction on cars was not so universally approved. The Clause provided that no-one should be driven to the poll except by a resident member of his family, or in a car voluntarily put at the disposal of the returning officer and under his orders. The clause was not affected by Toole's motion in the House of Commons on 10 December 1930, the subject had been one which had been put forward by Labour Members at the Ullswater Conference and had been a long-standing grievance of the Labour Movement. Clynes, however, had grave doubts about the practicality of the Clause and had written in his earlier Memorandum to the Cabinet "that in no circumstances would it be right to impose upon the returning officer the duty of allocating the vehicles put at their disposal."(120) His colleagues had over-ruled him but must have felt uneasy as the weakness of the Clause was effectively exposed by their ironic opponents.(121) The underlying weakness of the Clause as drafted was that it was a party clause aimed at

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117. Daily Herald, 18 March 1931.

118. H.C. Deb. 249, cc. 2038. 18 March 1931.

119. CAB. 23/66. 18(31)5, 18 March 1931.

120. CAB. 24/217/428. 16 December 1930.

121. For the debate see H.C. Deb. 251, cc.985 et.seq. 22 April 1931.



attacking the superior vehicle carrying capacity of the Conservatives. The Government's intention, however, was to equalise the franchise not to attack the Tory party per se and in this vein Stafford Cripps commented during the debate, "there clearly is a case made out for some method - it may not be the precise method laid down in this Clause - of arriving at a fairer use of cars"(122) while Clynes, conceded that the Clause was perhaps not the "last word in perfect draftsmanship....."(123) and agreed that it was not incapable of amendment. The point was that the Government had "endeavoured to equalise the race between the poorer voters and the rich, and to diminish the force of the weapon of wealth which owners of money now have against poor candidates in Parliamentary elections."(124) The debate collapsed into a series of amendments, in varying degrees of acceptability, before the guillotine fell and the principle of limiting the use of cars was approved by 263 votes to 229.

The following day the Clause reducing the maximum scale of election expenses from 5d. to 4d. per elector in the boroughs and from 6d. to 5d. in counties was considered by the Committee. A number of variations were offered with Jimmy Maxton offering 2d. and 3d. as the required amounts necessary to prevent the lavish expenditure designed to influence voters away from their better or more rational judgement. Marion Phillips thought the suggestions laudable but impracticable. She noted that the average expenses of all candidates in the English and Welsh counties were 3.14d. and 3.29d., that of Labour candidates 1.91d. and 2.15d. and that of Conservatives 4.7d. and 4.53d. respectively. "It is perfectly clear, that on the average," she concluded,

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122. Ibid., cc.1006.

123. Ibid., cc.1043.

124. Loc.cit. Clynes might have noticed that in Oldham the parties had agreed to ban all cars during elections: a point made on several occasions by Mr. Lang. H.C.Deb. 246, cc. 459. Cf. H.C.Deb. 252, cc. 2240.

"Conservative candidates can fight their elections within the figures suggested by this Bill."(125) It would do those who spent more no harm to reduce their expenditure, nor would it incur them in any hardship. All Opposition argument was to no avail when Clynes pointed out that in the 1929 election only 162 candidates had exceeded the proposed new rate and of these only 80 were successful.(126) A number of other Labour Members felt that Maxton's proposed limit was set too low, although T. Lewis (Southampton) did support his amendment. The amendment, however, was not called and it was the Conservative amendment that was discussed in detail and defeated 258 to 68. Following the approval without a division of the Clause itself a number of consequential amendments to the Bill were proposed. A number of new clauses were ruled out of order. Three were proposed by Mr. Cecil Wilson, designed to combine the English University constituencies into one returning seven members, the Oxbridge constituencies into one and to apply the principle of P.R. (Single Transferable Vote) to the City of London. Another Clause, proposed by Oliver Baldwin, would have reduced the City of London's representation in the Commons from two to one.

In the discussion that took place on the rules to be adopted in applying the alternative vote system a Conservative, Sir Hilton Young, moved that the system advocated by Professor Nanson be adopted.(127) The Government spokesman recognised the weakness of the A.V. and the logic of the Nanson system but still dismissed the latter as impracticable while Sir Stafford Cripps reminded

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125. H.C. Deb. 251, cc. 1195.

126. 2 Labour, 60 Conservative and 18 Liberals. Butler appears to have misinterpreted what Clynes said. See Butler, op.cit., p.77 and Cf. H.C. Deb. 251, cc.1204.

127. H.C. Deb. 252, cc.1013. et. seq. Clynes had already rejected Nanson's scheme at the drafting stage of the Bill.

Sir Hilton that he had himself doubted the practicability of the Nanson system as recently as 4 March. Conservative support for the amendment was ironic, if not sarcastic, and it was easily defeated by 242 votes to 158. An amendment proposed by Herbert Samuel to allow the use of as many preferences as there were candidates found Mr. Wilson's support and was readily accepted by the Home Secretary, much to the chagrin of the Conservatives who forced a fruitless division on the issue. Other Conservative amendments seem to have been blocking devices although one which would have postponed the counting of the votes until the day after the election gained the support of Mr. Tinker, Labour Member for Leigh, who declared, "If I were free I would vote for the Amendment." (128) He was not free, however, and joined the Home Secretary in opposition to the amendment, though Clynes did promise to give the question further consideration before the Report Stage. A proposal to count second preferences as half a vote found favour with George Strauss and Commander Kenworthy who abstained as a mark of their views while Chuter Ede expressed similar sentiments but still voted to defeat the amendment.

The Report Stage was less eventful partly because the Government had accepted defeat on the University Clause and had put down a backbench attempt to resurrect the issue. (129) The Government did, however, introduce a new clause specifying that no one could vote more than once in a general election and the debate it invoked was one between the advantages of plural voting and the philosophy of one man, one vote. The superior voting strength of the latter won the day. A Conservative proposal to allow candidates four cars per polling district was also rejected though during the debate Mr. McKinley spoke for many rank-and-file members of the P.L.P. when he said that they were

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128. Ibid., cc.1090.

129. Ibid., cc.1997. et seq. 20 May 1931. CAR 23/67. 28(31)9. 13 May 1931, and 19(31)9 10 May 1931.

"not opposed to supplying reasonable means of conveyance to people who otherwise cannot get to the poll because of age or infirmity"(130) Other Labour Members spoke in favour of an amendment in Clynes' name which provided for one car for each candidate for every thousand electors in the constituency in the counties and half that number in the boroughs; an amendment which was finally accepted by the House. A Liberal amendment excluding some 54 constituencies of more than 400 square miles in area from the operation of the clause was accepted.

The Third Reading (131) was a repetition of most of what had gone before. Sir Ernest Bennett reiterated the value of the alternative vote. S.F. Perry confessed a preference for P.R. and regretted the retention of university representation, indicating a readiness to take up the challenge that the Lords might make on the Bill - the possibility of which had been indicated in an intemperate Churchillian outburst. Chuter Ede sneered at the Conservatives' selective love of P.R.(132) while another Labour Member looked forward to an early deletion of the clause which had continued the anomaly of university representation. The Government's performance was well rounded off by Mr. Short who made many effective points against the plural vote.(133) The Bill was passed by a majority of 50 and went to the Lords.

The Lords' response was at first neutral and then hostile as the Conservative peers systematically tore the heart out of the Bill in Committee.(134)

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130. H.C. Deb. 252, cc.2275.

131. H.C. Deb. 253, cc.43. et.seq.

132. The Conservatives were willing to apply it to the large boroughs where it would affect the Labour Party but not to the counties where it could have rebounded against themselves.

133. Ibid., cc.161.

134. See Butler, op.cit., pp.80/2.

Clynes submitted a memorandum (135) asking whether the Cabinet wished to press the issue with the House of Lords before the Summer adjournment but the Cabinet refused to do so, (136) despite Clynes' optimistic claims that he could reach an agreement with their Lordships. The events of August, which destroyed the Labour Government, effectively killed P.R. as an issue in the Labour Party, while the election of September destroyed forever the Liberal threat to Labour and with it the need of a Labour Party thirsting for office to be interested in the death throes of a party that had forced upon it issues it had not welcomed.

In many ways the views of the Parliamentary Labour Party in the 'Twenties on the subject of Parliament and its prestige were fashioned by the personality and outlook of its leader Ramsay MacDonald. MacDonald's attitude had always been conservative in his criticism of Parliament. "He believed in House of Commons methods; he had a complete mastery of procedure there and a reverence for the ancient complicated ritual." (137) If the Party did not share MacDonald's reverence for the procedure they accepted his mastery of procedure as unique. With the solid exception of the I.L.P. Members no attempt was made to use Parliamentary procedure to the Party's advantage and certainly not in a manner likely to provoke their allies and opponents into retaliation against them in the House.

The Parliamentary situation created by the General Election of 1929, which left Labour within twenty seats of a majority but still dependent on the Liberals for the implementation of policies the prestige of Parliament was inevitably bound to decline in the eyes of the various factions within the Party. True, the House was regarded as the main platform for publicising

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135. CAB 24/222/178. (31). 17 July 1931 and CAB 23/67. 39(31)3, 20 July 1931.
136. CAB 23/67. 39(31)3. 20 July 1931. It was generally expected that the Parliament Act would be used. "Notes of the Week" Economist 18 July 1931.
137. Mary Agnes Hamilton "Ramsay MacDonald" Atlantic Monthly, 161, (April, 1938), pp. 452/62(453).

Labour's ideals and policies but it was seen, on occasion with regret, as an institution more suited to the prevention of progress. In the opinion of the I.L.P. it was generally made for gradualists. Yet the I.L.P. dominated the Left Wing of the P.L.P., having failed to convince their colleagues not to accept office whilst in a minority, embarked upon a policy of reasoned amendments and deliberate obstruction which itself reduced the prestige of Parliament as an efficient working body rather than an ineffective "talking-shop." In asserting the right to remain free of Party discipline the I.L.P. were exacerbating the de-emphasis on legislatures that was already in existence.

The sources of this de-emphasis were manifold. The Rise of Fascism in Italy and to a lesser extent to hostile nature of the Soviet regime towards Parliamentary Government stressed the advantages strong Government had in executive power. The elitist structure of the Party and the political structure in Great Britain reinforced the weakness of a reformation from below; for with the possible exception of devolution, most Labour Ministers were concerned with problems of political and personal executive power rather than increasing the prestige of Parliament. Indeed amongst the solid trade union rank-and-file there were no doubts expressed as to the future viability of Parliamentary institutions in the furtherance of Socialism. John Scurr, for example, writing in April 1930 declared, "Ramsay MacDonald, typifies the democracy. Born of the people, over-cautious in temperament, sometimes failing because he has waited too long, yet surely advancing towards better things. Under such men in the future Parliament will not decline in prestige; it will be enhanced."(138) Earlier in the same article Scurr had extolled the art of compromise and denounced extremism - Oswald Mosley was such an extremist. Shortly after his narrow defeat at the Labour Party

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138. J. Scurr, "The Prestige of Parliament," T.G.W.U. Record April 1930, p.264.

Annual Conference Mosley asserted that the basic economic problems of the country could not be overcome by the existing system of Parliamentary Government and suggested that "it was necessary to free the Executive from the procedure which was bringing the work of any Government to a standstill." (139) In early December the Mosley Manifesto was issued to the press. (140) Its signatories declared that, "it is impossible to meet the economic crisis with a 19th century Parliamentary machine. While the power to change the Government must, of course, be retained by Parliament, wide powers to deal with the present economic crisis must be vested in the Government of the day for the (emergency) period subject only to the general control of Parliament .... An emergency Cabinet of not more than 5 Ministers, without portfolio, should be invested with power to carry through an emergency policy. The normal Cabinet of department chiefs should be retained for less frequent meetings to deal with normal business." (141)

The Manifesto's attack on Parliament as it stood in effect represented an attack on MacDonaldisism in the Party's attitude to Parliament. In it can be seen the seeds of Cripps' Socialist League proposals in their wildest form, (142) although the link between them is explicable mainly in the person of Harold Laski whose penchant for plagiarism was almost unequalled in the annals of the intellectual Left. Yet the results of this reaction to Parliamentary conservatism, or perhaps conservation might be a more appropriate term to use, were in the short-run almost negligible, for the Party's attitude

139. Times, 10 October 1930.

140. Observer, 7 December 1930; Times and Guardian, 8 December 1930. The Manifesto was signed by 17 Members of the P.L.P. and A.J. Cook.

141. Mosley Manifesto, Ibid.

142. Two of the signatories (John Strachey and Aneurin Bevan) became strong supporters of Cripps in the 'thirties.

to Parliamentary reform was dominated by the most basic of all political instincts, that of survival, to which all other problems must take second place. It was when that battle was feared lost that distinctly Labour reforms were formulated and it is to the course of that battle we now turn.

The experience of the Second Labour Government was as bitter and frustrating as that of its predecessor in 1924 and for many of the same reasons. It was, in the first place, a minority Government, dependent for its Parliamentary majorities upon a Liberal Party which by January 1931 was, because of its own internal divisions, becoming increasingly unreliable. In February and March of that year a divided Liberal Party had effectively destroyed the Trade Disputes and Trade Unions Bill and helped prevent the abolition of the University franchise in the Representation of the People Bill. Lloyd George's openly-declared policy was to discredit the Labour Party without discrediting its Liberal Parliamentary supporters. The antics of the Liberal Party were, however, of secondary importance compared with the House of Lords whose destructive activities culminated in the destruction of Trevelyan's Education Bill and the savaging of the Representation of the People (No.2) Bill.

However, if the external difficulties of the Government led to the resignation of Trevelyan his letter to MacDonald made it clear that its internal difficulties would prove to be its undoing. (143) MacDonald had begun badly, alienating the Clydesiders by the omission of Wheatley (the most conspicuous success of the 1924 Government) from the Cabinet; indicating to many his aversion to critical opinions. His opening speech to the House of Commons in which he talked of Parliament acting as a Council of State convinced the

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143. "After some time I have realised that I am very much out of sympathy with the general method of Government policy. In the present disastrous condition of trade it seems to me that the crisis requires big Socialist measures as the only hope rather than piecemeal and ineffective economies."



left-wing, and after the events of 1931 many others too, that MacDonald had sold his principles for the privileges of office.(144) The fact that 131 Labour M.P.'s voted against the Government during its term of office is indicative of the extent of this belief as well as the poor quality of leadership exercised by MacDonald and his colleagues.(145)

The quality of the Government leadership was weakened still further by the individuals appointed to vital offices. J.H. Thomas was made Lord Privy Seal with special responsibility for Unemployment and Philip Snowden Chancellor of the Exchequer. Thomas' power in the Labour Movement had originally been based on his connection with the National Union of Railwaymen of which he was a still prominent member until the events of 1931.(146) His political skill was essentially that of a trade union negotiator; his political views were decidedly conservative, his social graces positively endearing. It was not in his nature to challenge authority, as the 1926 General Strike had shown, and in the Cabinet of 1929-31 Snowden represented the authority to which Thomas deferred. When Thomas' more able subordinates gave their general support to Mosley's schemes for economic reform it was sufficient for MacDonald that once Thomas had raised the question of resignation it was Mosley who was to go. The old leadership, despite its painfully clear inadequacies, was preserved and the dominance of the Treasury maintained through the personality of Philip Snowden whose role in precipitating the economic crisis of August 1931 was a crucial one.

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144. "I wonder how far it is possible, without in any way abandoning our Party positions, to consider ourselves more as a Council of State and less as arrayed regiments facing each other in battle?....so far as we are concerned co-operation will be welcomed.....so that by putting our ideas into a common pool we can bring out.....legislation and administration that will be of substantial benefit for the nation as a whole." H.C.Deb. 229, cc.64/5.

145. Cross, op.cit., p.256. "The Party has been greatly disturbed during this Parliament by a growing lack of discipline which has seriously hampered its work." L.P.A.C.R. 1931, p.93.

146. Thomas remained Political Secretary of the National Union of Railwaymen having been granted secondment to the Government for its period of office. Shortly after the events of 24 August the N.U.R. Executive held that the secondment had ended with the resignation of the Second Labour Government.

Snowden had long been regarded, without too much reason, as the Labour Party's expert on finance.<sup>(147)</sup> As Chancellor in the First Labour Government he had proved his orthodoxy to the Treasury and but for his Socialist rhetoric, acid tongue and dislike of speculative ventures, would have made a first rate merchant banker. It was not in Snowden's nature to change the institutions in which he worked or to question the passive role of Government in a capitalist world. His economic policies, with the exception of Free Trade, were identical with those of his most vociferous opponents and his outlook that of a nineteenth century liberal. For whilst Snowden was willing to attribute the high level of unemployment to the evils of Capitalism he would not consider the application of Socialism as a practical cure and, indeed, held most strongly the view that any alternative methods to those tried and trusted by the Treasury were automatically wrong. Thus the maintainance of the Gold Standard, the Balanced Budget and Free Trade became to Snowden articles of faith rather than policy choices. To him, and in all fairness to many of his generation, the Mosley Memorandum, the Liberal "Yellow Book" and the T.U.C. were all advocating not simply new, but positively dangerous, doctrines.

Thus it was with clear deliberation that Snowden began the chain of events that led to his joining MacDonald in the National Government when late in January 1931 he authorised the Treasury to submit an alarmist memorandum to the Royal Commission on Unemployment Insurance. Snowden was determined to secure the victory of "sound finance" against these new doctrines and to persuade his party that the only way to deal with the prospective Budget deficit that was forecast for the coming financial year was in accordance with these principles and that such a victory would necessitate economy in the public sector. He set out "to create an atmosphere of public anxiety over the Budgetary situation"<sup>(148)</sup>

147. Clayton writing in 1926 made reference to the fact that Snowden had worked in the Inland Revenue. Clayton, op.cit., p.174.

148. Cross, op.cit., p.263. On pp.262/3 Cross deals with the theoretical alternatives open to Snowden.

in order to win the Labour Party from the unsound policy of governmental interference in the market economy that its high level of public expenditure had committed it to. The history of events between January and August 1931 can be seen very largely in terms of the financial orthodoxy and political tactics of Philip Snowden against the political instincts and prejudices of the Labour Movement's organs and centres of influence.

The Treasury Memorandum, which had warned of the instability of the British financial system should State borrowing be continued on the existing vast scale, had been issued with Snowden's full support but without the Cabinet's prior approval - a fact of which Webb complained. By his unilateral action Snowden had committed the Cabinet to an implied fundamental policy change without discussion.

Having effectively secured the support of the Cabinet for his policy Snowden attempted to prepare the P.L.P. for the change of emphasis. On 11 February he took the opportunity raised by a Conservative censure motion to appeal to the Labour Party to support the principle of equality. Speaking on the Liberal amendment to appoint an independent Committee Snowden told the House that the country was facing a financial crisis, declaring "this is a problem which no one party can solve, but the country and the House of Commons must realise the gravity of the position. Instead of party bickering, which we can resume later, we must unite in a common effort to take effective measures to overcome our temporary difficulties and to restore our former prosperity."(149) In approving the setting up of the inquiry by a massive majority the House, and indeed the bulk of the P.L.P. (only 21 Labour M.P.'s opposed the motion) implicitly assented to Snowden's appeal.

The Committee, which was set up under the Chairmanship of Sir George May, recently retired Secretary of the Prudential Assurance Company, whose financial

qualifications were, and remain, obscure, consisted of an equal number of representatives of all three Parties. As Colin Cross notes, "Snowden and the Labour Party took the unusual step of charging an all-party committee with consideration of the central work of government. The May Committee was not, like a Royal Commission, a more or less expert fact-finding inquiry into a specified problem. It was a highly political body charged with making recommendations on major policy. And Labour's own representatives on it were in a minority."(150) It could be argued that the Government was restoring real power to the House of Commons by allowing it to share in the policy-making process but the impact of the pre-conceived economic ideologies on the content of the Report, ideologies determined by party considerations, rebutted such a claim. If the May Committee represented anything it was the inability of the political authority in the State to exercise its full executive power without strict reference to the economic context within which it operated. Clearly too much could be read into a situation in which the main personalities were led by psychological rather than economic reasons to adopt the posture they did adopt but the warping of Parliamentary institutions by its economic environment was clearly implied in the Government's actions.

Snowden was not deliberately planning the downfall of the Labour Government but he was determined to see that the principles of sound finance would succeed and his policies implemented even at the cost of alienating a goodly section of his Party. Even at this early stage Snowden's outlook was no different from that of Neville Chamberlain and the events of August can be seen as the measure not of a move to the Right by Snowden or MacDonald, but on the stability of their conservative position. That that position could lead to friction with the P.L.P. was seen at a party meeting a few days later where his proposals were

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150. Cross, op.cit., p.266.

attacked and a statement he made that he had no intention of reducing unemployment benefit was deliberately leaked to the press.(151) However, the implications of Snowden's manoeuvres were apparently not fully understood and the crisis which developed later found the Party incapable of meeting the challenge with a united front. In particular, it should be remembered that Snowden, who was both sick and old had more or less decided to quit the Chancellorship in favour of the House of Lords and a less active political life, and was already regarding his tenure of 11 Downing Street, as a temporary necessity in view of what he regarded as a growing national crisis which it required his skill to avoid. As Colin Cross puts it, Snowden thought that "If he quit, some weaker Chancellor....might precipitate the deluge. Not only the Labour Party, but the country itself would fall into utter disaster. Only the Iron Chancellor Snowden could hold the Government to the principles of sound finance. Since it was to be the last big job he ever expected to perform in politics, he wanted to perform it well. He had nothing to gain from applause, nothing to lose from attack."(152)

There was little, however, that could be done until the May Committee produced its report and with this in mind Snowden's budget was designed to be a stop-gap measure. Meanwhile the ingredients of the financial crisis were slowly prepared. In May the Credit Anstalt Bank in Vienna collapsed, producing panic in investing circles and precipitating the withdrawal of vast sums from Central European banks. Two substantial German banks collapsed under the strain and suspended payments, thus tying up a great deal of money lent by London bankers who themselves were under severe pressure to pay on demand the

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151. Much to Snowden's annoyance, Ibid., p.267. Some of Snowden's far-seeing opponents were determined not to be presented with a fait accompli.

152. Ibid., p.269.

short-term loans they had borrowed. The bankers' policy of borrowing short and lending long which had been the subject of criticism for some while, was highlighted by the MacMillan Committee (153) and indeed was generally accepted as contributing to the origins of the crisis, (154) but in July 1931 such criticism was academic to British bankers, they were concerned with their own protection which they identified with the stability of the pound sterling. They felt that such stability could only be afforded by Governmental action and in particular in the reduction of public expenditure. They had useful allies; the Gregory Commission had reported in the previous month that the Unemployment Fund should be balanced by reductions both in benefits and the period over which they could be received.

Within a short space of time the problems raised by the irresponsible financial policy of the British banking community was submerged in a welter of comment directed against the "irresponsibly high level" of public expenditure. Snowden was one of the first to concur with such comment. (155) His motives in so doing was to restrict the policy-options open to backbenchers by creating a majority opinion, especially in "responsible" circles, in favour of retrenchment. In the face of such outside pressure, supported by key individuals in the legislature, the backbench M.P. was helpless. Having received a copy of the May Report shortly after it had delivered its findings on 24 July Snowden deliberately delayed its publication until the day Parliament rose in order to prevent the possibility of it being discussed by elements of the P.L.P. hostile to his case. (156) It was an abuse of Parliament and a demonstration

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153. Report of the Committee on Finance and Industry. Cmnd. 3897(1931)

154. A view expounded, for example, by the T.G.W.U. Record, See September, 1931 issue

155. A campaign for retrenchment in Government expenditure had begun, with the full support of the City of London, in January. See Times, 31 January 1931.

156. In all fairness to Snowden it should be noted that the delay was welcomed. The Parliamentary correspondent of the Forward (Glasgow), for example, wrote, "It is a good sign that the Report will not be published until the day Parliament rises. There will thus be ample time for the nation to consider its terms before Parliament can take action." 1 August 1931.

of the power of the Executive over the legislature that did not go unnoticed. Moreover, not content with preventing discussion in the House, Snowden, after prior arrangement with Neville Chamberlain, participated in a short debate in which he declared "No Government, and especially a Government like ours, which does not command a majority in the House of Commons.....could take the full responsibility of submitting to the House of Commons proposals for a reduction of expenditure of a drastic character.....The responsibility for carrying out any recommendations that will be made must be shared by the House of Commons as a whole." (157) The declaration was less a statement of fact as of intent; Snowden having already decided to substitute discussions among leaders in place of that of consultation between Members of Parliament. Viscount Samuel noted, "A few days before the adjournment of Parliament, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, asked me to come and see him. He gave me three advance copies of the Economy Report, and said that he would very much like to know what would be the general attitude of the Liberal Party towards it. It would be plain that no Government could carry out drastic economies without the support of the whole House of Commons. The Committee was really the child of the House itself and he felt that all Parties should co-operate in any measures that might result from its recommendations."(158) Snowden's claim that the Committee was "the child of the House itself" in general ignored the fact of political parties and in particular ignored the fact that the Report was divided on party lines. Snowden gave Opposition leaders in effect an assurance that any proposals

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157. H.C. Deb. 255, cc.2512/3 30 July 1931. "

158. Samuel Papers, File No. A78(3). Samuel used this information at a meeting of the Advisory Committee of the Liberal Party held on 29 January 1931. In a letter dated 5 August Snowden did indicate that the Parties should consider things separately, but it is clear that he did not mean that the rank-and-file should be consulted. A78(1).

which were to be made would be submitted to them for their prior approval; an assurance which effectively removed policy options from the Cabinet to the Party leaders. The adjournment of the House just as the May Report was published only heightened the inevitability of the inter-party talks at leadership level that led to the collapse of the Labour Government and diminished the possibility of the legislature playing any constructive role in the proceedings.

The future course of events during August were not as clear, however, as can be seen in retrospect. The Cabinet, having discussed briefly the May Report, referred it to a special Cabinet Economy Committee, consisting of MacDonald, Snowden, Henderson, Thomas and Graham and set 25 August as the date for its first meeting. Ministers, with the exception of Snowden, then dispersed for their holidays.(159)

The May Report was, in fact, the majority report of its anti-Socialist members.(160) "The False Economy Report," E.F. Wise called it.(161) Its conclusions were deliberately designed to shock the Government into action by painting the blackest picture possible, even to the extent of including in its claim that the prospective Budget deficit for 1932/3 would be £120 million, the £50 million of the Sinking Fund. In order to meet this deficit they said that the Government should raise extra taxation to the tune of £24 million and cut its expenditure by £96 million, some £66 million of which should come from the Unemployment Insurance Fund by a variety of measures, including a 20% reduction in Unemployment benefit. Their report was less a list of required economies than a statement of the belief that public expenditure was against their conception

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159. MacDonald had warned the Cabinet "that there might be emergencies to be dealt with." CAB 23/67.40(31)10. 30 July 1931.

160. Committee on National Expenditure Report, Cmd. 3920, (1931).

161. New Leader, 7 August 1931.



of democracy to which the majority referred very briefly at the end of their Report.(162)

The minority Report which was signed by the two Labour Members, Charles Latham and Arthur Pugh, attacked the majority's conclusions on the grounds that "what they regard as 'undesirable' (public expenditure) we view as consistent with the right and proper course of democratic government and progress,"(163) and went on to state their firm belief in the necessity of public expenditure as a means by which social injustices could be remedied. However, their disagreement was not limited to the philosophical differences with their colleagues. They went on to deny the necessity of cuts in unemployment benefit, condemn the deflationary policies of recent years and to accuse the majority of confusing cause with effect. Moreover, they argued, even if sacrifices were required then they should be demanded from all sections of the community not just from the unemployed and those who were dependent upon the Government for their income.

The importance of the Minority view was that it was one which found great sympathy in the T.U.C. and the Labour Movement in general, both Pugh and Latham were prominent in the two wings of the Party, and it was fundamentally at odds with the whole basis of the Majority's recommendations and, therefore, with the views of Philip Snowden. Moreover, in the following weeks the sentiments of the Movement were to be based on these propositions while the Cabinet was in the process of considering a total alien viewpoint.(164) The reason why the

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162. Cmnd. 3920, Majority Report. Paras. 573/4.

163. Ibid. Minority Report Para.5. Cf. Para.7. "Public expenditure has ample justification when it rests primarily upon the necessity for re-adjusting the use of the national income in such manner as to transfer expenditure from less essential or desirable channels into those which are designed to mitigate social injustices, or those which improve the economic structure of the nation."

164. See Note 14.

Majority Report was successful was because its views coincided with those of MacDonald and Snowden whose perceptions of their own roles as guardians of the "national interest" were instrumental in their seeking the implementation of that Report and its philosophy irrespective of the implications for the Labour Party.

The effect of the May Report in the financial world was little short of disastrous. Following hard upon the two increases in Bank Rate which took place late in July it served to increase speculation about the stability of the pound sterling. The £50-million credit which had been borrowed from New York and Paris was quickly being used up and Snowden, who had remained in London, contacted MacDonald at his Scottish home on 8 August to advise him to return to London immediately.

MacDonald returned to London on 11 August, immediately informed the King of the situation and together with Snowden went into Conference with representatives of the Bank of England. They told MacDonald and Snowden that "The cause of the trouble was not financial, but political, and lay in the complete want of confidence in His Majesty's Government," and that "the remedy was in the hands of the Government alone,"<sup>(165)</sup> an analysis which neither the Prime Minister and the Chancellor of the Exchequer challenged. Snowden had long since surrendered his independence of thought to advocate the Treasury line and like MacDonald, "it was not in his nature to oppose a King's Private Secretary and two bankers if he could in any way avoid it."<sup>(166)</sup> Neither demurred from the Bankers' suggestion that the facts should be laid before the leaders of the Opposition parties, a suggestion which compromised the Labour Cabinet by restricting the area of disagreement and range of policy options

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165. See K. Feiling, The Life of Neville Chamberlain (London: MacMillan, 1946), p.191.

166. Francis Williams, A Pattern of Rulers (London: Longmans, 1965) p.109. Williams' brilliant but controversial interpretation of MacDonald (pp.61-134) should be contrasted with Bassett's MacDonald interpretation of the events of August 1931. R. Bassett, Nineteen Thirty One: Political Crisis (London: MacMillan, 1958).

open to them. There is little doubt that Snowden intended this to happen in order to ensure that the Cabinet and the P.L.P. followed the general direction, if not the specific details, of his economic policy.(167)

Snowden's tactics were later criticised by the Labour Party as evidence of his willingness to co-operate with Opposition leaders rather than with his own Party (implied in his assurances to Parliament on 30 July) and of his preconceived intention to help form a "national government" in order to enact an economic policy which the preceeding ten days must have indicated would not have had the support of the Party as a whole.(168) It is not without significance that Baldwin's aide, J.C.C. Davidson rang the Conservative leader "to tell him that the Government was breaking up" and that in his opinion, "it was almost certain that there would be an attempt to form a Government of All the Talents to rescue the Labour Party from its dilemma."(169) The idea of "a National government of some sort had been discussed in high political circles for some time" to the extent that Le Temps of 12 August could state categorically that "It is common knowledge that Mr. MacDonald hopes to reorganise his Government on the basis of a coalition with the Conservatives and Liberals."(170) Such knowledge was common, not to the public at large, but to what might be called the political Establishment. The working of this Establishment is illustrated in Davidson's comment that "MacDonald's Private Secretary, Usher, kept me closely informed of the situation and was very gloomy about the

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167. Cross, op.cit., p.283., provides a sympathetic view of Snowden's motives, from which it is difficult to dissent other than to remark that his fears were not simply exaggerated but almost hysterical and that Snowden's hysteria increased as the possibility of his being defeated in Cabinet got closer.

168. See Note 15.

169. R.R. James, Memoirs of a Conservative: J.C.C. Davidson's Memoirs and Papers 1910-37, (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1969), p.365. Despite the failings of this book so vigorously highlighted by A.J.P. Taylor in his review in the Observer 31 August 1969, there is little reason to doubt the authenticity or reliability of these passages.

170. Quoted in R. Sidelsky, Politicians and the Slump (London: MacMillan, 1967), p.354. See Note 16.

prospects of the Government surviving the crisis. He felt that only Snowden and Thomas could really be relied upon to see the situation through, particularly if the correct solution to the crisis was a cut in unemployment insurance."(171) The control of the interflow of ideas was vital in suggesting to the King that a national government was both popular and desirable, and it is Nicolson's calculated ignorance of this aspect of political communication that makes his suggestion that Samuel's advice to the King was an important factor in determining the outcome of the crisis seem rather dubious.(172) After all, if the Editor of the Times could ring up the King's Private Secretary and respectfully suggest, with apparent success, that the King adopt the course of action advocated by the Times, then clearly private communication within the Establishment played a vital role in creating that consensus in high political circles which was instrumental in securing the downfall of the Labour Government and the triumph of political and economic orthodoxy.(173)

When the Cabinet Economy Committee met on Wednesday 12 August, Snowden began by informing its members that the prospective deficit was not the £120-million but £170-million and told them that he was proposing to raise half the amount required by new taxation and half by economies. "This was," wrote Colin Cross, "a considerable retreat from the May recommendation,"(174) a retreat governed by the need to gain wider support in the Labour Party. Unfortunately Snowden presented the Committee with his minimum demands and left himself no room for

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171. James, Memoirs of a Conservative, loc.cit.
172. H. Nicolson, King George the Fifth: His Life and Reign (London: Constable, 1952), p.461. See Note 17.
173. J.E. Wrench, Geoffrey Dawson and Our Times (London: Hutchinson, 1955), p.291. See also Michael Foot's review of Bassett's book in the Evening Standard, 3 July 1958.
174. Cross, op.cit., p.285.

further concessions so that every reversal, especially in respect of the cut in unemployment benefit, was regarded as a personal defeat for Snowden, and in Snowden's mind, for the nation.

The main feature of the economy proposals which Snowden put to the Economy Committee was a 10 per cent cut in unemployment benefit. This was half the amount proposed by the May Committee but was still in contradiction of Snowden's declaration made to a P.L.P. meeting the previous February that he had no intention of reducing unemployment benefit. The intransigent support which Snowden gave to this proposal, as opposed to alternative of a 10% tariff, as a way of securing the confidence of foreign bankers was in fact the unbridgeable gap in policy that could not be overcome either in Committee or in the full Cabinet. The Committee agreed to apply economy to the unemployment fund but to limit its incidence to restrictions in the amount of transitional benefit and by making certain administrative changes. Neither Henderson nor Graham would commit themselves to making positive proposals to the full Cabinet and the conclusions of the Economy Committee were the tentative suggestions only.

On 13 August MacDonald and Snowden had what Mowat has called a "rather premature"(175) meeting with the Conservative and Liberal leaders to inform them of the general situation. The importance of this meeting however was that it "set the pattern for the future: consultations which compromised the Cabinet's decisions, and which were attended and reported on by two ministers only, MacDonald and Snowden."(176) Moreover, the manner in which the Government's case was presented both at this and subsequent meetings, seriously weakened the Cabinet's position.(177)

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175. C.L. Mowat, Britain Between the Wars 1918-40 (London: Methuen, 1955), p.386.

176. Loc.cit.

177. See Footnote 181, Note 18 Below. Samuel Papers A78/7 Memorandum entitled "Course of Events 20-23 August."

On Wednesday 19 August the full Cabinet was told of the Economy Committee's survey and spent the whole day considering its implications. A revenue tariff was approved by 16 votes to 5, Snowden leading the minority, but was dropped when it was decided that the minority was too large. MacDonald undoubtedly dropped the tariff question to accommodate Snowden upon whose support on the other questions he could rely. By the time the Cabinet adjourned at 10.30.p.m. they had agreed to economies amounting to £56-million, consisting mainly of reductions in the pay of public employees and cuts in the road-building programme.(178)

The following day MacDonald and Snowden, with their Cabinet colleagues' knowledge, met opposition leaders to outline the general situation. They informed the Conservatives and Liberals that the Budget deficiency would be £170-million instead of the £120-million predicted by May and gave the impression that the Cabinet had agreed to economies amounting to £78-million, although of course, only £56-million had been agreed upon.(179) Chamberlain, strongly supported by Samuel, immediately stated that a reduction in unemployment benefit and economies amounting to the £96-million recommended by May were essential economic measures and recorded that "In effect the P.M. and Snowden gave us to understand that they quite agreed, the latter saying that if you took into account both the fall in the cost of living and the rise in benefits, the unemployed were 36% better off than in 1924."(180) The validity of Williams'

178. The relevant Cabinet Minute 23/67. 41(31)1 discussing CP 203(31) recorded that it became clear "that while the Cabinet were prepared, though with reluctance, to accept as a temporary measure to meet the present emergency certain of the economies set out in CP 203(31) the Cabinet were not prepared to entertain the main recommendations of the May Committee in regard to Unemployment Insurance, including the proposal (rejected by the Cabinet Committee) for a reduction of benefits....."

179. Samuel Papers A78/7. "The Government's representatives stated the economies on the Budget which they were about to propose to the Cabinet. The total amounted to £78.5" Italics Mine.

180. Feiling, op.cit. p.192. Bassett, who strongly defends MacDonald and Snowden throughout, makes no comment upon the propriety of Snowden's actions. Bassett op.cit., p.87. Cf. Samuel A78/7/5. "The Ministers made it quite clear that they personally did not expect us to come to any other conclusion, and let it be quite apparent that individually they entirely agreed with us." See also Footnote 190.

assertion that MacDonald and Snowden "assumed from the start the role not of representatives of the Cabinet but of reporters of its obduracy,"(181) is adequately attested by Chamberlain's record of events. The willingness of both the Prime Minister and the Chancellor of the Exchequer to agree with the policy options presented by the Opposition leaders whilst refusing to accommodate the claims of their political colleagues in Cabinet is unparalleled in Labour Party history and formed the political foundations of the constitutional crisis that followed.

The Opposition leaders did not commit themselves to a final verdict on the £78-million "agreed" economies but intimated that they would go away and consult with their associates as to whether they could support the Government's programme.

While the Opposition leaders were still at Downing Street MacDonald and Snowden met representatives of the P.L.P. Consultative Committee who were told that the Opposition leaders were insisting on a cut in unemployment benefit. In reply the Consultative Committee said that the P.L.P. would not accept such a demand. Increasingly, MacDonald and Snowden found that their economic remedies, others were dismissed as ignorant or irrelevant, were those advocated by their political opponents. The crucial point was reached then they met the T.U.C. at 3.p.m. on the same afternoon.

Snowden had no particular desire to meet the T.U.C. who he contemptuously regarded as economic ignoramuses, and at his insistence the meeting was officially between the Cabinet Economy Committee, the T.U.C. General Council and the Labour Party National Executive.(182) Reluctantly Snowden gave the

181. F. Williams, A Pattern of Rulers, pp.113. See Note 18.

182. The Minutes of the meeting are recorded in the N.E.C. Minutes, Vol.60. Snowden indicated to the meeting "not the definite decisions of the Cabinet, but matters they had been considering as possible economies..." 20 August 1931.

briefest details of his economy plans, refusing even to give details of new taxation but giving the impression that there would be no reduction in unemployment benefit. The analysis which Snowden presented to the General Council was brusquely rejected by the Citrine/Bevin axis which diagnosed the fundamental problem as being financial not political in origin. In their view the existing currency system based on the gold standard was about to break down. In the four-and-a-half hours following Snowden's departure from Transport House at 4 p.m. the General Council discussed in great detail alternative measures to those proposed by the Chancellor. At 9.30 p.m. they presented three proposals to the Cabinet Economy Committee; the replacement of the unemployment insurance scheme by a graduated levy upon the whole community based upon the capacity to pay; a new tax upon all fixed interest-bearing securities and other unearned income; the suspension of the Sinking Fund for the National Debt. A revenue tariff was not presented for a variety of reasons, although it had a great deal of support on the General Council. (183)

The General Council's proposals failed to convince Snowden whose fundamental views were too divorced from those of the T.U.C. to be overcome by an appropriate form of words. "Mr. Snowden said that if sterling went, the whole international financial structure would collapse, and there would be no comparison between the present depression and the chaos and ruin that would face us in that event. There would be millions more unemployed and complete industrial collapse." "Mr. Bevin disputed this statement." (184) A further exchange between Citrine

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183. For full details of the events see Bassett, op.cit., pp.86/98 and Bullock, op.cit., pp. 480/9 who also includes a summary of the T.U.C.'s alternative economic thinking. See also Lord Citrine: Men and Work, An Autobiography. (London: Hutchinson, 1964), pp.281/6.

184. Bullock, op.cit., p.484. It can of course be argued that given the economic environment of 1931, Snowden was right even if, in the post-Kenyesian light of the 1970's, his analysis was inadequate. If the type of thinking represented by Snowden had outlived its utility in practical terms, however, then the alleged calamity was inevitable; as the subsequent devaluation proved. It is, however, very difficult to accept the view that the National Government had prevented a worse situation from occurring.



and Thomas reinforces this point. "Mr. J.H. Thomas asked what the General Council would actually do in the desperate situation which confronted the Government at the present time. Mr. Citrine said that the Council were not convinced that the situation was quite so desperate as was alleged. There were enormous resources in the country." (185)

So much was made at the time of alleged T.U.C. dictation on the question that it is important to quote the Cabinet records of the meeting.

"The Cabinet received from the Chancellor of the Exchequer an account of the meeting which had taken place the previous day between the Cabinet Committee .... and a Committee of the General Council of the Trades Union Congress. The meeting had been a friendly one, and Mr. Citrine, who acted as spokesman for the Committee, pointed out that in the view of the General Council, the Government had been mistaken in their method of approaching the problem. Although through his statement and in the subsequent discussion, it appeared that the members of the General Council had no real appreciation of the seriousness of the situation; the statements made, appeared to be based on a pre-crisis mentality, and the objections raised to the proposals were those which members of the Cabinet themselves would have taken had the circumstances been quite normal."

The record continues:-

"The Chancellor of the Exchequer added that he had replied to the points raised at some length but it must be realised that the Trades Union General Council were not prepared to accept the scheme of economics which had been prepared by the Government." (186)

There is little hint of 'dictation' in this record. Certainly none that can be equated with the suggestion of one commentator that those who did not agree with Snowden had thought more in terms of the interests of the Trades Union Congress than the nation. (187) Indeed, MacDonald had immediately seen the

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185. Ibid., p.485. A view endorsed by Lloyd George in a Memorandum to Samuel. Samuel Papers, A78/12.

186. CAB. 23/67. 43(31)1. 21 August 1931.

187. I. Colvin. "A Royal Weekend" Atlantic Monthly, Vol. 149, (April, 1932), pp.501/8. Perhaps Colvin should not be taken too seriously in view of the fact that he actually suggested that the T.U.C. "controlled the Socialist Party in the House of Commons and nothing could be done without their approval." (p.504).

the representatives of the Bank of England after the meeting with the Trade Unions, a fact clearly indicating where the source of any alleged 'dictation' lay.

The meeting with the T.U.C. served to polarise and isolate the orthodox economic views of the Chancellor and MacDonald. It also had the effect of influencing Henderson to take up his final position of implacable opposition to those views. As Bullock notes "(he) did not speak at all, but no man present was more impressed by what he heard." (188) What impressed Henderson was the implication that accommodation with the Opposition leaders could only be achieved at the cost of alienating the vital support of the Trade Unions. This, he concluded, was too high a price to pay. The question was not one of Trade Union dictation but of Opposition dictation to the Labour Government to follow policies which would split open the Movement and benefit the financial establishment and their political allies.

On Friday 21 August, the Cabinet, reinforced by Henderson's resolute opposition to further economy, substantially reaffirmed its position, having refused to accept a 10% cut in unemployment benefits and settling for £56-million worth of economies. (189) At 5.p.m. with the agreement of the Cabinet, the Prime Minister and Snowden saw the Opposition leaders to inform them of the position. Chamberlain, in particular, was shocked to learn that the proposed economies totalled on £56.million instead of the £78-million he had expected or the £96-million he thought was desirable while Snowden made no attempt to hide his disagreement with his colleagues on the issue. (190) After a four

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188. Bullock, op.cit., p.484. Cf.p.489. Cf. Snowden's Autobiography, II, 958. See also Henderson's comment, "that it would be no use going on unless we carried our own people with us." H.C.Deb. 256, cc.33.

189. CAB 23/67. 43(31)2. See Note 19.

190. Feiling, op.cit., p.192. See Note 20.

hours adjournment Chamberlain, whose conduct throughout was motivated by his Party's advantage, which he conveniently described as the national interest, returned with the other leaders to tell MacDonald that if these were the final proposals of the Government then they would not get through the House of Commons; that they anticipated that before then the financial crash would come; that they considered it to be MacDonald's duty to avoid it and that they "were ready to give him any support in (their) power for that purpose either with his present, or in a reconstructed government."(191)

This passage, more than any other, effectively disposes of the theory that Sir Herbert Samuel's suggestion to the King was little more than pure chance and quite readily explains why MacDonald on the one hand and Henderson on the other were not surprised by the events of 24 August.(192)

On the morning of Saturday 22 August MacDonald and Snowden made one last unsuccessful attempt to persuade the Cabinet to support their policy of a 10% reduction in unemployment benefit claiming that they had found that it was absolutely impossible to reach any agreement on the proposals which the Cabinet had authorised him to lay before (the Opposition and the representatives of the Bank of England). He went on to assure "the Cabinet in the most emphatic terms that there was no ground whatever for the suggestion that the present crisis is in any respect due to a conspiracy on the part of the Banks, all of whom were most anxious to render assistance to the Government.....The representatives of the Bank of England, however, 'had made it quite clear that if the economies suggested represented the Government's final word, the scheme would be of no value' while the Party leaders had made it clear that if the crisis occurred the sole responsibility must rest with the Government, and in the most correct

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191. Feiling, loc.cit. See Note 21.

192. See Note 22.

Possible fashion they had suggested that His Majesty should be consulted."(193) Henderson, by now fully convinced of the political impropriety of such a policy, accused MacDonald and Snowden of continuing negotiations when no such negotiations were viable. The Cabinet had, in his opinion, declared its collective will and the only course left open to it was to take its proposals to the floor of the House of Commons or resign. Neither MacDonald nor Snowden seemed prepared to do this and at their insistence and with Thomas' support the Cabinet empowered them to enquire of the Opposition leaders the hypothetical information as to whether, if the Cabinet were to agree to add the ten per cent unemployment cut to the existing £56-million programme on the understanding that the Government were seeking information and in no way committed to the proposal, they would be willing to accept it as satisfactory.(194)

After receiving a not discouraging reply to the effect that if the Bankers found it acceptable the politicians would not demur the hypothesis was put to the Bank of England who as expected consulted New York and received a reply that a full answer could be expected the following day. Consequently, the Cabinet arranged to meet again at 7.p.m. on Sunday 23 August to hear New York's reply, having heard from Snowden and MacDonald that they had "derived the impression that (if) the banking interests were ready to regard the propositions as adequate and satisfactory the Party leaders would accept it..."(195)

On the following morning the King, who had returned overnight from Balmoral, following a telephone message by MacDonald made during the Cabinet meeting, sent for MacDonald who advised him "to acquaint himself with the views of the Leaders

193. CAB 23/67.44(31).

194. H.C. Deb. 256, cc. 33/4. Henderson had strong grounds for taking this view especially as the Prime Minister "had found it absolutely impossible to reach any agreement on the proposals which the Cabinet had authorised him to lay before (the Opposition and the Bank of England)." CAB 23/67 44(31)1. Italics Mine.

195. CAB 23/67.45(31), 22 August 1931.

of the Conservative and Liberal Parties on the situation."(196) There is little indication from the available evidence to show that MacDonald intended to do anything but resign should the communication from New York prove successful.(197) Nevertheless, his uneasiness with the situation, in particular his belief that his colleagues were grossly ignorant and stubborn on matters of vital economic necessity, had prepared him for the conviction that "to stick a knife in the ribs of his Party seemed the obvious course, not out of planned intent but because the right people expected it."(198) Samuel's advice to the King, supported by Baldwin, served only to reinforce these beliefs by appealing to MacDonald's vanity, patriotism and innate social conservatism.

When the Cabinet met at 7 p.m. the eagerly awaited reply had not arrived and the meeting adjourned after three-quarters of an hour until the telegram's arrival shortly before 9.p.m. The reply which the Cabinet heard at 9.10.p.m. stated that, until Parliament had met and acted, there could be no question of a long-term loan, but that it might be possible to arrange a short-term credit for between \$100 to \$150-million. The sting, however, lay in the tail, which read,

"Are we right in assuming that the economy programme under consideration will have the sincere approval and support of the Bank of England and City generally, and thus go a long way towards restoring internal confidence in Great Britain? Of course, our ability to do anything depends on the response of public opinion - particularly in Great Britain, to the Government's announcement of the programme."(199)

To the moderate "waverers" these last two sentences constituted a clear

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196. CAB 23/67.46(31). 23 August 1931.
197. See Note 23.
198. Williams, A Pattern of Rulers, p.109. Cf. Davidson's assessment of MacDonald especially his belief that MacDonald did not know how to be loyal. James, Memoirs of a Conservative, p.372.
199. CAB 23/67.46(31)1. Appendix. 23 August 1931.

and unacceptable demand that the Government's policy should conform to the dictates of outside bodies, a demand upon which the Cabinet was clearly sensitive. The result sounded to those outside the Cabinet Room like pandemonium and the final two groups took up their respective positions when MacDonald in a long speech appealed for an acceptance of the 10 per cent cut.(200) MacDonald's narrow 10:9 victory (excluding his own vote) was insufficient to secure the acceptance of the measure as the minority were prepared to press their dissidence to the point of resignation. There was little else MacDonald could do but ask for the resignation of the Cabinet, convey the position to the King and request that a Conference of the Party Leaders be held.(201) At the Palace MacDonald was told that he was the only man capable of leading the nation through the crisis and was asked to reconsider his position, although he did not mention this when he reported back to the Cabinet. (202)

Reginald Bassett asserts that the Cabinet must have known that the tripartite Conference of leaders which MacDonald had advised the King to call was in fact called for the purpose of forming a new Government. If this had in fact been the case, however, the King would not have needed to make his appeal to the resigning MacDonald. Moreover, MacDonald would have, as a matter of course, reported the King's remarks back to his Cabinet colleagues, which, in fact, he failed to do. Furthermore, MacDonald was at this stage, still only primus inter pares, the representative of the Labour Party not as an individual though whether the King understood the real nature of MacDonald's

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200. See Note 24.

201. MacDonald "informed the Cabinet that he proposed to acquaint (the King) at once with the situation that had arisen and to advise him to hold a conference with Mr. Baldwin, Sir. H. Samuel and himself on the following morning. The Cabinet agreed to the proposal and also authorised the Prime Minister to inform His Majesty that all Cabinet Ministers had placed their resignations in the Prime Minister's hands. " CAB 23/67. 46(31)1.

202. CAB 23/67. 46(31)1.

position is open to doubt.(203) The final point to remember is that the midnight arrival at Downing Street of Baldwin, Chamberlain and Samuel, allegedly unknown even to Philip Snowden, made it clear that MacDonald was acting without the permission and knowledge of his colleagues.(204) It was perhaps this which made Sidney Webb write to his wife on the morning of 24 August that "all that is now doubtful is the character of the Government that succeeds us (as we have all along speculated.)"(205)

It was this also which caused Henderson to complain that MacDonald was about to restructure the Government under his own leadership and with Tory and Liberal support.(206) What had previously been common knowledge based on mutual suspicion and mistrust was quite readily confirmed in the minds of the Labour leadership. When, therefore, MacDonald confronted his colleagues with the fait accompli the reaction was one of shocked surprise, not at MacDonald's action in rejecting his colleagues but at the flamboyant manner in which that rejection was readily delivered.(207) Referring to that morning's audience with the King MacDonald said "it was quite clear that no useful purpose would be served by consideration of any question other than that of saving the country from financial collapse. The proposal was that His Majesty would invite certain individuals, as individuals, to take upon their shoulders the burden of carrying on the Government, and Mr. Baldwin and Mr. Herbert Samuel had stated that they were prepared to act accordingly." The Prime Minister then stated that he proposed to tender to His Majesty the resignation of the Government. He had not failed to present the case against his participation in the proposed

203. See Dalton, op.cit., p.271 n.1.

204. In fact the Cabinet had agreed that the Prime Minister should inform the Opposition Leaders of the nature of the message from New York. CAB. 23/67, 46(31)1.

205. Quoted: Bassett, op.cit., p.148. Italics in the original.

206. See Dalton, op.cit., p.271.

207. See Note 25.

Administration, but in the view of the gravity of the situation he had felt that there was no other course open to him than to assist in the formation of a National Government on a comprehensive basis and for the purpose of meeting the present emergency. (208) *MacDonald's assertion, italicised above, is the only record of his alleged stance of independence on the question.*

That the response of the Labour Movement to the formation of the National Government should be determined very largely by the Trade Unions led by Citrine and Bevin was both natural and convenient. It was natural in so far as the General Council was the only influential body of opinion which had offered a real alternative to the policy of retrenchment that had so divided the Labour Government and it was convenient because of the extent to which some ex-Ministers had been committed to the policies now advocated by the National Government. (209) Moreover, having watched helplessly while the Government, which was allegedly representing their interests, had bent over backwards to accommodate what they regarded as the vested economic interests of capitalism, both Citrine and Bevin were determined that their party should follow their policy of social and economic change. In this they were not alone, having widespread support among the ex-Cabinet Ministers and the P.L.P., and it was in conjunction with Henderson that Citrine announced on the afternoon of 24 August a Joint Meeting of the three bodies of the Labour Movement (i.e., the General Council of the Trades Union Congress, the National Executive of the Labour Party and the Consultative Committee of the P.L.P.) was to be held the following Wednesday (26 August). Citrine, who was speaking for the trade union movement, did not prejudge the decision of the meeting although his declaration that "our support of the Government ceased with the resignation

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208. CAB 23/67. 47(31)1. 24 August 1931. Italics mine.

209. See Note 26.



of the Cabinet," made the outcome certain. (210) According to Bassett, Citrine attached great importance to a decision by the General Council and National Executive and showed apparent indifference to the Parliamentary Party. (211) This observation, however, completely misses the point. The question was one of policy upon which the Joint Body was the authoritative body within the Labour Party, given the resignation of the Government. The Parliamentary Party was, and still is, an autonomous body which generally acts in accordance with the decisions passed by the authoritative Party bodies. There was no attempt to by-pass the P.L.P., many members of which were out of London while Parliament was in recess, and it did, in fact, meet on 28 August when it confirmed the immediate stand taken by the Joint body. (212) Moreover, the degree of consultation between the General Council, the N.E.C. and the Consultative Committee of the P.L.P. was far greater than that afforded the latter by MacDonald and Snowden during the negotiations of the previous week. Indeed, Henderson had complained in Cabinet, as others were to complain in the Commons, that the Prime Minister and Chancellor had shown complete indifference to the wishes of the P.L.P. in their clear haste to accommodate the Opposition leaders, the Banking fraternity and foreign opinion. (213)

The apparent volte face of the ex-Cabinet members of the Labour Government was a victory both for the Trade Union Movement and majority opinion with the Party. This is not to deny that there were members of the Labour Party who did not sympathise with MacDonald - nor is to dispute the fact that some thought

210. Times, 25 August 1931.

211. Bassett, op.cit., p.170.

212. The Joint Meeting did not order the P.L.P. to form the official Parliamentary Opposition it merely recommended that it should do so. L.P.A.C.R. 1931, p.4. and N.E.C. Minutes, Vol. 60, G.C., E.C. and C.C. 26/27 August 1931 (1930/31. Mins. 15,16, and E.C. 12 1930/31, 26/27 August 1931. M.436 and 437.) The resolution to the Joint Meeting was proposed by Arthur Henderson, each constituent body having met separately and expressed similar sentiments.

213. See footnote 167 above.

there was a need for the formation of a National Government. What it does mean is that few were satisfied that the Prime Minister had paid adequate regard to, or had even considered, the "national" need but had been guided by more personal motives of vanity and pride. Bassett records, for example, that Sir James Sexton told the Commons that he personally had been in favour of the formation of a National Government but **completely** ignored Sexton's clear and unambiguous rider; "I was in favour of the formation of a national government, but I was not in favour of the method by which that Government was brought about." (214) Sexton's position was no different from that of Henderson who had told the House a week earlier, on 8 September, that he was not taking exception to the fact of the National Government which he preferred to call the new Government but to "the manner of its formation." The Trades Union Congress took the lead but the Party willingly followed.

The main feature of the Trade Union campaign was its characterisation of the new Government as the creature of international finance. (215) The Joint Manifesto issued the day after the joint meeting went out of its way to attack those "forces in finance and politics (which) made demands which no Labour Government could accept," sentiments which Dalton coined at the P.L.P. meeting on the 28th in the phrase, "The First Labour Government had been destroyed by a 'Red Letter' and the Second by a 'Banker's Order'." (216) At the T.U.C. early in September Arthur Hayday gave a long speech along these lines declaring:

214. See footnote 207, Note 25 above.

215. According to Dalton, the Daily Herald changed its prepared moderate editorial to one of hostile opposition to the National Government's policy in response to direct pressure from Bevin. Dalton, op.cit., p.274.

216. Ibid., p.278. Cf. Forward (Glasgow), "A Labour Government has been bullied and battered out by the Moneylenders and the Liberals have joined with the Tories in declaring that the Government must capitulate." 29 August 1931. See also Daily Herald, 25 August 1931.

"Political and financial influences of a sinister character, working behind the scenes, have taken advantage of the difficulties arising from the policy pursued by private banking interests, which are not subject to any public control, to dictate to the British Government and people a fundamental change in national policy. Secret forces have broken the Labour Government. These same forces have created a new Government without the authority of Parliament or the people by methods equivalent to dictatorship.....These recent events have revealed the existence of an imperious international financial combination possessing the power to bring even a country like ours, wealthy, solvent and productive, to its knees, and to threaten it with financial ruin unless it agreed to change its policy and curtail its social expenditure. Political parties, with the exception of our own, have come under the dominance of finance along with the Government of the day. The Labour Government was destroyed by it. It has brought about a financiers' revolution more ruthless and complete than a military dictatorship could accomplish....."

"It is a matter of the gravest significance that behind the scenes, where the destruction of the Labour Government was planned, the one inescapable demand which the Labour Cabinet was required to meet was the reduction of unemployment benefits. No other proposal, no alternative plan, that the Labour Cabinet could have formulated would have been accepted as an alternative to this demand."(217)

The truth of the last two sentences is undeniable but the conclusions which have been drawn from it are untenable, for as Miliband points out, it was less that the Bankers dictated terms to the Government rather than the fact "that the Labour Government had surrendered all freedom of initiative to the Opposition leaders, to the Treasury officials, and finally to the goodwill of American finance."(218) Moreover, the difference between the natural desire of the bankers to safeguard their money and the appearance of dictation is a very slim one. "What a borrower regards as 'dictation' can appear as 'conditions' in the eyes of the lender."(219) The real fault lay in the nature of the banking

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217. T.U.C. Report.1931, pp.66/9. Cf. Willie Graham in the House of Commons, "It was because of an outside insistence upon that specific point, which we refused to accept, that the late Government broke." H.C.Deb.256, cc.316.
218. Miliband, Parliamentary Socialism, p.175. Henderson implicitly conceded this point (H.C.Deb.256, cc.37/8). Cf. New Statesman 29 August 1931, "Once the Government had determined to maintain Sterling at parity the methods by which it should do so were necessarily dictated by the banks."
219. Cross, op.cit. p.284. Cf. MacDonald's reply to questions in the House of Commons, 21 September 1931. H.C.Deb.256, cc.1272/3.

policies of the City of London and the fact that those policies could be conducted jealously independent of governmental control until such time as a crisis set in. The irresponsible short borrowing, long lending policies of the City were a root cause of the crisis and its unjustified and unjustifiable demands that the Government should stand the resultant losses by reducing its expenditure brought the 1931 Crisis to a head. The obvious solution of Government direction of finance was beyond the intellectual grasp of most politicians.(220) It was the defeat of 1931 that galvanised the Labour Party into a re-appraisal of the situation. What should be remembered, however, is the fact that whilst the Party as a whole effectually rejected the "Bankers Ramp"(221) explanation of 1931, the Left-Wing of the Party, particularly the intellectual Left-Wing led by Laski and Strachey, used it as a fundamental part of their interpretation and alleged predictions of events. Thus while Thomas Johnston who had been an early exponent of the Bankers Ramp theory could write in 1934 that, "really there was no Bankers' plot; that is, there was no deliberately conceived, no consciously designed manipulation of the Money Market with the object of achieving a political end in the destruction of a Labour Government. Nevertheless, it is true that the day-to-day policy of the Government had to be trimmed, curtailed, and amended, because of decisions taken in the City by groups of the Government's bitter political enemies."(222) The Left was not so persuaded.

They saw in the 1931 Crisis the destruction of the old consensus of political life which had been based on an agreement about the fundamental

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220. An early advocate of such control which became very popular after the events of August 1931 was G.D.H. Cole. See "A Socialist View" Economist, 17 October 1931. p.697.
221. Francis Williams attributes the phrase to Tom Darlow. See his Nothing So Strange: An Autobiography (London: Cassell, 1970), p.101.
222. Tom Johnston, The Financiers and the Nation (London: Methuen, 1934), p.193. Johnston nonetheless regarded the assurances sought by the foreign banks as being dictatorial. Ibid., p.199. For his comments at the time see Forward (Glasgow), 5 September 1931.

tenets of the constitution, and the willingness of capitalism to destroy democracy in an attempt to preserve its economic privileges. They regarded 1931, in effect, as the fulfilment of the Marxist critique of the futility of Social Democracy and the Parliamentary process. The rest of the Labour Movement, meanwhile, had moved on to the task of securing a Parliamentary majority.

If the "Bankers' Ramp" had been discounted as a realistic part of the ideology of the Labour Party at an early stage in the 'Thirties, the notion that MacDonald had "plotted" the downfall of the Labour Government continued unabated for a great deal longer. Sidney Webb's "Record"(223) was based on the belief that MacDonald had planned the whole episode, a view endorsed by Philip Snowden.(224) Shortly after MacDonald's defection a number of small incidents, previously forgotten by discreet or opportunist politicians, were given new significance by the crisis which culminated in the formation of the National Government on 24 August. MacDonald's "Council of State" speech(225) was eagerly reproduced as evidence of this plot and there is no doubt that the increasing inability of the Government to solve unemployment did lead MacDonald to encourage thoughts of a National Government - thoughts which he confided to what Neville Chamberlain called "leaky vessels" and which reflected to some degree the thoughts of many of his own elderly, middle-of-the-road colleagues in the House. His shy nature, his illegitimate birth, reinforced by the alienation of most sectors of the party during the life of the Second Labour Government,

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223. S. Webb, "What Happened in 1931: A Record" Political Quarterly, III, i, (January-March, 1932), 1-17.

224. Snowden, Autobiography, II, p.954.

225. See foot note 144 above.

increased MacDonald's isolation and susceptibility to the calls of "statesmanship." His vanity and snobbery were notorious and his dependence upon the inner-workings of the Establishment reinforced his self-induced importance in the eyes of the nation. He was the leader of "respectable" Socialism, he was the one man who could lead all sections of the nation in its time of crisis and even should his colleagues fail to discharge their duty in this respect he would not flinch. Yet for all the apparent evidence there is no proof that MacDonald's action was anything but the sincere response of a man whose life and ways disposed him to think that he was greater than his party.

Apart from one or two extreme elements in the Party there were few who thought MacDonald had deliberately harmed his party. All sections from Maxton on the Left to Ben Turner of the Right stated their belief in MacDonald's sincerity.(226) But as Laski wrote in the Daily Herald on 29 August, "No one .... doubts that MacDonald and those who have gone over with him to reaction have acted from the highest motives; their sincerity is not in question. What is at stake is their sagacity...." Henderson's early call for no recriminations was re-echoed by Stanley Hurst at the 1931 Conference, the latter however, prophetically added the warning; "We are familiar with the tactics and methods of Mr. MacDonald's new friends, and we need not be astonished if they touch new low levels of degraded electioneering."(227) Yet the truth of the matter is that the Labour Party was astonished by the level of degraded electioneering

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226. Maxton wrote in the New Leader, "He did what he believed right. Accusations from the Labour Movement about treachery appear to me to be quite out of place." 4 September 1931. For Turner's comments and those of several others see Bassett, op.cit., p.204. Citrine's considered view is in Men and Work, p.286.

227. L.P.A.C.R. 1931, p.158. Henderson's call is to be found in H.C. Deb. 256, cc.25. Cf. "It was 1918 all over again" Mary Agnes Hamilton, Remembering My Good Friends, p.240.

to which the National Government descended and in which MacDonald and Snowden took particularly offensive lines. MacDonald destroyed his sincerity by his equation of moderate Labour policies with that of massive inflation while Snowden's "Bolshevism run mad" speech remains the most cynical repudiation of a life's work ever broadcast.(228) Its impact was still felt years later.(229)

Yet if the antics of MacDonald and Snowden destroyed their sincerity their willingness to participate in a General Election, despite claims that no such coupon election would be fought, had provided enough evidence to suggest that they had both recognised that they were prisoners of a Tory regime and were fighting to preserve their otherwise untenable positions. As Henderson put it in his adoption speech at Burnley on 13 October, ".....Mr. MacDonald, by consenting to this election, was permitting himself to be used by his life-long opponents to smite his life-long political friends."(230) Their political judgement had been gravely at fault and their claim that they were entering the election as one part of a broad but distinct political front was clearly both unprecedented and untenable. The National Government was, as Lloyd George had stated, "a mere Tory ramp." The national emergency, in so far as it existed, had been ruthlessly exploited by the Tory Party, aided and abetted by MacDonald and Snowden, they were now about to reap the whirlwind in what the Manchester Guardian described as "the shortest, strangest and most fraudulent election campaign of modern times." The 1931 election like the 1931 Crisis was a victory for the Conservative Party.(231)

228. See Note 27.

229. See, "Bevin, Cripps and Mosley", Tribune, 19 February 1937.

230. Times 14 October 1931. J.C.C. Davidson recorded on 17 September 1931, "It is clear that Ramsay feels that he has no following and that unless he can get together a group of personal supporters he would be regarded as nothing but an adjunct to the Tory Party, against which he has fought consistently." James, Memoirs of a Conservative. p.375. On 5 September, J.H. Thomas apparently had visions of smashing the Socialist Party. Ibid. p.376.

231. Manchester Guardian, 28 October 1931. Cf. "Labour has no cause to be ashamed of its defeat. . . It was beaten not by truth and in fair argument but by infamous lies, grotesque misrepresentation, intimidation, vile abuse and appeals to fear." T.G.W.U. Record, (November 1931), p.99.

From the Labour Party point of view the Election, of which MacDonald had warned his former Cabinet colleagues at their final meeting, was inevitable and the immediate pressure made towards this end by prominent Conservatives only increased their suspicions. The failure of the National Government to maintain the gold standard not only increased the demands of Conservatives for a General Election but destroyed the raison d'etre of the coalition. It was MacDonald's refusal to re-enter the Labour fold after that event and his disposition to call instead for an election which led to his eventual expulsion from the Party. MacDonald revitalised by an appeal from the King for the continuation of the National Government, had no intention of returning to the Labour Party and his hopes of doing so were illusory. (232) The situation which the Labour Party had predicted would come about had come about and MacDonald, needing to justify the continued existence of the Coalition, once again turned to the shrewdest exponent of a national politics for party advantage, Neville Chamberlain. Chamberlain offered MacDonald the quaint and naive suggestion that the separate elements of the Government should go to the country as a united body but with separate manifestos - a suggestion which was as politically convenient as it was ludicrously transparent; it was most effective. The electorate returned not a National but a Conservative Government, the vast majority of the increased Conservative vote coming from the Liberals, though it is clear that MacDonald received a great deal of Labour support. The greatest disparity, however, was in Parliament where the Conservatives had a comfortable majority - a fact Philip Snowden attributed to Labour's refusal to accept P.R. (233)

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232. See Note 28.

233. Snowden, Autobiography, II, p.889. Cf. Economist 31 October 1931, pp.795 and 802. The Conservative vote increased by 3,322,272 and the Liberal decreased by 3,106,106.



A third interpretation of the events of the 1931 election which led to a good deal of dispute and debate concerned the role of the Monarch George V. Though popularly associated with, and developed by, Harold Laski's The Crisis and the Constitution (234) the claim that the King had strained, if not flaunted the Constitution, the theory, like much of Laski's work in the 'Thirties, was first put forward by someone else. The person in this case was Leonard Woolf whose contribution to a Political Quarterly symposium on the Crisis was entitled A Constitutional Revolution. (235) Woolf argued that "the action of the King and the Prime Minister may have been technically constitutional, but if the Crown and the head of a party Government act as they did, a fair and honest working of a democratic system on the model of the British Constitution is impossible." (236) This in Woolf's opinion, was because

".... the whole of our political system, in so far as it is democratic, rests upon the party system. The Prime Minister is not Prime Minister because he is an individual, but because he can count on the support of a party .... (Therefore) when Mr. MacDonald found that he wishes to pursue a policy which was solidly opposed by practically the whole of his party, he should on democratic principles, have told the King that he could not carry on the Government and have resigned. It was quite open to him to tell the King that he was prepared to support as an individual any Government formed to carry out that policy or take office in it as an individual. But that is not what happened. Mr. MacDonald was induced .... to form a National Government which meant a Government of all parties. If Mr. Baldwin entered the Government as leader of the Conservative Party and Sir H. Samuel as acting leader of the Liberal Party what was Mr. MacDonald's position? It was that of leader of the Labour Party. Even to state the bare facts is almost equivalent to stating baldly that the thing was a fraud. It is said that the King personally induced Mr. MacDonald to do this. If so, he was doing something which may prove highly dangerous to the Crown. For, in effect, he was making an individual Prime Minister though he had no support for his Government in the House of Commons...."

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234. H.J. Laski, The Crisis and the Constitution: 1931 and After (London, L. & V. Woolf at the Hogarth Press and the Fabian Society). passim.

235. Woolf "A Constitutional Revolution," Political Quarterly, II, 4, (October/December, 1931), pp. 475/7.

236. Ibid., p. 476.

The whole thing was in Woolf's opinion an ominous and dangerous constitutional revolution which may have set the precedent which "might be developed so that the Crown could be used to break down the democratic system of party government and to introduce .... a system not materially different from that of a dictatorship." (237)

This view, dismissed by Reginald Bassett, as "hysterical nonsense," received support from academic quarters some years later, and has far more validity than supporters of MacDonald or the National Government have been prepared to admit. (238) On the advice of the Prime Minister the invitation from the Monarch was to the Party leaders as representatives of their parties, not to individual members of the House of Commons and it was, therefore, plainly inappropriate and untenable that the leaders of political parties should, in that capacity, claim that they were forming a Government composed of individuals. Furthermore the emptiness of the "government by individuals" case was proved by Baldwin's insistence six weeks later that he could not hold his Party's demands for an election in check. Clearly since the development of the Party system it was impossible to pretend that the Monarch had the right to choose any individual M.P., however eminent, as Prime Minister if the bulk of his support in the House did not come from the Party of which he was the head. Bassett's claim that MacDonald's majority in the Cabinet, and the backing of important colleagues and supporters in the Labour Party, entitled him to special consideration are futile compared to the attitude of the P.L.P. and the indisputable fact that the only Parliamentary support he obtained from his own Party was a mere baker's dozen. That MacDonald enjoyed the support of

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237. Ibid., 476/7. Cf. Laski, The Crisis and the Constitution, passim.

238. G.C. Moodie, "The Monarch and the Selection of a Prime Minister: A Re-examination of the Crisis of 1931." Political Studies, V, No.1 (1957), 1-20.

the other two parties is of complete constitutional irrelevance. MacDonald was not the Conservative Party leader or the chief personality amongst the Liberals when he went to the Palace, he was the representative of the largest party in the House of Commons and to pretend differently is to ignore reality. This was implicitly recognised by Bassett when he wrote that "MacDonald of course, was fully aware that his decision would involve his deposition as leader of the Labour Party. This was, indeed, generally and immediately recognised."(239) If that was, in fact, true - and there is no reason to doubt that it was - MacDonald's presence at the Palace as the representative of the Labour Movement was totally inappropriate. Certainly he should have been present but so should a mainstream spokesman. Neither can it be claimed that MacDonald was there as Prime Minister. He was Prime Minister but he was there in the capacity of Party leader and Bassett again implicitly accepted this when in criticising Herbert Morrison he wrote, "If MacDonald had ceased to possess representative parliamentary value when he formed the National Government, he very soon reacquired it, and did so in unprecedented degree,"(240) an admission which gives credence to Laski's comparison of the King's choice of MacDonald with that of Pitt by George III in 1783 in that both were chosen despite the respective Parliamentary situations and gained such political legitimacy as they had from subsequent elections.

This argument was, in fact, the kernel of The Crisis and the Constitution. Unfortunately, Laski's work was characteristically inaccurate on vital points to the extent that Bassett was able to tear holes in the conclusions that Laski

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239. Bassett, op.cit., p.401. Not least by MacDonald who claimed, "I have credentials of even higher authority. My credentials are those of positive duty as I conceive it and I obey them irrespective of consequences." Ibid., 179.

240. Bassett, op.cit., p.370. Cf. "Mr. MacDonald at the best could not hope to have the support of more than a mere handful of Labour Members." Snowden, Autobiography, II, p.959.

drew from them. Laski's main contention was that the King had acted unconstitutionally, not as other critics (Woolf, Jennings and later Morrison) contended in accordance with bad advice. Unfortunately his argument was centred less on the constitutional propriety of the King's action which he was to develop in later pamphlets into the expression of the will of Capitalist conspirators, rather than the political legitimacy of MacDonald's action. Not that Bassett's criticism was of a higher quality. In defending MacDonald's acceptance of the post of Prime Minister in the new National Government Bassett wrote, "It would have been quite futile for him to have consulted the Labour Cabinet as a whole. What he did was to consult his leading supporters in that divided Cabinet; and without their agreement it is difficult to see how he could have gone forward." (241) Yet MacDonald had not made his acceptance of this new post conditional upon the support of any of his colleagues, and the obvious conclusion is that there is no reason to suppose that had Snowden and Thomas refused to join the new Government MacDonald would not have gone forward alone. Their support had indeed been valuable in predisposing MacDonald to following the course of action which he did, in fact, follow but the decision to lead the National Government was MacDonald's alone.

Criticism of the King's action did not persist although vague references to it and the other interpretations of 1931 still persisted for many years afterwards. The important point to remember about 1931 is that it catalysed the doubts held in parts of the Labour Movement concerning the viability of the use of Parliamentary methods in the transition to Socialism and cleared the path for the vigorous neo-Marxist policies of the Left-Wing in the 'Thirties. For

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241. Bassett, Ibid., p.399.

the bulk of the Labour Party, and especially its leadership, 1931 was regarded as a setback but no more than a setback, in the march towards a Socialist Britain.(242.)

Was such optimism justified in view of the fact that Parliament had been so clearly ignored in the decisions that were taken in August 1931? The Left was to answer in the negative but mainstream members of the Labour Party disagreed. What 1931 did, as far as the Labour Party as a whole was concerned, was to set the Parliamentary process in its context. It highlighted the limitations of Parliament. It did not deny the potentialities of Parliament, or subtract from the belief that the main quality required to utilise those potentialities was will-power and direction.

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242. See, for example, Ernest Bevin, "Socialists have nothing to Fear," T.G.W.U. Record, (November, 1931), pp.112/3. Cf. "Labour has lost only seats in Parliament....It has lost nothing that it cannot regain." (H. Tracey), Ibid., p.104.

## CHAPTER FIVE - NOTES

1. See also Snowden, Labour and the New World "A system of proportional representation is essential to make Parliament representative of the general will." Op.cit., p.66., and "The adoption of a system of proportional representation would relieve members of Parliament from the temptation to concede the demands of sections or classes of the electorate through fear of losing votes, when the demands themselves could not be justified on their merits." Ibid., p.106.
2. Cf. Socialism After the War. "I have.... never been attracted by the prospects held out by the advocates of Proportional Representation and their peculiar views of minorities. But if the tyranny of uniformity and conformity cannot be broken by the intelligence of constituencies, let us have the evil of Proportional Representation, with a chance, that a few oddments of independents with Parliamentary ability may be returned to break down the iron ring of party obedience." Op.cit., p.49. Cf. his view in the Socialist Review, No.111 (December 1922). "The changes in election problems that have followed the last extension of the franchise seem to me to have strengthened the case for the adoption of some scheme like Proportional Representation, but we should be under no delusions as to its effect upon the formation of majority governments." p.242.
3. In 1911 the Labour Party had introduced a Reform Bill into the House of Commons. The Bill had advocated amongst other things, the alternative vote, adult suffrage, quarterly registers, quinquennial Parliaments and the abolition of plural voting. See Chapter 1 note 18 above. In the debate referred to in note 2 Ramsay MacDonald, Arthur Henderson, J.H. Thomas and W. Adamson all voted against P.R. Although the T.U.C. and Labour Party did adopt pro-P.R. resolutions (e.g., T.U.C. 1917 p.94., 1918 p.306, 1919 pp 65/6 and 1922 p.449) they did so without debate, dissent or division.
4. The Labour Magazine, II, No.4. (August, 1923) referring to Philip Snowden's Socialist resolution in the House of Commons pointed out that it "compelled the members of the House of Commons to declare their attitude towards the Labour Party's general scheme of fundamental changes in the present economic system of society. It placed Tories and Liberals in one lobby and a united Labour Party in the other. It provided striking confirmation of Mr. MacDonald's declaration that 'there are only two parties in politics today, the Capitalist Party and the Labour and Socialist Party.'" p.169.
5. Douglas asserts that "it was at least as reasonable to invite a Party with 158 M.P.'s and Front Bench full of experienced ex-Ministers to constitute King's Government as to invite the Labour Party, albeit with 33 more M.P.'s but with hardly anyone who had had Ministerial experience and not many were capable of it." Douglas, op.cit., p.174. Even if it was as "reasonable" a course of action as Douglas suggests, would have been both a constitutionally unwise and politically disadvantageous course of action for the Monarch to have adopted: for the King's Government was chosen for its capacity to command support in the House of Commons not on the administrative qualities

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5. of its Members. Neither Baldwin nor Asquith had any doubt that MacDonald was second in line and the assertion by the Liberals that an alliance with the Tories was out of the question (See Liberal Magazine, XXXI, 363, December 1923, p.706) and Asquith's speech of 18 December 1923 also precluded an anti-Socialist alliance though Churchill wanted one. See James, Churchill, *op.cit.* p.151. Cf. "The top Liberal leaders, though individually impressive, made an ill-assorted team." R. Lyman, The First Labour Government, 1924 (London: Chapman & Hall, 1957), p.51.
6. See Wilson, Downfall of the Liberal Party p.270 for reference to the Liberals seeking to bring the Government to order. "The possession of so many platform planks in common with the Liberals made it .... essential that consultation with the Liberal leaders and whips should be frequent and frank. "Labour's First Term," Economist 19 April 1924, p. 817. See also Liberal Magazine, (May, 1924) and MacDonald's comments to C.P. Scott: Scott's Diaries, p.460. In the Liberal Magazine's "Notes of the Month" for January 1924 the Liberals had asserted, "Upon what sort of electoral authority.... can the Labour Party take office? It can do so only as a Free Trade Government pursuing lines of policy upon which the Labour Party and the Liberal Party are substantially agreed." (p.4.)
7. For the views of some right-wing Liberals, see Ibid., p.267. Lloyd George's speech is to be found in the Times 16 April 1924. See also Liberal Magazine, (May, 1924), pp 269/ff for a second speech on the same subject. Wilson displays a great deal of willing naivette in his coverage of the Liberals' views on P.R. His only observation on the conveniently timed report of the Party Committee and the meeting of the Liberal Party in the House is to say, "As It happened, a P.R. Bill introduced by a Liberal as a private measure was due for its second reading later that week. Op.cit., p. 273. *Italics mine.* This conveniently ignores the obvious connection between the three events and the clear conclusion that the Liberals' conversion to P.R. was an indication of their fight for survival as a meaningful political force represented in the House of Commons. It was not until 1922 that the Independent Liberal Manifesto came out in favour of P.R. Lloyd George had opposed it vigorously while in office.
8. Asquith had written to MacDonald expressing the Liberal view that the P.R. Bill "should receive official Government support and have the facilities for passing into law this Session, which only the Government can furnish." Asquith went on to say that a favourable Cabinet announcement "would greatly ease the situation both inside the House and in the constituencies, without in any way compromising the independence of either side, or the vigorous propaganda of our respective Parties." CAB 23/48. 27(24)5. *Italics mine.* 1 May 1924.
9. Cf. John Scurr, "A government dependent upon Parliament must have a majority behind it if it is to function. If there is any virtue in P.R. it means that there will be a multiplicity of parties, and we may expect a succession of minority governments .... Democracy would be rendered useless .... Instead of our policy being determined by the broad principle which a particular party in the State stands for, it will be decided by an agreement between a number of minority groups. Our present system has defects, but a Government can function. Under P.R. it would become a farce." Socialist Review Vol. 24, no. 134 (December, 1926), p.195.

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10. "The Liberal Party cut anything but a creditable figure over P.R. last week. They so managed the affair as to create a widespread impression that the Government should support Mr. Rendall's Bill as the price of keeping it in office." Cf. Forward (Glasgow), "The fact is that 'P.R.' was turned down largely because we were dared by the Liberals to do other than support it. And, secondly, upon its merits or demerits." 10 May 1924. As the Manchester Guardian commented: "The rank-and-file of the Labour Party undoubtedly voted in a state of indignation about the supposed Liberal threat." 3 May 1924.
11. Lord Ullswater had, as Mr. Speaker Lowther, presided over the Conference in 1917. Labour and the Nation had called for the abolition of plural voting, legislation against corrupt practices at elections and the abolition of practices which conferred special political advantages upon wealth.
12. In 1922 the Government Chief Whip wrote to the N.E.C. expressing the view that it was desirable to promote the passage of an Agreed Bill to amend the Representation of the People Act, in order to prohibit the interference of interest groups in Parliamentary elections by special publicity methods with the object of securing the return of one candidate but with their expenses not being shown in the official return. The N.E.C. had sent a reply approving the principle and asking that a similar agreed measure dealing with the use of vehicles at elections also be sent. See N.E.C. Minutes, Vol.24, 24 June 1922.
13. MacDonald was replying to a question by Samuel. CAB 23/68, 73(30)4. 17 December 1930 and CAB 24/217/428 16 December 1930. On 17 December the N.E.C. came out in favour of the A.V. by 16 votes to 3, having been told that "there was no definite arrangement or pact with the Liberals but conversations had taken place from time to time in the course of which Electoral Reform had been discussed." Jowett's persistence in dissent prevented an attempt to secure unanimity. N.E.C. Minutes, 57, E.C.4 1930/31 M.122.
14. Hence Henderson's statement to the House of Commons on 8 September that the problem was "approached too much in a spirit of undiluted and unrelieved pessimism." H.C. Deb. 256, cc.38. Cf. A. Bullock op.cit., p.490. and M. Cole, Ed. Beatrice Webb's Diaries 1924-1932 (London: Longmans Green, 1956), p.282. 23 August 1931, The Times, on 10 August, considered that any suggestion of a National Government had been ruled out "by the hostile attitude already adopted towards the (May) Report by considerable sections of the Labour Movement." See for example, editorials in the Daily Herald and Forward (Glasgow), 8 August 1931 and New Leader's comments 7 August 1931.
15. Not only was the Labour Press universally hostile but Members of the P.L.P. had also expressed their disquiet over the proposals. Chuter Ede, by no means an extremist, had written to the Chairman of the P.L.P. Consultative Committee, of which he was a member, that "Any attempt to implement those

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15. (cont'd). "... recommendations must provoke the most serious crisis the party has yet faced, and I sincerely hope .... that before we are committed to any course of action the Cabinet's recommendations may be submitted to the Parliamentary Party in such a form as will enable an effective discussion to take place and a clear vote to be taken on each issue that may be raised." H.C. Deb. 256, cc. 62. 8 September 1931. Discussion was the last thing that Snowden wanted. Note also Dalton's complaint that Chamberlain was given preference over the Members of the P.L.P. Ibid., cc. 789, 15 September 1931.
16. The previous fortnight had seen Baldwin, Simon and Viscount Grey all publicly come out in favour of co-operation to reduce public expenditure (see Times 6 and 8 August) while a leading article in the Times on 1 August had referred to "suggestions that all parties should agree to a political moratorium while some ad hoc coalition carries out drastic economies." Fenner Brockway had prophetically written in an article entitled, "Towards a 'National' Government" New Leader 24 July 1931.
17. Nicolson apparently regards of little importance the letter to the King from his Private Secretary Sir Clive Wigram on 11 July 1931 which read, "it is quite possible that Your Majesty might be asked to approve of a National Government." The text of the letter suggests that the basis for Wigram's warning was the City and in particular the Governor of the Bank of England. Ibid., p. 449 cf. the remark attributed (post 24 August) to J.H. Thomas in H. Dalton, Call Back Yesterday: Memoirs 1887-1931 (London: Frederick Muller, 1953), p.281. and Chamberlain's record of a conversation with MacDonald on 6 July 1931 (Feiling, op.cit., p.189).
18. Cf. I. Jennings, Cabinet Government (London: Cambridge University Press, Second Edition, 1951) p.41. "the evidence seems to suggest that they (MacDonald and Snowden) did not (represent the Government) and that they were using the Opposition leaders to force their own policy on the Cabinet." This is exactly what MacDonald and Snowden were doing. Bassett's weak criticism that, "It would have been at least as plausible .... to suggest that the Opposition leaders were using MacDonald and Snowden for that purpose" (Bassett, op.cit., p. 387) only serves to illustrate, in the light of Chamberlain's desire, "to secure a measure of relief .... through a Socialist Government," (Feiling op.cit., p.191) the degree of consensus that existed between the Party leaders on this question. A letter from Chamberlain to his sister in which he wrote that, "The only way in which the economy figures could be raised was by cutting the dole and if once we could fasten that on the Labour Party they would be irrevocably split," makes Chamberlain's motives transparently clear. Quoted in R.K. Middlemas and J. Barnes, Baldwin: A Biography (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson 1969), p.625. Italics mine. In the final analysis it was because MacDonald could agree on policy with Chamberlain rather than Henderson that the National Government was formed. The Graham Memorandum. (Passfield Papers, IV, 26:25) records that it was suggested on one occasion that all the members of the Cabinet Committee met with the Bankers' representatives but "that idea was not encouraged by the Prime Minister or the Chancellor of the Exchequer. There was some remark to the effect that these Bankers were not accustomed to meetings with politicians: and that it might be easier if they put the case to the head of the Government and to the Chancellor of the Exchequer as the Minister immediately responsible."

19. During the meeting MacDonalld conveyed to the Cabinet the view of the Bank of England that, "it was.....essential, particularly from the point of view of the foreign interests concerned, that very substantial economies could be effected on Unemployment insurance. In no other way would foreign confidence be restored." CAB 23/67. 43(31)1. Italics mine. The succeeding minute records that "the Cabinet were almost equally divided on the question of whether there should be a reduction of 10 per cent or no reduction at all."
20. "When we asked what would happen if this announcement failed to restore foreign confidence.....Snowden replied 'the deluge'." Cf. Cross, op.cit., p. 292. MacDonalld in fact complained to the Cabinet that, "At the opening discussion with the Leaders of political parties, economies of the order of near £84-millions had been envisaged but these economies had now been greatly reduced by decisions with which he personally was not in agreement." CAB 23/69 44(31)3. 22 August 1931. In his record Samuel indicated that both MacDonalld and Snowden made this clear. "We had come prepared to give a general approval to the economies proposed, provided that a reduction was made in the unemployment scales. At the outset, however, the Ministers informed us that they had not been able to obtain the consent of the Cabinet even to the proposals on the Unemployment Fund which they had specified on the previous day." Samuel Papers A78/7 p.4.
21. Davidson commented, "Chamberlain, I am sure, had his eye on the Chancellorship of the Exchequer, and Sam Hoare also was a man of unlimited personal ambition. Although they put the national interest first they - and some other leading Conservatives - had thought a good deal about what positions they would have in a National Government....." James, Memoirs of a Conservative, p.368. Cf. Chamberlain's own view that "Truly, the Conservative Party is a wonderful embodiment of good sense, patriotism and honesty." Feiling, op.cit., p.195. Samuel and the Tories told MacDonalld that "we regarded it as his duty either to present more adequate proposals, or to place his resignation in the King's hands." Samuel Papers A 78/7, p.6.
22. At the Cabinet meeting on 22 August Snowden had declared, somewhat emotionally and, in view of later events, prophetically, that "so far as he was concerned he had no doubt whatsoever, if he was compelled to choose between retaining the Labour Movement in its present form and reducing the standard of living of the workmen by 50% which would be the effect of departing from the gold standard where his duty would lie." CAB 23/67 44(31)3. Cf. Henderson's adoption speech at Burnley, "the possibility of a National Government had been in Mr. MacDonalld's mind for many months, and had even been the subject of conversation without its having once been brought before any official meeting of the Labour Party." Times, 14 October 1931. The Economist had considered MacDonalld's defection a possibility. "Will Mr. MacDonalld stake his political future on an appeal to the country on co-operation with other parties against strong currents of feeling in his own?" "Democracy and Economy" 15 August 1931, p.299.
23. Nicolson recorded that MacDonalld warned the King of the likely resignations of Henderson and Graham from the Cabinet in the event of the "success" of the telegram to New York, and that "it would not be possible for him to carry on the administration without their assistance." Nicolson, op.cit., p.460/1. The Cabinet Minutes record "If the answer from New York was

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(cont'd.) favourable the Prime Minister's proposed to see the leaders of the Opposition Parties again and to discuss with them the parliamentary situation. If the answer from New York was unfavourable it was not proposed to have any further meetings with the Party leaders." (45(31).
24. "He most sincerely hoped that the Cabinet would now accept the proposals as a whole. If, however, the Cabinet were unable to accept them, then it was clear that the loan which was essential to avert the crisis would not be forthcoming and it was unthinkable that the Government could remain in office and prevent some other Administration being given the opportunity of deciding that the money should be found." The situation was grave and he admitted, "that the proposals as a whole represented the negation of everything that the Labour Party stood for, and yet he was absolutely satisfied that it was necessary in the national interests, to implement them if the country was to be secured. He then pointed out that, if on this question there were any important resignations the Government as a whole must resign." CAB 23/67. 46(31)1. 23 August 1931.
25. H.C. Deb. 256, cc. 733, 15 September 1931. Bassett's use of his material on this occasion is open to serious objection. His claim that Sexton's speech was "evidence of the reluctance with which Labour Members were adhering to the Opposition" is patently false. Bassett, op.cit., p.232. Henderson declared that he did not take exception to the formation of the National Government but to ".... the manner of its formation and what led immediately to the formation of the Government." H.C. Deb. 256, cc. 29. 8 September 1931.
26. Bassett spent some time discussing the supposed embarrassment of the ex-Ministers caused by the Labour Party's apparent volte-face. It should, however, be noted that such embarrassment was not particularly acute within the Labour Party itself. At the Annual Conference the Chairman said, "I am not concerned whether this so-called indispensable demand was put forward by international financiers, by British bankers or by the leaders of the other parties. What I do say .... is that in refusing to accede to these demands the ex-Ministers of the Labour Government did what the whole Labour and Trade Union and Labour Movement expected ...." L.P.A.C.R. 1931, p.156.
27. The speech is reproduced in full in Bassett, op.cit., (Appendix VIII) pp.444/9. Beatrice Webb described it as "a model of lucidity, delivered with conviction .... admirably planned and phrased." Cole, Beatrice Webb's Diaries, 1926-32, p.293, 18 October 1931. Whereas Forward (Glasgow), called it a "shameless apostasy and treachery to the principles publicly espoused for a life-time." 24 October 1931. In Labour's Election Appeal (1929), to which Snowden had presumably subscribed, it was claimed that

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27. (contd.) "In order to hide their record of incompetence and reaction Tory leaders are trying to frighten the electors with terrifying pictures of the disasters which would come upon the country if a Labour Government were returned .... We warn the electorate against the misrepresentations of Socialism and the aims and policy of the Labour Party .... The Labour Party is neither Bolshevik nor Communist. It is opposed to force, revolution and confiscation as means of establishing the New Social Order. It believes in ordered democratic methods."

28. The fact that MacDonald did not formally announce the decision to go to the country until 6 October is besides the point. Bassett, in claiming that it was the Labour Party which formally expelled MacDonald, is as guilty as Davidson of wishful thinking in believing that MacDonald was in any position to return to the Labour Party. Bassett, op.cit., pp.265/7. Cf. James, Memoirs of a Conservative, p.375. For MacDonald's hopes along these lines see Nicolson, op.cit., p.491. For his doubts about the role of the National Government following devaluation see Ibid., p.493. Cf. especial interest is MacDonald's self-justifying remark made some time later that "Any man in my position at the time, knowing all that I did would have acted as I acted. However, I wish sometimes that someone else had been in my position at the time." Ibid., p. 494. n.2.

CHAPTER SIX

THE THEORY AND PRACTICE OF BRITISH SOCIALISM IN

THE 'THIRTIES.

(a) Labour and Parliament: The Theory under Scrutiny.

While the events of 1931 had a debilitating effect on the Labour Party in the short-term they were not as crucial to the development of the Party as might at first appear to be the case. The internal conflict which 1931 inspired was no more than the traditional conflict between the reformist and revolutionary elements in the Labour Party, between its theoretically orientated and Marxist-inspired Socialist Left and its pragmatic non-doctrinaire Labourite Right. It was, as Richard Lyman correctly points out a conflict between "Socialist Ideals and practical politics" which centred upon the strategy to be used for attaining the socialist millennium.(1)

The Party's attitude to Parliament in the 'Thirties did not change from the moderate democratic stance prevalent in the previous decade. Neither did the Left seize power only to lose it slowly throughout the decade. What happened in fact was that a vociferous unrepresentative section of the Party, expressing what were frequently half-sensible views with nonsensical implications, were given excessive credence by their political opponents in order to damage the prospects of the Labour Party. From the point of view of Parliamentary reform the most relevant period of the 'Thirties is the first half of the decade for, to all intents and purposes, the overall attitude of the Party to the question was settled by 1934. In the years that followed other relevant issues requiring settlement were the marginal, 'though in one sense fundamental, questions of the affiliation of the Communist Party and the United Front. Although these questions posed fundamental questions about the basic principles from which

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1. R.W.Lyman, "The British Labour Party: The Conflict between Socialist Ideals and Practical Politics between the Wars," The Journal of British Studies, V, No.1.(November, 1965), 140-152.

the Labour Party derived its attitude towards Parliament and the Parliamentary process they were marginal in that they were simply manifestations of deeper attitudes towards the interpretation of the world as a whole.

The internal conflict characterised by "Intellectuals-v-Trade Unionists" and personified by Cripps and Bevin was a difference of temperament as much as one of ideology. It was also representative of the decade as a whole in which the major events of the World were systematically reduced to the simple issues of Capitalism and Communism, Fascism and Marxism, engaged in a world-wide apocalyptic conflict from which only one victor could emerge. To some extent the inability of contemporaries to correctly interpret the political events of the day was understandable. As Bernard Zylstra says, "One must not expect a good deal of genuinely scientific appraisal of Marx, Marxism and the history of Communism between the world wars. Insufficient lapse of time, the violence of the Russian Revolution the rise of Fascism and the economic crisis blurred one's view of the import of the new developments - both on the (Conservative) 'Right' and the (Labour) 'Left.'" (2)

Yet if interpretations of Fascism as the last bastion of Christian civilisation or the last fling of Capitalism in decline reflect unscientific and immature intellectual judgements, the refusal of many to apply normal values to Totalitarian countries represented a degree of ideological commitment incompatible with the right to demand individual respect. As Mary Agnes Hamilton said,

"The (political) Right forgave, even rather liked Totalitarianism in Germany, Italy, Spain but detested it in Russia; the Left forgave it there, to detest it everywhere else. Right and Left disagreeing in everything else, found a strange unanimity in applying to Russia standards the obverse of those used for other countries." (3)

2. Zylstra: Op.cit., p.134, n.26.

3. Mary Agnes Hamilton, Remembering My Good Friends, p.255.

Tribune protesting that "to us the theory of Stalin as modern Napoleon is simply unbelievable" (4) is a good example of the unwillingness to accept the possibility of either Socialist corruptibility or of a conflict between the aims of Communism and democratic Socialism.

It was inevitable that the internal conflicts of the Labour Party in the 1930's should be seen not only in terms of trade unionists and intellectuals, for this was in broadest terms the composition of the antagonistic groups, but also as clashes of personalities; for where the issue involved was that of loyalty to collective decisions and the right to individual view of conscience the conflict would inevitably take place between individual spokesmen such as Cripps and Laski and individuals speaking for the collective view. This was heightened by the Left's sneering comments at the leadership of the trade unions. "There have been many such men in the Labour Movement. They represent an English type - a type that means well but is in reality remote from the living problems of the Workers." (5) Such snide comments were reminiscent of the personal attacks levelled at the Party leadership by the Communist Party and appear to reflect a self-induced sense of importance often felt by the ideologically committed. Not that the Party leadership failed to respond. "If Bevan or anybody else," Emmanuel Shinwell told the Party Conference in 1934,

"believes that the Party is insipid and lacking in courage and has not got the necessary energy, either to put its point of view to the country or to carry it out then in my judgement they ought to join the party or the organisation which they believe has got the attributes that the Labour Party ought to have." (6)

In this context the success of the Labourite Right was assumed for whatever Attlee's political deficiencies, Bevin's prejudices and Morrison's

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4. Tribune, 18 June 1937.

5. Tribune, 19 February 1937.

6. L.P.A.C.R. 1934, p.141. Cf. Ernest Bevin's attack on Aneurin Bevan, Ibid., pp. 140/1.



conservatism may have been, they compared more than favourably with Cripps' political immaturity, Laski's capacity for intellectual bias and exaggeration and John Strachey's ability to logically spell out to the ridicule of later generations the implications of a Marxist analysis which itself was an intellectually inadequate explanation of current events.(7)

While the Party leadership did not emerge from the 'Thirties unscathed from the conflicts surrounding the issue of "democracy-v-dictatorship" its whole-hearted commitment to the former was recognised by its opponents. Stanley Baldwin, for example, told the House of Commons, "the Labour Party as a whole have helped to keep the flag of Parliamentary government flying in the world through the difficult period through which we have passed."(8) Attlee, in replying, said that it was the Labour Party's "duty to preserve our democratic Constitution and the workings of this Parliament."(9) Unlike the Left the leadership of the Party did not accept that Parliamentary government could not work in what was called "Capitalist Democracy". As Herbert Morrison commented, "All this talk by Fascists and sometimes by Communists that democracy would not work, that it was slow was sheer nonsense. It all depended who was running the democracy. The main thing in running democracy was will, determination and clearness of head."(10) In particular they did not accept the scheme of the Left for a popular front and so forth because they did not accept the applications of Marxist theory to the British situation.(11)

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7. For Laski's prejudices see L. Robbins, op.cit., pp.77/8, 95/5. A more sympathetic account of Laski's abilities is to be found in Kingsley Martin Harold Laski 1893-1950: A Biographical Memoir (London: Gollancz, 1953) and a long and careful analysis of his early writings is to be found in Zylstra, op.cit., and a complete analysis of his life's work in H.A. Deane, The Political Ideas of Harold Laski (New York, Columbia University Press) 1955.
  8. H.C.Deb. 302, cc. 3712. 22 May 1935.
  9. Ibid., cc. 372.
  10. Daily Herald, 8 October 1934.
  11. See Hugh Dalton 'The Popular Front', Political Quarterly, 7, No.IV, (October-December, 1936), pp.481/489.

Above all, however, the Labour Party as a whole continued to depend upon a pragmatic interpretation of world events. Unlike their predecessors the bulk of the Party in the 'Thirties did not dissipate their energies attacking Parliament or the P.L.P. Indeed, the contrast is remarkable for whereas the election campaign of 1931 had been more overtly fraudulent than that of 1918 there was no strong reaction, outside the Left whose commitment to Parliament was always ambiguous, against the working of Parliament or the performance of the P.L.P. Indeed, they were frequently praised.(12) This indicates the extent to which 1931 was regarded as a temporary setback under peculiar circumstances rather than the inevitable outcome of the Party's attempt to secure Socialism within a Capitalist framework. It was a measure to some degree of the extent to which the Trade Unions re-emerged in the political arena, after the disillusioning experience of the General Strike had been put in perspective; a re-emergence governed not by the mechanics of reform (the T.U.C. took as little interest in the reform of Parliamentary reform in the 1930's as it had in the latter part of the 1920's) but in the totality of the Fascist challenge and the necessity of defending democracy.

Bearing these points in mind this chapter will discuss the alternative views of society that existed within the Labour Party and the positions that these produced on the issue of Parliamentary reform and, indeed, on the whole question of the role of the British Parliament within the framework that surrounded it. It will be shown that although the apparent differences between the two sides in the Party on the specific details of parliamentary reform were minor enough to enable compromises to be effected relatively quickly in the long-term they were so fundamental as to promote division over continuing issues; such as the United Front and the affiliation of the Communist Party: that it was the

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12. See, for example, L.M. Weir in the New Clarion, 15 July 1933.

fundamental interpretation of Society and the wider world as they actually existed that provoked dissension rather than a simple clash of personalities. What follows is an examination of the variety of tenets upon which the two forces ('Left' and 'Right') based their attitudes to Parliament and its reform and to trace how this affected their views to both these and other allied questions throughout the decade.

Although the immediate wake of the 1931 Crisis brought with it a variety of scares concerning the possible extinction of democracy in Great Britain (13) it can be said quite confidently that the main fears on this score were felt, thought and articulated by the 'Left' which was composed of a variety of elements ranging from Laski, Cole and Strachey from the academic world to Alex Gossip of the Furnishing Trades' Association on trade union side although dominated by neo-Communist Marxist Left intellectuals (14) such as Cripps, Wise, Mellor and Trevelyan who wrote the pamphlets.(15) Its acknowledged leader was Sir Stafford Cripps and its main organised force the Socialist League. Its ideology was specifically developed from the political interpretations of the world, synthesised, vulgarised and popularised by Harold Laski articulated by Sir Stafford Cripps and given intellectual credence by John Strachey.

The main analytical tool of the Labour Left in the early 'Thirties was Marxism. Harold Laski, for example, described the role of Marxist thought in his work when he wrote in 1935,

"No tool at the command of the social philosopher surpasses Marxism either in its power to explain the movement of ideas or its authority to predict their practical outcome. On the nature and function of the State, on legal institutions, on capitalist habits, on historiography, on the development

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13. James Maxton, for example, declared in the House of Commons on 8 September, 1931, "I have heard rumours and seen indications that it is proposed by various devices to reduce Parliamentary opposition to a mere farce. I hope the Labour Movement realises that Parliamentary Opposition is not its only resource." H.C.Deb. 256, cc.55.
  14. See Note 1.
  15. A brief outline of the Socialist League is to be found in B.Pimlott, "The Socialist League: Intellectuals and the Left in the 1930's" Journal of Contemporary History, Vol.6. No.111 (1971) pp.12-33.

"of philosophical systems, Marxism holds the field against any of its rivals. On the breakdown of capitalist democracy, the decline of bourgeois culture, the rise of Fascism, the role of non-revolutionary socialism, it has insight not possessed by any other method of analysis."(16)

Even making customary allowance for Laski's penchant for overstatement and over-simplification the truth of this passage cannot be denied in its application to Laski's work even if in a corrupted form and more especially to John Strachey's The Theory and Practice of Socialism.(17) Their analysis of the immediate past and predictions for future developments were attempts to rigidly apply Marxist tenets to Britain and to place the British political scene in the context of a world-wide philosophy concerning the alleged decline, collapse and abolition of capitalism and its replacement by Socialism.

Briefly, the left-wing analysis was based on the fundamental tenet that economic interests in society were primary over political one, and that the State had evolved as an instrument for defending the interest of the privileged ruling group in society. The primary function of the State according to Laski was,

"to ensure the peaceful process of production in society. To do so it protects the system of productive relations which that process necessitates. Its function is to evolve, under coercive sanction, the legal relations by which the society maintains its life in terms of the way in which it earns its living."(18)

The sovereignty of power exercised by the State meant that,

"those.....who seek to alter the character of the distributive process in any fundamental way, who want, that is, to alter the productive relations of the system under which they live, must do so by altering the legal...."

16. See Note 2.

17. It is important in this context to note that Strachey had already gained a wide reputation with the publication of The Coming Struggle for Power (London: Victor Gollancz, 1932). Strachey's ability lay in the presentation of a case in logical manner - the judgements upon which his exposition was based were frequently erroneous. Cole distrusted his political judgement as well as that of Laski. M. Cole, Life of G.D.H. Cole, p.201/3.

18. H.J. Laski, The State in Theory and Practice (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1935), pp.110/111. "The legal order is a mask behind which a dominant economic interest secures the benefit of political authority." Cf. his Introduction to Politics (London: George Allen & Unwin, Rev. Ed., 1951), p.21.

"foundations of the society. This they can only achieve by possessing themselves, either peacefully or by violence, of the state-power...." (19)

The previous century - termed by Strachey "the century of the great hope"(20) had been one in which the middle class had secured political recognition of their economic power through the expansion of the general areas of liberty and democracy, culminating in the achievement of a universal franchise and the mitigation of the worst features of industrialisation. However, these achievements which had been made possible by the fact of capitalist economic expansion throughout the nineteenth century, were conceded by the governing class on the distinct understanding that "they did not disturb the essential thesis that the ownership of economic power must remain in private hands. They were the necessary concessions of the capitalist system to the outcry against its more naked consequences." (21) The concessions gained, in other words, were in answer to the peripheral questions of capitalism they were not answers which concerned the fundamental values of capitalist democracy. Moreover, "the lack of effective desire in any party to change the capitalist system enabled Parliament in times of comparative prosperity to give the appearance of a successful democratic machine." (22)

The fight to achieve Parliamentary democracy, however, had served to divert attention from the economic basis of society to its political superstructure, to the extent that the real conflict in society had been hidden by arguments over its formal power-wielding instruments. Moreover, the "democratic" features of

19. Laski, The State in Theory and Practice, Ibid., p.111.

20. J. Strachey, The Menace of Fascism (London: Victor Gollancz, 1934), Ch.II.

21. H.J. Laski, Democracy in Crisis (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1933), p.22. Cf. his "The present position of Representative Democracy" in Laski, et.al. Where Stands Socialism Today? (London: Rich & Cowan, 1933), pp.3/4 and 18. Hereafter cited as "The present position of representative democracy."

22. R.S. Cripps "Parliamentary Institutions and the Transition to Socialism" in Where Stands Socialism Today?, pp.29/56(30). Hereafter cited as Parliamentary Institutions and the Transition. The essays in this volume were revised versions of the Autumn series of Fabian Lectures delivered in 1932. An earlier draft of this particular lecture can be found in the New Clarion 5 November 1932. Cf. Laski, Democracy in Crisis, pp.30/35 for the economic background to mid-Victorian political life.

Capitalist democracy were in point of fact useless adjuncts in the face of the real power in society which lay, "even in the States which.....maintained democratic forms, in the hands of capitalists." (23) Furthermore, because "in a capitalist democracy the main weapons of leadership are in the hands of the capitalists. Its opponents are always on the defensive unless they confine their antagonism to the minutiae of the regime." (24) Under no circumstances was the political liberty conceded by the Capitalists to be used to secure economic equality.

Yet the logical outcome of the democratic ideal of equality was the universal franchise, the achievement of which, by changing the psychological dispositions towards, and social expectations of individuals from, the political system as a whole, inevitably changed the nature of social demands made upon the system from superficial political claims to fundamental economic ones. The logical progression from political to economic democracy is conceived by the mass of people as a natural demand to be secured in the same perceived manner as their previous demands - through the medium of the State. (25) However, these new demands involve questions about the central citadels of the economic system, i.e., the private ownership of the means of production, and will only be conceded if the Capitalists, who own the means of production, agree to do so, whereas in fact, a Capitalist Democracy, "offered a share in political authority to all citizens upon the unstated assumption that the equality involved in the democratic ideal did not seek extension to the economic sphere." (26)

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23. Strachey, Menace of Fascism, p.136.

24. Laski, Democracy in Crisis, p.76.

25. Laski referring to the Fabian nature of British Socialism noted "they assumed that they had only to persuade (the) majority that they were right, to proceed to use the power of the State for the Socialist transformation of economic institutions." H.J. Laski Parliamentary Government in England: A Commentary (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1938), p.19.

26. Laski, Democracy in Crisis, p.53.

Moreover, Capitalism could only make concessions in the economic sphere during a period of material expansion and with the exception of the immediate post-war boom the years since the first world war had been characterised by a general decline of trade and an aggressive economic nationalism. Its social effects were those of general disillusionment. "Certainty," wrote Laski in 1933, "has been replaced by cynicism; hope has given room to despair,"(27) and not only was this true in the economic sphere, it applied also to the political sphere. Whereas optimism had prevailed previously, the Second Labour Government, which came to office in 1929, was faced with the fact that economic equality was impossible within the Capitalist framework. "There was evidently no longer any question of obtaining new benefits for the workers without damaging the interests of the capitalist,"(28) or undermining the stability of British capitalism.

"In the so-called crisis of July 1931 the capitalist classes became alarmed at what they considered to be the danger of a definitely socialist tendency in Parliament. They thought that if the Labour Government was allowed to continue in power they might have attempted a solution along socialist lines."(29)

When capitalism is in such a phase of contraction not only were economic concessions impossible but a situation would arise in which the privileged assumptions of capitalism were in direct conflict with the egalitarian implications of democracy. "Representative democracy became unstable because there was no longer agreement, between the governing classes and the mass of people, either upon the ends it should seek or the ways in which it should seek them."(30) Harold Laski

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27. Ibid., p.16. Cf. The Present Position of Representative Democracy, pp.6/9.
28. Strachey, Menace of Fascism, p.50.
29. Cripps, Parliamentary Institutions and the Transition, p.36. All the evidence, however, supports the New Statesman's contention that "The Labour Party has failed not because it has been too Socialistic but because it has abandoned Socialism....." 19 September 1931. Cf. Bullock, op.cit., I, p.451.
30. Laski, The Present Position of Representative Democracy, p.21.

succinctly made this point so as to draw its theoretical implications in

The State In Theory and Practice;

"the price of the concessions expected by democracy..... appears too high. The assumptions of capitalism then contradict the implications of democracy. If the phase of contraction is prolonged, it becomes necessary either to abrogate the democratic process or to change the economic assumptions upon which the society rests."(31)

The inevitable conclusion drawn by Laski in this instance was, in the eyes of the Left, illustrated by the history of Fascism. The dilemma caused by the democratic element in Capitalism democracy was solved by the elimination of democracy through the advent of Fascism. The Fascists, described by Strachey as "the capitalists and their dupes in fancy dress,"(32) were responsible for the elimination of the basic democratic rights of free association, liberty of speech and so forth. Fascism itself was,

"a movement of the capitalist class using the lower middle class and peasants as its instrument, and its success means merely a consolidation of power in the hands of that same capitalist class which already possesses it."(33)

Its function was to rescue capitalism from its dilemma. "By the abrogation of democracy, in one form or another, it has entrusted unlimited power to those who own and control the means of production."(34) Strachey was less restrained than Laski in his early analysis of Fascism. "The purpose of Fascism," he wrote, "is to defend by violence the private ownership of the means of production, even though..... modern civilisation has become incompatible with a social system based upon private ownership."(35) In Germany and Italy the Fascist attack

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31. Laski, The State in Theory and Practice, p.130. Cf. Strachey, The Theory and Practice of Socialism, pp.152/3. The First Editorial of the Socialist League asserted "Democracy and Democratic methods fail to resolve the contradictions of Capitalism; they cease to serve the purposes of a dominant class, conscious that its grip is endangered, and they are swept on one side."
32. Strachey, Menace of Fascism, p.136.
33. Ibid., p.135. Cf. His definition of Fascism as "one of the methods which may be adopted by the capitalist class when the threat of the working class to the stability of monopoly capitalism becomes acute." The Coming Struggle for Power p.261.
34. Laski, The State in Theory and Practice, p.131.
35. Strachey, Menace of Fascism, p.129. See Note 3.



had been brazen and undiluted whereas in Britain the capitalist encroachment on democratic rights had taken more subtle forms. The Trade Disputes Act of 1927 - "the first legislation hostile to the trade unions .... since the Combination Acts of 1799" (36) as Laski called it, the constitutional outrages signified by the Widespread use of Orders-in-Council, the famous "agreement to differ" and rule in the teeth of public opinion were, to the Left, all proof of the underlying Fascist nature of the National Government. (37) Behind the Government hovered the financiers, the real rulers of society. As Sir Stafford Cripps said of 1931, it had proved to be "the clearest demonstration of the power of capitalism to overthrow a popularly elected Government by extra-Parliamentary means." (38)

To the Left in the 'Thirties Fascism was the reaction of capitalism to the economic demands of democracy. The question which arose from this was, what would the British Capitalists do if once again faced with a Socialist Government? It was possible that the ruling class would peacefully accede to "the erosion of capitalist democracy by its own consent" (39) but the preponderance of military strength possessed by them led Laski to conclude that,

"A class which controls the power of the state will not surrender it if surrender involves the abdication of its privileges. It will reform when it must if reform does not mean the destruction of what it regards as essential .... On any other terms, a rule class will fight .... If, particularly, the conflict emerges in that special form of society we call capitalist democracy, I believe that the holders of economic power will seek to suppress the democratic system if this, in its operation, interferes with the foundations of capitalism." (40)

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36. Laski, Democracy in Crisis, p.15.
37. See Note 4.
38. Sir R.S. Cripps, "Can Socialism Come by Constitutional Methods?" in C. Addison, et.al., "Problems of a Socialist Government" (London: Victor Gollancz, 1933), pp. 35/66 (38). Hereafter cited as Can Socialism Come..?
39. Laski, Democracy in Crisis, p.84.
40. Laski, The State in Theory and Practice, p.316.

Strachey, too, believed that "an attempt by the British governing class to abolish democratic forms of Government and establish a naked dictatorship on Fascist lines is inevitable."(41) Unlike Laski, however, who was at times pessimistic about the fate of the British working-class, Strachey had no doubt that the workers would win.(42) At the heart of this interpretation of British society lay the belief that the differences between the various political parties were fundamental differences. As Laski characterised the rise of organised Labour:

"For the first time in British history since the Puritan Rebellion parties confronted one another with respective ways of life which looked to wholly antithetic ends. Between a capitalism which sought to preserve the motive of private profit as the keystone of the arch, and did not propose to allow the essential sources of economic power to pass from private ownership, and a socialism which denied the validity of either premise, it did not appear that there was the possibility of a new compromise. Changes of government, in such a perspective, would mean upon each occasion a constitutional revolution..."(43)

The broad view about the coming struggle for power produced a dual, almost mutually contradictory view, about the role, function and purpose of the Labour Party. On the one hand it was frequently assumed and often stated that the Labour Party was fully committed to the reconstruction of society. "The Labour Party," wrote Sir Stafford Cripps, "is not now concerned so much with some particular orientation of capitalist society as with the change from capitalism to Socialism."(44) Yet it was also just as often recognised that the Labour Party did not match up to the ideal Socialist Party that members of the Socialist

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41. Strachey, Menace of Fascism, p.255. Cf. Laski, Democracy in Crisis, p.256, "the first consequence of revolution.....would be in fact a dictatorship of the middle class in kind, though not in form, akin to that of the new Italy."
  42. Strachey, Menace of Fascism, p.255.
  43. Laski, Democracy in Crisis, pp.39/40.
  44. Cripps, Can Socialism Come? p.36.

League envisaged. In particular the Left-Wing intellectuals of the 'Thirties were convinced of the inadequacy of the policy followed by the Labour Party. They believed it to be wrong-headed in its insistence on distinguishing between democracy and dictatorship rather than between Capitalism and Socialism, and sectarian in its refusal to participate as a party in a broad political united front against Fascism and its allies, at home and abroad. If democracy was not allowed to work by the Capitalists, it was argued, then the resort to dictatorship was a necessary if unpalatable method of securing working class aims. The Labour Party's belief in democracy was, in fact, a refusal to face the fact that capitalist democracies were effectual dictatorships of the ruling classes, or as John Strachey put it, "dictatorships of the whole property owning class over the whole working class." (45) Moreover, the Left were particularly critical of the Labour Party's carte blanche condemnations of all dictatorships. This condemnation to Strachey, for example, "implies that the present leaders of the Labour Party make no distinction in their opposition to the German Fascist dictatorship of Hitler.....and the workers' dictatorship of Soviet Russia. They are not interested in the fact that Hitler's dictatorship has as its.....object the maintenance of Capitalism and the suppression of every form of working-class organisation, while the workers' dictatorship in Russia has as its object the suppression of Capitalism and the maintenance and development of working-class organisations." (46) For the Left in general and Strachey in particular, this really amounted to "a declaration of neutrality in the struggle of social classes." (47) Labour's hostility to such a Marxist interpretation of history -

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45. Strachey, Menace of Fascism, p.244 n.1. Cf. Theory and Practice of Socialism pp.156/7.

46. Strachey, Menace of Fascism, p.249.

47. Ibid., p.250.

implied necessary hostility towards the Soviet Union.

Such a stance was unforgivable in the eyes of the Left, who generally regarded the Soviet Union as the only positive example of practical socialism in the world.(48) In 1934 Laski wrote that "there has been more realisation of personality under the Soviet regime than in any comparable epoch in history. (If) the method of expression has been different, it has not been less real."(49) Strachey, too, praised the Soviet Government's advancement towards genuine equality of opportunity and declared,

"because the Russian Government, which has realised for the Russian workers one hundred times as much democracy and liberty, in the sense of real opportunities for self-development, education and advancement, as any Capitalist democracy has ever dreamt of, has the frankness to admit that it is, and must be until all class distinctions have disappeared, a dictatorship over the remaining Capitalist elements, the British Labour leaders class it with the Governments of the Fascist terror."(50)

In The Theory and Practice of Socialism Strachey claimed that the dictatorship of the proletariat was by definition a dictatorship of the majority and in the interests of the majority against the democracy of the few which Capitalist democracy represented.

"(that which) the spokesmen of capitalism call democracy means the effective subjection of the mass of the population to a small minority, whilst what communists and socialists call dictatorship means the subjection of a small and ever-dwindling minority to the great majority of the population - which is itself democratically organised."(51)

By "democratically organised" Strachey meant organised along the democratic

48. Not only the "Left" either. The view was commonly held throughout the decade - few were prepared to be disillusioned or sophisticated. See Footnote 3 above.
49. 'A Leningrad Letter' The Nation, (New York) 25 July 1934, p.101.
50. Strachey, Menace of Fascism, p.250.
51. Strachey, Theory and Practice of Socialism, p.157.

centralist lines of the C.P.S.U. by which the "advanced guard of the working-class" (usually middle-class intellectuals like Strachey) would "guide" the mass of the population according to the principles of "scientific socialism" through which instilled, unspoken and often unrecognised features of unregenerate capitalism could be purged from the minds of the unenlightened majority.(52) Clearly, therefore, it was argued,

"there is an essential difference between dictatorships of the right and of the left, not so much in their form as in the class objective which underlies them. Fascism is designed to give the maximum of economic advantage to the middle-classes .... Communism, on the other hand, is based on the dictatorship of the proletariat and is prepared to crush the upper and middle classes alike."(53)

Such distinctions naturally allowed the Left to view the Soviet Union in a rather rosy light. Strachey's earlier comments have been noted but his assertion that the adoption of the 1936 Constitution, which included such liberal features as the geographical franchise was indicative of a successful conclusion to the class struggle in the Soviet Union was in fact indicative of the extent to which the Left was prepared to take its Russophilia.(54) Laski was too liberal to go all the way to becoming a mere apologist for the Soviet regime, and unlike D.N. Pritt, for example, was not prepared to defend the Communists at all costs but like G.D.H. Cole his fame of reference was adroitly applied so as to avoid facing, or in order to pervert, the political facts of life.(55)

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52. See, for example, Strachey, What are we to do? op.cit., In the Coming Struggle for Power Strachey discussed the potential for a revolutionary Communist movement in Great Britain. Chapter XX.
53. Sir Stafford Cripps Preface to Addison, et.al., "Problems of a Socialist Government" op.cit., pp. 8/9, hereafter cited as Preface. Cf. E.F. Wise "A Socialist Revolutionary policy" New Clarion, 13 May 1933 and G.D.H. Cole "Notes on Democracy and Dictatorship" The Highway, (November, 1933), pp. 2/5.
54. Strachey, The Theory and Practice of Socialism, pp. 148/9;
55. See Note 5.

The essence of the Left's criticism of the Labour Party was its refusal to recognise the common struggle that existed between anti-Capitalist groups such as itself, the I.L.P. and the Communist Party. The inevitability of Fascist response and the political and economic oppression and misery that would be consequences of Fascist rule were immediate problems which the Left considered should be faced by the Labour Party. The Party should, they argued, be prepared to fight Fascism wherever and whenever it appeared. The possibility of a peaceful transition to Socialism was ruled out by all but the most optimistic on the Left, which incidentally, included, on occasions, Laski.

The intellectual weaknesses of the Left were well met by the publication in 1940 of E.F.M. Durbin's book The Politics of Democratic Socialism.<sup>(56)</sup> The weakness of the Left's approach as it was seen by the Labour Party as a whole, however, was centred on political issues which it raised. The most important of these was the "Democracy-v-Dictatorship" debate which shall be examined in great detail. The other issues that arose were in fact, off-shoots of this debate over first principles. The United Front and the question of the affiliation of the Communist Party were dealt with as parts of the broad spectrum of democracy and dictatorship upon which notwithstanding the continuation of the "United Front" issue to the eve of the Second World War, there was general agreement on the issue in the first half of the decade.

Many of the internal problems which arose within the Labour Party were derived from the alleged "swing to the Left" which occurred at the 1932 Labour Party Annual Conference and which was summarised in the Trevelyan resolution which stated,

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56. E.F.M. Durbin, The Politics of Democratic Socialism (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1940).

"that the leader of the next Labour Government and the P.L.P. be instructed by the National Conference that on assuming office, either with or without power, definite Socialist legislation must be immediately promulgated, and that the Party shall stand or fall in the House of Commons on the principles in which it has faith."(57)

This resolution, together with a number of others, and the revolutionary tone of Trevelyan's speech, were generally taken to signify success for the newly formed Socialist League which was created by and included most of the Left-Wing intellectuals.(58) The resolution, however, was so broadly stated that it could be taken to mean anything, even though in his speech to the Conference Trevelyan supported by Attlee, spoke in quasi-revolutionary terms. Attlee, for instance, implicitly rejecting gradualism, stated that

"we are bound in duty to those whom we represent to tell them quite clearly that they cannot get Socialist without tears, that whenever we try to do anything we will be opposed by every vested interest, financial, political and social, and I think we have got to face the fact that, even if we are returned with a majority we shall have to fight all the way, that we shall have another crisis at once and that we have to have a thought-out plan to deal with that crisis."(59)

At the broadest level Attlee's speech could be regarded as a rhetorical version of the intellectual analysis yet, in fact, whilst Trevelyan and Attlee may have meant the revolution in the violent sense the Executive meant something entirely different.

Exactly what the Executive did mean was made clear in its attitude to the I.L.P. which had earlier in the year been expelled from the Labour Party ostensibly over Standing Orders but in reality because of its revolutionary stance. Henderson, for example, had remarked to Fenner Brockway that

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57. I.P.A.C.R. 1932, p.204. Italics Mine.

58. See Note 6.

59. I.P.A.C.R. 1932, p.205.

"He had gathered that the I.L.P. believed that ultimately the transition from Capitalism to Socialism would be made not through Parliament but by a direct struggle for power between the working-class and the possessing class. Did this mean that the I.L.P. stood for socialism by revolution?" (60)

The same question with the implications it had in favour of Parliamentary Democracy may well have been asked of the Socialist League.

This is hardly surprising for those within the I.L.P. led by Frank Wise, who had recognised that to leave the Labour Party would have meant an ineffective existence for the I.L.P. as a whole, instigated a virtual take-over bid for the S.S.I.P. to form the Socialist League. Hence the stance adopted by the Socialist League was akin to the views of the I.L.P. and the ideological unity between them was substantial. The only real difference between the I.L.P. and the Socialist League was that the latter remained inside the Labour Party registering at the 1932 Conference a number of apparent successes against the Executive and creating the impression that the Party was far more radical than in fact it was. (61)

It is not frequently appreciated, however, that the reason for the success of the Socialist League at the 1932 Conference was the broad agreement throughout the Party that the 1931 Crisis had been manufactured by financial circles and that the National Government was the direct product of a "Bankers' Ramp" and the fact that some of the larger trade unions had supported definite Socialist measures. (62) The divergence that arose between the Executive and the Socialist League derived from the latter's insistence on anticipating trouble upon the

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60. McNair, op.cit., p.210

61. "Labour swept by Socialist wave" Forward (Glasgow), 6 October 1932. Cf., "the bulk of the Labour Party appeared to be frankly hostile to anything short of a clear-cut Socialist revolution." H. Pelling America and the British Left: From Bright to Bevan (London: A. & C. Black, 1956), p.139.

62. The confusion might well have been exacerbated by the fact that Laski was entrusted by the N.E.C. to write the Draft Manifesto for the 1931 Election. N.E.C. Minutes 60, E.C.14, 1930/1, M.500. 5 October 1931.



election of a future Labour Government and the former's recognition that the "Bankers' Ramp" explanation was not an infallible one. The differences were aggravated by conflicts of personality between Bevin and Cripps but at the heart of the conflict lay in the analysis of society and the interpretation of events derived from the analyses made. The broad principles of the Left-Wing approach have already been mentioned, and an examination of the issue of the specific role of Parliamentary institutions will follow shortly, but what must also be understood are the broad principles that underlay the Bevin, Citrine and Morrisonian approach to politics in general.

Unlike the Left the Trade Union dominated Executive approached politics from an empirical rather than an ideological point of view. Even John Strachey wrote in 1932 "The present leaders of the Labour Party and the Trades Union Movement are .... just as ignorant of, and hostile to, the science of social changes as were their predecessors." (63) Thus notwithstanding the early 'myth' of a Bankers' Ramp, the general interpretation made of the 1931 Crisis was that it represented a set-back in the inevitable progress towards Socialism rather than the collapse of democracy. Moreover, whereas the Left spoke of the incompatibility of Socialism and Capitalist Democracy Bevin, for example, concentrated on the need for "intense and continuous educational work" designed to promote "the spread of knowledge in every possible way in order to get the principles of socialism more deeply rooted in the hearts of the people ...." (64) - an aim which 'though often professed by Cripps and the Socialist League was often denied by their self-professing intellectual superiority. (65)

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63. J. Strachey, Theory and Practice of Socialism, p.447.

64. Quoted by Bullock, op.cit., p.503.

65. See, for example, John Strachey's designation of British Socialism as "so intellectually inferior to the main body of Socialist thought that it is difficult for me to admit that it is British Socialism." What are we to do? p. 70.

Above all, Bevin and the "Labourite" section of the Party continued to profess their belief in the efficacy of Parliamentary democracy, and its fundamental value to the Labour Movement. At the 1932 Conference Henderson stated specifically,

"that nothing has happened either to the Party or our own electoral position to warrant any scrapping of our programme or policy or the revolutionising of our methods .... Political democracy is not to blame for either government or parliamentary failures." (66)

Henderson was particularly critical of those elements who blamed Parliamentary democracy for the failure of the Labour Government and who despised Constitutional methods as a result.

"(They) do not tell us exactly what they have in mind or want the Labour Party to do. Political democracy - the principles upon which the Labour Party has been built and developed - is today .... being attacked by determined and resolute enemies. It is being prejudiced, weakened and undermined in our own country. That is a challenge which we must be prepared to meet from whatever quarter it may come for democracy is a cardinal principle of the Socialist faith and democracy is an essential condition of the successful accomplishment of Socialism." (67)

It was this belief in the essential primacy of democracy that separated the Executive from the Left during the Thirties. By "Democracy" was meant the achievement of Socialism by Parliamentary means and the underlying assumption that this was both possible and desirable. There is little doubt that this belief derived from the life experiences of Henderson, Bevin and their colleagues, which they had appreciated during their own life-times. Their own rise to success and leadership and the constant negotiating battles they had, convinced them that politics was the practical art of the possible rather than

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66. L.P.A.C.R. 1932, p.166. See Note 7.

67. L.P.A.C.R. 1932, p. 166. Cf. The Labour and Socialist International. "Democracy can only be defended effectively as it develops from Political Democracy to Social Democracy" L.P.A.C.R. 1933, Appendix X, pp. 279/287 (284).

the intellectual science of the certain.(68) Not the least of the qualities valued by the Labour leadership was that of loyalty to collective decisions and the willingness to compromise. On both accounts they had clashed with the Left's predecessors in the Minority Movement and were just as adamant in their determination to overcome the pretensions of the newer Left.

Moreover, because they neither shared the same ideological premises as the Left nor regarded Parliamentary democracy as the tool of Capitalism, the Executive also tended to view the "United Front" and the Soviet Union in a different light. It naturally followed from their insistence in the absolute value of democracy and the practical nature of politics that they would condemn dictatorship in any form and that their attitude to the United Front and the Soviet Union would be governed by this and by their experience of communist tactics on International bodies. They denounced the Communist Party as the tool of the Communist International, as a body which did not believe in the same democratic principles as the British Labour Movement, and as an hypocritical group which sought to affiliate to the Labour Party in order to subvert and disrupt it, and subject the international Communism directed from Moscow. As for the "United Front" that was a transparent tactic designed to divide and weaken the existing United Labour Movement of Labour Party, Trade Unions and Co-operatives; such a "Union" would be both artificial and disastrous, serving only to divide the Movement as had been the case in Germany where the Communist Party, under the direction of the Communist International, had fatally weakened the working-class movement, i.e., the Social Democrats, by their unrestrained hostility in the vital period immediately prior to Hitler's accession to power. The comparison between the intellectual analysis of the British situation and the practical suffering undergone by the continental Trade Union colleagues of

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68. Roy Jenkins makes this point, Jenkins op.cit.p.67.

Bevin and Citrine were too obvious to be ignored. Their experience of Communist activity at home and abroad had only reinforced this viewpoint.(69)

Raymond Postgate made the same point,

"At the Labour Party Conference of 1933 when the question of the 'united front' should theoretically have come up, it received no consideration.....this was not because corrupt reformist leaders had stamped out a rank-and-file revolt. They had no need to: the delegates had had so large a belly full of Communist tactics that they could not, for however just a cause, associate with them."(70)

The strongest statement of Labour's position was made in British Labour and Communism.(71) The document began with an assertion of the Labourite position.

"From its beginning the British Labour Movement has been based on democratic principles.....Its policy, born of its own thought and experience has been arrived at by free discussion, untrammelled by reference for determination or decision to other less democratic bodies either at home or abroad."(72)

Whilst recognising that

"The Russian Revolution was.....the inevitable reaction against Czarist tyranny and the horror of war.....the sympathetic interest (of the British Labour Movement) in Soviet economic advance has been qualified by growing resentment against Russian effort through the Communist International to establish and finance revolutionary Communist Parties in other countries with the object of destroying existing democratic industrial and political Labour Movements, and of bringing about the overthrow of the existing social system by violence."(73)

After attacking the Communist International's failure to appreciate "varying national traditions and circumstances" the document stated the Labour Party's empirical faith in Parliamentary and Democratic Socialism.

69. Citrine, Men and Work, p.253/4.

70. R. Postgate, "A Critique of Communist Techniques" Atlantic Monthly, 32, ( July, 1934 )pp.281/8.

71. I.P.A.C.R. 1936, Appendix IX, pp.296/200.

72. Ibid., p.296.

73. Loc.cit.

"The British Labour Movement from its own history, its own knowledge, and its own common sense, realises now, as ever, than an instructed and convinced democracy, loyal to its principles and inflexible in its determination, can shape and adapt the State to its democratic Socialist purpose .... In Britain Labour's case requires neither conspiracies nor foreign subventions. Its strength lies in its clear appeal to the masses and the steady support they give to its open agitation for social change." (74)

Recalling previous attacks by the Communist Party on the British Labour Movement, the Executive detailed the Communist attempts to disrupt the Labour Movement, through such organisations as the Minority Movement and latterly through the United Front. The purpose of the United Front was clearly to subject the British Labour Movement to the dictation of the Russian Government. (75) Such a course would be disastrous for the British Labour Movement and consequently the Executive said that the British Labour Movement "will not attempt to achieve a spurious unity with those who hold principles so completely irreconcilable with Labour and who have no faith in democracy." (76) Underlying this attitude was the recognition of the political insignificance and weakness of the Communist Party of Great Britain. The Labour Party was the party of the working-class in Great Britain; to broaden its base would serve no useful political purpose and could bring only internal and external trouble. (77)

Despite individual differences from year to year the general underlying attitude to the United Front remained constant. Underlying it were not only fundamental cleavages over Parliamentary Democracy but also over the concept of

74. Ibid., p.297.

75. Ibid., pp.299/300. Cf., Herbert Morrison at the 1933 Annual Conference quoting Stalin's statement that "the United Front tactics were set up by Lenin in order to make it easier for millions of workers in capitalist countries who are infected by the prejudices of Social Democratic opportunism to come over to Communism." L.P.A.C.R. 1933, p.145. See also The Communist Solar System (London: Labour Party, 1933).

76. L.P.A.C.R. 1936, p.300. The N.E.C. had reiterated the view that "the fundamental differences between the democratic policy and practice of the Labour Party and the policy of dictatorship which the Communist Party had been created to promote was irreconcilable." Ibid., p.51.

77. See Note 8.

loyalty. To the Executive loyalty was essentially collective, whereas the Left considered that loyalty to first principles with the right of the individual to dissent from wrong-headed policies was of primary importance. The Executive viewed the Party as a Trade Union Party operating on Trade Union principles and accepting, above all, the responsibility of collective action.(78) As Ernest Bevin once wrote to G.D.H. Cole,

"You see the difference between the intellectuals and the trade unions is this: You have no responsibility, you can fly off at a tangent as the wind takes you. We, however, must be consistent and we have a great amount of responsibility. We cannot get up in the morning and get a brain wave, when father says 'turn' and half-a-million people turn automatically. That does not work."(79)

Bevin, for whom "the authenticity with which he represented and embodied in his own person the character and convictions of the English working-classes, prejudices and all"(80) still held a fascination for the Left, commented at the Annual Conference of 1934, "If organised Labour in the trade union sense has trusted its destiny to this Party, this Party has no right to allow an individual member to flirt with that responsibility."(81) At the Annual Conference of the following year he said,

"The great crime of Ramsay MacDonald was that he never called in his Party and the crime of these people is that they have gone out, they have sown discord at the very moment when candidates wanted unity to face an election."(82)

Such individuality was indicative of the intellectual's irresponsibility and lack of loyalty that had, in Bevin's view, produced the political crisis of 1931.

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78. See Note 9.

79. Bullock, op.cit., p.532.

80. Ibid., p.535. The New Statesman described him as "much the biggest man the Trade Union movement has today - the only man in it who looks at all like a leader." 30 December 1933.

81. L.P.A.C.R. 1934, p.140.

82. L.P.A.C.R. 1935, p.180.

Ralph Miliband has remarked in respect of the characterisation of the different political outlooks of Cripps and Bevin as "intellectual" and "Trade Unionist" that

"Cripps had many ideas, but to call him an intellectual doctrinaire is to overlook the fact that he was exceedingly weak on doctrine; nor was Bevin by any means as crassly empirical as his own antitheses, then and later, were intended to suggest. On the contrary, Bevin in many ways, had a much more organised theory of the role of Labour than Cripps.....At the core of that theory lay the notion of institutionalised co-operation between the trade unions, management and the State, to be supplemented by the parliamentary pressure of the Labour Party for legislation beneficial to the working classes."(83)

However, such a view of society was stated with very little difference by Bevin's opponents.

"In the absence of industrial militancy the attack in Parliament falls flat, no matter how eloquently it may be stated. Parliament is rarely the place where a political crisis originates. It is the place where it finds final expression, in a fashion which enables the Labour Movement to obtain the maximum advantage, both in the immediate results for the workers, and in the ultimate increased political consciousness of the whole movement."(84)

This is not to deny the validity of Miliband's analysis which is true to the extent that Bevin's ideological framework was reasonably well established. However the real point to note is that the framework itself was the product of Labourite empiricism and prejudice rather than unproved and unprovable a priori assumption. As Bevin pointedly asked of G.D.H. Cole, "How could anyone have followed you in the last ten years?"(85)

The differences of political analysis and social interpretation were responsible to a large degree for the various conflicts over policy. To the

83. Miliband, Parliamentary Socialism, p.206. See Note 10.

84. Tribune, 2 April 1937

85. Bullock, op.cit., p.531.

Left programmes were necessary devices to secure the mandate from the electorate whereas the Executive regarded them as programmes for implementation, although on this point, as we shall see, Bevin and Cripps were far nearer than is commonly supposed." The continuing point which was made by the Right was that the emphasis by the Left on the inevitability of violence was a tactical error of the first magnitude. Herbert Morrison who always reserved the right to resist capitalist counter-revolution declared that while it was vital that "the parties of the Left should stand firm by the principles of parliamentary democracy and be ready to take all practicable steps to increase the difficulties of reaction in resorting to violence,"(86) they should not promote the pre-disposition to violence by "wild talk".

These basic differences in respect of the question of Parliamentary reform came to a head at the 1933 and the 1934 Annual Conferences where the reform of House of Commons procedure and the tactics to be adopted by a Labour Government in the event of deliberate subversion by its enemies were thrashed out and an effective compromise reached. After this the continuing discussions over basic principles found expression in the quarrels over defence, the united front and similar issues. That the question of Parliamentary reform raised any heat at all was due primarily to the attempts by Sir Stafford Cripps, to popularise the eclectic opinions of Harold Laski by posing the unnecessary and deliberately provocative question "Can Socialism come by Constitutional Methods?"(87)

The notoriety attached to Cripps' lecture "Can Socialism Come by Constitutional Methods?" was derived from the reception the lecture received rather than the answer Cripps gave, which was, in fact, a qualified "yes"(88). The important

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86. H. Morrison "Social Change-Peaceful or Violent?" Political Quarterly, Vol. X, No.1., (January-March, 1939), p.8. See also Note 11.

87. See Footnote 38 above.

88. Cripps, Can Socialism Come? pp.65/6.



point to remember about the lecture is the fact that it dealt with two inter-related but distinct themes. The first part of the lecture dealt with the likely circumstances surrounding the accession of a Labour Government to power whilst the latter part of the lecture was concerned with changes in Parliamentary procedure designed to make it more responsive to a positive enactment of the electorate's mandate by the Government. The link between the two themes lay in Cripps' assertion that a reformed House of Commons was essential to the efficient implementation of a Socialist society. The storm of criticism aroused by the lecture lay, as has been noted, not in the conclusions he reached, but in the implication of some of the remarks he made and, in particular, in the comments made by his colleagues in the Socialist League. That this is so will become clear shortly but it is important to note that the basis of Cripps' lecture, and indeed, much of the substance of the second part of the lecture had been delivered in 1932 as part of the Fabian Society's autumn lecture programme without even as much as a comment. Even admitting that the title had been the less provocative "Parliamentary Institutions and the Transition to Socialism,"<sup>(89)</sup> and making due allowance for the scant reference to the Laski-inspired prophecies about Capitalist reaction to the advent of a Labour Government, the reaction to Cripps' lecture was based on accidental or deliberate misrepresentation of a carefully argued, if not carefully conceived, plan of action.

The premises underlying Cripps' lecture were set out in the preface to the collected Socialist League lectures for 1933. The State, it was claimed, was an instrument of class domination and its use by some class or classes would inevitably bring about political, social and economic conflict with the class against whom it was to be used. The traditional method of capitalist rule through Parliamentary democracy had in recent years collapsed with the growing

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89. In Where Stands Socialism Today? pp.27/56, see also Footnote 22 above.

inefficiency of democracy in face of the growing complexity of society's economic life. The obstructive nature of parliamentary democracy had exacerbated political problems whilst the mass democratic implications which were derived from its theoretical promises had, in the search for efficiency, provoked a variety of dictatorships. These implications, of course, involved a transfer of economic power from the capitalist to the working class which the ruling class of capitalists would resist. 1931 had proved this. The result was the National Government which was in effect, a "Parliamentary Dictatorship." (90)

Having managed to drive the Labour Government from office in the past there was little doubt that the Capitalists would seek to repeat their success in the future should a Labour Government be returned to office. As Cripps wrote, "a Socialist Party must be fully prepared to deal with every kind of opposition direct and indirect and with financial and political sabotage of the most thorough and ingenious kind." (91) It was not clear what form this opposition would take but it was the Socialist League's self-appointed task to ensure that the Labour Party was prepared to deal effectively with any kind of opposition that might arise.

The circumstances in which Cripps envisaged the return of a Labour Government were perhaps best summed up by Frank Wise in his lecture in the same volume; (92)

"I assume that the next Labour Government will be a Socialist Government, taking office in order to carry into effect the Trevelyan resolution of the Leicester Conference, which laid it down that the next Socialist

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90. Cripps, Preface, p.8. Cf. Article in Reynolds News 8 November 1931. Ivor Jennings pointed out that all Parliaments controlled by a majority were dictatorial - it was the possibility of peaceful change which made the system democratic. "The Technique of Opposition," Political Quarterly, Vol. VI., No.2, 208-221.
91. Cripps, Can Socialism Come? p.38.
92. E.F. Wise, "Control of Finance and Financiers" Addison, et.al. Problems of a Socialist Government, pp. 67/94 (67/8).

.....Government must be animated by a ruthless determination to carry through Socialist measures, whatever the obstacles. It should hold office for that purpose only, and only for as long as that course is possible. I contemplate, too, that, for such a programme to be carried through by Parliamentary means, fundamental changes in constitutional methods and procedures would be necessary. Parliament should cease to be a tool in the hands of obstructionists; it should become an efficient instrument for the rapid passage of legislation empowering the Government to put its programme into effect."

This passage is in fact an interesting summary of Cripps' lecture and highlights both its strengths and weaknesses. Not the least of its weaknesses was the inability to recognise that "fundamental changes in constitutional methods and procedures" could not be forced through as part of an overall Socialist programme but must, unless there was to be a constitutional breakdown, precede the transition to Socialism. Certainly some of the reforms could be delayed until the transition was well under way but the general attitude of the Socialist League seems to have been dictated by the desire and necessity of provoking an apocalyptic struggle with the Capitalist ruling class, so much so, that the struggle appeared in their doctrine as an inevitable part of the process of constitutional change.

A second weakness lay in its assumption that the Labour Party shared the same Socialist convictions as the Socialist League. For whatever the Trevelyan resolution meant to Frank Wise it could not, by any stretch of the imagination, be taken to commit the Labour Government to carry through Socialist measures "whatever the obstacles". True, the resolution did imply that the P.L.P. should attempt to enact Socialist measures - which Wise clearly recognised - but the Trevelyan resolution was less of a statement of positive Socialist action than an expression of disgust with MacDonald's attempt to accommodate the Liberals. What Cripps and his associates did was to inter-relate two separate processes involving the transition into Socialism on the one hand and

the operation of Parliament within a Socialist state on the other. Harold Laski for example, was clearly referring to the future role of Parliament when he wrote that,

".... the leisurely processes of parliamentary debate are far too slow for the requirements of economic decision. They tend merely to register agreements arrived at outside the legislative assembly .... No one supposes that Parliament .... could charge itself with the control of the detailed processes of industry; at the most, it must confine itself to the largest general issues."(93)

Cripps, too, as we shall see, saw the future role of Parliament in these terms and his proposals for Parliamentary reform were to effectively introduce the Commons to that role.

Cripps' main tenet was that Parliamentary democracy, as it stood, was incapable of dealing with the complex economic and social problems of the 20th century.

"One thing that has been proved, beyond all doubt since 1918 .... is that the nineteenth century form of democratic government has shown itself incapable of adaption to the economic and social conditions of the present day." (94)

The analysis was neither new, revolutionary, nor was it particularly Left-Wing. It had inspired reforms from sources as diverse as the Webbs,(95) Winston Churchill (96) and Oswald Mosley (97) all of whom argued for some form of alternative assembly or bureaucracy to deal with "technical" economic questions. Mosley's proposals were those most closely paralleled by Cripps in his argument

93. Laski, The Present Position of Representative Democracy, pp.16/17.

94. Cripps, Preface, p.7.

95. S. & B. Webb, "A Constitution for the Socialist Commonwealth of Great Britain," op.cit.

96. Churchill, Parliamentary Government and the Economic Problems, op.cit.

97. Mosley's proposals can be found in J. Strachey and C.E.M. Joad, "Parliamentary Reform: The New Party's Proposals." Political Quarterly, II, No.3, 319/336. See also Mosley's evidence to the Select Committee on Procedure, H.C. 161 (1931) pp. 311/27.

that the Government should lay down the general principles of legislation which should be implemented by experts and administrators with Parliamentary rights for discussing these principles. Where Cripps differed from Mosley was in his assertion that the State was, and should remain, an instrument of class rule. "The absolute necessity for the control by Governments of individual and class interests is now universally recognised....."(98) The manner in which this was to be done was distinguishable from the issue of Parliamentary reform, although reform of Parliament would make its implementation easier.

A second principle underlying Cripps' work was the fact that the Labour Party was a Socialist Party committed to using the existing legislative machine for acceding to power and to using that power to change the fundamental basis of society by the transfer of economic power from the capitalist to the working classes. The struggle, which was different in essence from all previous struggles, was based on the "complete severance with all traditional theories of government, this determination to seize power from the ruling class and transfer it to the people as a whole....."(99)

Cripps took the view that there would be no time at the outset of the next Socialist Government to reform Parliamentary institutions, which would have to be reformed throughout the transition period as a whole, preferably at an early stage, and implied that in order to forestall the implementation of economic democracy, the capitalists would precipitate a financial crisis in the hope that they would drive the Government from office, as they had done in 1931.(100) However, whereas in his lecture to the Fabians in 1932 Cripps

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98. Cripps, Preface, p.9.

99. Cripps, Can Socialism Come? p.36.

100. Cf. G.D.H. Cole's letter to the New Statesman, 29 April, 1933.

contented himself with the statement that "those who believe in political democracy desire to stage that fight (for Socialism) in Parliament and at the polls and not in the streets or at the barricades,"(101) in his 1933 lecture he freely speculated on the likely outcome of a situation in which Parliament would prove to be ineffective. It was this speculation on the consequences of the accession to power of a Labour Government that provoked the storm of criticism from all quarters. Anticipating a constitutional crisis between a fully mandated Socialist government, prevented from passing wide-ranging reforms and a reactionary capitalist establishment, Cripps envisaged a situation arising in which the Socialist government might be forced "to make itself temporarily into a dictatorship until the matter could again be put to the test at the polls."(102) The alternative to this would be to allow a capitalist government, relying primarily upon the military for its support, to maintain itself in office in face of popular opinion. This Cripps clearly disliked, but the ultimate cause of this situation was the inadequacy of the machinery of government. For Cripps, therefore, this was the primary consideration:

"Unless some adequate democratic machinery can be devised, Socialists will be left with but two alternatives. Either to seize a dictatorship or else to abandon power and hand it back to the Capitalists. I can regard neither of these with equanimity, as I am convinced that both would mean dictatorship. Obviously, a dictatorship of the left based upon a majority in favour of Socialism, would be the better of two bad alternatives. It is from this that the urgency arises for the development of a machine of government which preserves the fundamental conceptions of democracy and freedom and yet at the same time enables the elected majority to carry through rapidly and without interference the drastic changes desired by the people."(103)

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101. Cripps, Parliamentary Institutions and the Transition, p.37. Cf. G.D.H. Cole and M. Cole, A Guide to Modern Politics (London, Victor Gollancz, 1936), pp. 413/4.
102. Cripps, Can Socialism Come? p.46. See also Note 12.
103. Cripps, Preface, pp.15/16, Italics Mine.

In this context Cripps' proposals appear relatively moderate and, indeed, the conditions surrounding the actual establishment of the 'dictatorship' make it appear to be little more than the use of those Emergency Powers accorded any democratic government faced with insurrection and sabotage. (104) The literature of the Socialist League frequently asserted that they were seeking to reinvigorate Parliamentary democracy. "Socialists stand for true freedom and real Democracy," declared one of their publications, "but are opposed to the time-wasting and obstructive use of Capitalist democratic procedure which has brought Parliamentary government into disrepute and on which the propaganda for Fascism fastens; Parliament must become a workshop." (105) Cripps' fault lay less in the content as in the tone of his speeches and those of erstwhile colleagues, for he made it clear that any action taken by a Socialist government would be dependent on that Government having the support of the electorate. Indeed, Cripps was desirous of raising the general level of political consciousness in society as a whole. Even the most "undemocratic" parts of Cripps' lectures were qualified statements.

"Unless during the first five years so great a degree of change has been accomplished as to deprive capitalism of its power, it is unlikely that a Socialist Party will be able to maintain its position of control without adopting some exceptional means such as the prolongation of the life of Parliament for a further term without an election. Whether such action would be possible would depend entirely upon the temper of the country..... (106) Socialism could and should come by constitutional means but if unconstitutional means are used to resist it, those who use unconstitutional means must not complain if they are met with force." (107)

104. See Note 13.

105. Forward to Socialism (London: Socialist League, 1934), p. 14. Policy statement of the 1934 Socialist League National Conference.

106. Cripps, Can Socialism Come?, p.39. Italics Mine.

107. Ibid., p.66. See also Note 14.

Similarly, it was argued by the Right, Cripps had little cause to complain that he was misrepresented if he asserted the rights of ordinary government so forcibly - it was, at the least, bad tactics.

In answer to the question why Cripps followed the speculative road in 1933 one need look no further than the publication, earlier in the year, of Democracy in Crisis by Laski in which he expounded the whole theory of Capitalist democracy which he had gained from a variety of sources and which Cripps popularised. Laski, besides providing the theoretical framework for the Left's analysis and critique of society during the 'Thirties, also listed three possible situations that could arise from the return of a Labour Government to power.(108) Cripps drew his inspiration from all three.

In the first place, Laski argued that if Labour were elected to office it would find it necessary to dispense with the existing restrictive procedural forms of Parliamentary government; to take vast power and legislate under them by ordinance and decree; and to suspend the classic formulae of normal opposition. Even assuming that this policy was peacefully accepted, the continuance of the system of parliamentary government would depend on the Conservative Party guaranteeing not to undo the work of social transformation begun by the Labour Party should the latter have the misfortune to be defeated at the polls. Underlying this analysis was the assumption that the differences of political philosophy between the two major political groups (the National Government and the Labour Party) were fundamental - so fundamental in fact that they changed the rules governing the political system.(109) This situation, articulated by Laski, anticipated Cripps' Socialist League lecture and indicated the extent to which liberal ideals were overwhelmed by Marxist philosophy in the thinking

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108. Laski, Democracy in Crisis, pp. 87/91; 119/126; 239/243.

109. See Cole's comments in similar vein on "Parliamentary forms" The Intelligent Man's Review of Europe Today (London: Victor Gollancz, 1933), pp. 598/9.



of the Left throughout the decade. In particular, the assertion that the new fundamentals of the system must be "Socialist", irrespective of the decision of the electorate was, to the Left, the justification for "enlightened" dictatorship - notwithstanding their condemnation of such regimes in respect of Germany and Italy. (In all fairness to Laski it should be pointed out that his vague references to public opinion may qualify this statement in his particular case, whilst Cripps was certainly far more circumspect on the whole question).

The second situation Laski saw was that the Labour Party would come to office only to find its proposals for reform sabotaged by financial interests. The Government would, therefore, have to resort to rule by a Defence of the Realm Act to enforce its will. "In these circumstances" he wrote, "it appears inevitable that the resultant exacerbation of temper would produce the normal revolutionary situation, and men would rapidly group themselves for civil war." (110) From the pen of Palme Dutt such a statement would be rightly dismissed as doctrinally inspired conspiratorial nonsense, and the similarity between the Communist and the Left-Wing analysis is so great as to be almost indistinguishable. This per se explains the failure of the Left to secure a lasting foothold in the higher echelons of the Labour Party, which consistently rejected the Marxist basis of the interpretations made. (111)

The third possibility Laski spoke of was, in his view, the most likely. Should Labour win at the polls the financial interests, through their political allies (the Tory Party), would attempt to persuade the leader of the Labour

110. Laski, Democracy in Crisis, p.88. Italics mine.

111. Dutt's views are to be found in Fascism and the Social Revolution (London: Martin Lawrence, 1934). The main difference between the Labour "Left" and Dutt was in the latter's willingness to draw the logical conclusion that, given the validity of the Marxist analysis of "Capitalist Democracy", the social democratic ideal of a political conquest of power was a futile delusion.

Party to head a 'national administration' in the interests of Capitalist democracy. Should this ruse fail, as it probably would, then the Conservative Prime Minister would refuse to resign or to summon the new Parliament. Instead he would rule by emergency decree until a second election could be held in an emotional "save the nation from Socialism" atmosphere designed to secure Labour's defeat. Whatever the outcome of this second election the agreed political basis of the Constitution would have been destroyed and respect for parliamentary democracy irreparably damaged. The Conservatives would resort to overt or covert dictatorship while Labour would be forced to adopt more direct methods of achieving socialism. The similarity between Laski and Cripps is quite clear, but Cripps hedged his version round with so many qualifications as to quite severely alter its meaning from that advocated by Laski. That the two sets of views should be indistinguishable to opponents is hardly surprising and neither is the fact Cripps' view that "it is, I believe, possible to make the change by constitutional means ...."(112) went unheeded.

The result of this misunderstanding led to concentration on the wide spectrum of Cripps' views and the complete ignorance of his views on changes in Parliament's role in the political system designed to make it more effective. Why this was so will become apparent shortly but it is important first of all to examine the kind of changes envisaged by Cripps in the role and structure of Parliament.

Cripps, like many others, was concerned that Parliament was merely the tool of the Executive and, indeed, had been completely ignored during the 1931

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112. Cripps, *Can Socialism Come?* pp 65/6. Others, however, were not always so optimistic. See G.D.H. Cole, *Modern Theories and Forms of Political Organisation* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1932), p. 154.

political crisis. "Unless Parliament" he wrote, "is capable of exercising a real control we shall inevitably lapse into a state of dictatorship which would .... be a real tragedy." (113) To prevent this it was necessary that Parliament be made efficient. This involved two essential factors; firstly, the sovereignty of the people's representatives in the House of Commons.

"to preserve democracy in the sense that the people through Parliament initiate the main lines of the National Plan and have power to see that it is carried out. We cannot hope that any democratic assembly will be able to carry on the detailed legislative or administrative work. This must be left to the Ministers, and, if they fail in the responsibilities, Parliament will be able to turn them out." (114)

The second essential factor was that the Government should be able to discharge the people's mandate. Indeed, Cripps believed that "the efficiency of the Government .... is even more vital than the efficiency of Parliament...." (115)

Parliament must, with the Government, become the tool of the people governing according to their wishes as expressed in the mandate approved at the polls. It was clear to Cripps that "the problem of democratic government.... cannot be solved by relying upon our existing machinery." (116) New effective machinery had to be developed both to secure the transition to Socialism and to operate in a Socialist state in which the tempo of legislation implemented would be greater. Cripps, it should be noted, was not clear in his own mind of the difference between the two situations and his only reference to the topic was far from clear. (117) This machinery would be designed to increase the efficiency of the House of Commons, the Commons being sovereign and the

113. Cripps, Parliamentary Institutions in the Transition, p.56.

114. Cripps, Can Socialism Come? pp. 64/5.

115. Cripps, Parliamentary Institutions in the Transition, p.42. No doubt reflecting George Bernard Shaw's pointed remark, "What is the historical function of Parliament in this country? It is to prevent the Government from governing," "In Praise of Guy Fawkes" in Where Stands Socialism Today? pp. 161/205 (171/2).

116. Cripps, Preface, p.12.

117. Cripps, Parliamentary Institutions in the Transition, p.37. "Clearly there will be no time to enter upon a reform of Parliamentary institutions before starting upon the introduction of Socialism."

Lords abolished, whilst preserving legislative rights of democratic opposition and giving greater control to the Executive where necessary.

In order to secure the passage of the high volume of legislation involved in the operation of a Socialist State Cripps advocated the restriction of Parliamentary approval of legislative measures to the broad principles involved whilst the implementation of such legislation would be enforced by Administrative Orders which would be challengeable only in Parliament itself and not in the Courts.(118) To prevent repetitions or unnecessary debate Cripps proposed the abolition of financial resolutions and the wider use of the various time-saving devices available to the Government. "It is by the reasonable and intelligent development of these.....methods, of increasing the legislative output that the House of Commons can best be made capable for its new task."(119) Within a general framework of control Cripps was also prepared to see administrative devolution to Regional areas.

Cripps' most radical proposals, however, dealt with changes in the role of the Commons which he thought should be changed so as to make it more effective. The first priority was to restrict the discussion of the House to one annual measure "the Planning and Finance Bill for the year" which "would take the place of the King's Speech, the Budget, financial resolutions and the second reading debates on most of the important measures during the year."(120) This Bill would lay down the main lines of legislation in every sphere for the coming year or period of years and once approved could not be rediscussed. "It is idle, once Parliament has decided upon a certain course of action to discuss its wisdom again and again."(121) The Bill would, of course, receive full discussion

118. Ibid., pp. 32 and 54. See Note 15.

119. Cripps, Can Socialism Come? p.53.

120. Ibid., pp.55/6.

121. Loc.cit.

but "even on this Bill, it (would) be necessary to proceed by time-table, so as to obviate obstruction and waste of time."(122) The details of the Act would be effected by Ministerial Order - challengeable only, as has been mentioned, in Parliament. Secondary legislation arising out of the Plan would be brought before Parliament for a second reading on the floor of the House and later for one final stage during which Government amendments alone would be dealt with.

It might be thought, of course, that with the Party system in full operation these proposals would serve only to reinforce the power of the Executive over the Legislature. More so when Cripps' prerequisites for the transition to Socialism included the gaining of a Parliamentary majority and electoral plurality "definitely and irrevocably pledged to Socialism....."(123) Under such circumstances surely opposition would be a mere formality?

Not so far as Cripps was concerned, for although he envisaged a politically aware electorate in favour of, and a Parliament committed to Socialism, he assumed a political system in which individual Members of Parliament were bound less by Party consideration but more by the need to secure and maintain the good of the nation. To encourage greater independence on the part of Members Cripps proposed to create a system of powerful Standing Committees based on particular groups of Governmental activities (in Parliamentary Institutions in the Transition, he proposed Finance, Industry, Social Services, External Relations, Defence, Law and Order and Economic Planning)(124) upon at least one of which all M.P.'s would be obliged to serve. The Committees, which would have Government

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122. Loc.cit.

123. Ibid., p.39.

124. Cripps, Parliamentary Institutions in the Transition, p.50. See also p.42. See Note 16.

majorities, would not only deliberate on the subjects assigned to them but would also "exercise a general supervision over the whole area of these functions of Government with which they (were) concerned."(125) They would deal with all matters of Supply and be allowed to receive and initiate suggestions as to legislation, rather than simply serve as a platform for the airing of grievances.(126) Indeed, Cripps was willing to allow these Standing Committees so much power that an adverse vote on such a Committee could result in the removal of the Minister concerned.(127) However, such a defeat should not lead to the downfall of the Government. "Provided that the Government can retain the confidence of the House in matters of first-class importance, defeats on matters of detail should not have any effect upon its term of office."(128) Indeed, Cripps took the view that to restrict governmental resignation to major policy questions would enable the House to discuss and vote upon matters of details on their merits thus adding to the independence of Members and the utility of debate. It should perhaps be added that Cripps' assertion that defeat on the floor of the Government should automatically lead to the resignation of the Government was not as generally accepted as he believed it to be. MacDonald, for example, had made it perfectly clear in 1924 that he would not accept defeat on the floor of the House as final, unless it was a matter of confidence.(129)

Criticism of the Government would be preserved, presumably on the floor of the House, by allotting to the Opposition a certain number of days in the year to raise any matters they wished and to use whatever Parliamentary measures

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125. Cripps, Can Socialism Come? p.57. Cf. Parliamentary Institutions in the Transition, p.46.

126. Cripps, Can Socialism Come? p.57.

127. Ibid., p.59/60. Cf. Laski, The Labour Party and the Constitution, p.10.

128. Cripps, Parliamentary Institutions in the Transition, p.44.

129. See H.C. Deb. 169, cc.749/750, 12 February 1924, and New Leader 4 January 1924. It was a view MacDonald had long held. See Parliament and Revolution, p.111.

they desired, for example, censure motions, to achieve this purpose. By allowing the Standing Committees to sit contemporaneously with the House, a great deal of time would be saved, possibly enabling the actual sittings of the House to be limited to alternative weeks although it would be in continuous session throughout the year, with the exception of the summer recess. Consequently, Members would be freer to spend more time in their constituencies and as members of the Regional Councils ensuring that the Plan was being implemented. This, together with the other changes, would make sure that Members would be "fully occupied with important and responsible work."(130)

As part of the overall administrative changes that the transition to Socialism would involve Governmental Departments, new and old, would be regrouped into eight or ten main subjects, each under the general charge of a Cabinet Minister. The more detailed work would be carried out by assistant ministers while the Minister himself would devote his time "to the working out of the plan of national development," in conjunction with a large body of technical experts. "It will be essential for this body of experts to be inspired by the Socialist ideal, and not to spend their time looking for difficulties and explaining that they cannot be overcome."(131) Here, Cripps is particularly weak, for in accepting the need for a Socialist civil service he ignored the reality of an existing conservative bureaucracy.

To round off his procedural changes Cripps, advocated the removal of such anomalies as the University vote, plural voting and the elimination of the power of money from elections so as to "remove the capitalist bias of the existing machinery and enable the electors to choose fairly the policy they desire."(132)

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130. Cripps, Can Socialism Come? p.59.

131. Ibid., p.61.

132. Ibid., p.65.

There was very little about these proposals that was revolutionary. True, they assumed a certain degree of electoral rationality that would have been hard to justify in practice, but Cripps was saying little more than, for example, Philip Snowden, who asserted in his Autobiography that,

"The waste of time in interminable talk will have to cease.....Parliamentary discussion should be confined to the general principles of a Bill and the details should be left to a body of experts for close examination."

Given Snowden's record the civil service could well be expected to be categorised as "experts", a designation which in no way reflected on the capacity of Parliament to deal with general economic questions. Indeed, Snowden asserted that

"Something will have to be done to make (Parliament) a more efficient machine for legislative purposes. Otherwise.....Parliament will continue to lose popular confidence and.....encouragement (will be) given to revolutionary and anti-democratic methods."(133)

Expressed in this way even the most wide-ranging reforms could be justified.

The real weakness of Cripps' approach, however, lay in the revolutionary context in which he placed his proposals and whilst it would be wrong to dismiss him as naive it is clear that he only half-grasped at times the significance of what he was saying, whilst on other occasions he simply did not appreciate that his comments were open to serious misinterpretation.(134) Thus, whilst to be perfectly fair to Cripps, his own position if carefully read, was clear, the comments of his colleagues were more extreme and began in time to be associated with himself partly because of his own inability to recognise the incompatibility of what he was saying and what his colleagues were advocating.

133. Snowden, Autobiography, II, p.1036.

134. See Eric Estorick, Stafford Cripps: A Biography (London: William Heinemann 1949), pp 20/25. Cripps had, as the New Statesman pointed out, used "unwise phrases on occasion" 17 June 1933, although it later argued that the Press had used extreme statements for publicity purposes rather than the main trend of his speeches. (See 3 February 1934). The Economist took a broadly similar though more critical view of the situation. 27 January 1934.



The reality of this was first seen at the Hastings Party Conference of 1933 where the Socialist League sought to build on the foundations it thought it had laid the previous year. Cripps spoke on, but did not move, a resolution which asked the Conference to instruct the Executive "to specify the means to be adopted by the next Labour Government for a rapid and complete conversion of the Capitalist into the Socialist system" means which in his, or the Socialist League's opinion, should include "the revision of the procedure of the House of Commons and the machinery of Government, so that a rapid transition to Socialism may be carried through constitutionally, and dictatorship avoided."(135)

Cripps' speech was a moderate one.

"We are all of us.... united in our desire to combat the 'isms' of the world, whether they are Fascism or Communism. We have all of us pledged ourselves to follow the democratic course in bringing about.... changes....(our) conviction of the effectiveness of social democracy is one which has got to be rammed home if we are going to keep with us all the keener elements in our Movement."(136)

His proposals, he claimed, were defensive measures designed to meet a great problem. As far as Parliamentary procedure was concerned, for example, "We want Parliament so reformed that it is going to keep a constant and effective control of all Ministerial powers,"(137) over which the existing Parliament had no control. Cripps did not move a reference back of the relevant section of the N.E.C.'s Report because he understood that the Executive was prepared to consider the matters raised in his resolution and to report back to the Conference the following year - a fact confirmed by George Lansbury.(138)

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135. L.P.A.C.R. 1933, p.156. See Daily Herald, Editorial, 4 October 1933.

136. L.P.A.C.R. 1933, Loc.cit.

137. Ibid., p.160.

138. Loc.cit.

A number of delegates were not impressed by Cripps' claims. Emmanuel

Shinwell, for example, complained that,

"For the past twelve months and more the Movement has been in a state of confusion and bewilderment in relation to the issues.....now presented to the Conference. . . The teeth of the Movement.....have been set on edge.....with all the controversies, the Press scares.....the talk of disunion in the Movement, of dictatorship and the like.....we are asked to dismiss those controversies and refer the whole matter back to the Executive.....so for the next twelve months the controversies will rage....."(139)

Shinwell went on to attack Cripps' tactics of provoking an immediate constitutional crisis between a Labour Government and the House of Lords - a criticism supported later by Lees-Smith but claimed, "that any difference that exists between my friend and myself is merely a difference in philosophy."(140)

Ernest Bevin, at his most patronising, extended the difference to a way of life.

"I want to put the point of view that I take as a Trade Unionist who has to deal every day with the masses of the people. Probably we live in a different world from a good many who have now joined the Labour Party. . Our work is of a different character, and hence probably we approach these problems from a different angle. Our work is eminently practical.....it is to deliver the goods to our members and we know.....the absolute folly of putting up programmes that are not likely to be realised, because we have to go back to the branch members and report, and be judged by real democratic machinery and procedure."(141)

Twitting the advocates of rapid transition for requiring another twelve months to consider how they were going to achieve it Bevin attacked several leading personalities of the Socialist League.

139. Loc.cit.

140. Ibid., p.161.

141. Loc.cit. Italics mine. Bevin seems to have had the Capital Levy specifically in mind.

Underlying the attitude was the belief in "Scientific Socialism" and the "bourgeois" nature of Parliamentary institutions both of which Bevin emphatically rejected. To Bevin such sentiments smacked of the same intellectual smugness that had reduced his fellow trade unionists to enslavement in Germany and which had proved in the past to be as firm as shifting sand.

In his Memoirs Walter Citrine recalled a meeting between himself and a number of the leading personalities of the Socialist League at the London School of Economics on 3 July 1933. (148) Invited to make an observation on the League's views Citrine delivered a Memorandum entitled, "The Tendency of Dictatorship" in which he asked a number of very pointed questions. He began by defining the issue:-

"The first question is .... are we really sincere in our opposition to dictatorship? Do we desire to prevent its being established in Great Britain?"

and continued,

"If we do, is this the right time for responsible people in the Labour movement to be talking in terms which give currency to the belief that we are ready to abandon the methods of democracy in favour of some form of dictatorship?" (149)

"What," he asked, "is the essence of the theme expounded by Sir Stafford Cripps, G.D.H. Cole, Major Attlee, E.F. Wise and others? Is it not that Parliament is outworn, too slow, not responsive enough to the electoral will? That its machinery is adapted to other days and not to present day needs? That the attainment of Socialism through the present machinery of Parliament is impossible? That, therefore, some means must be taken so to alter this machinery, and to deal with elements in the community which might oppose socialist legislation and to ensure that the programme of the party can be rapidly carried through?" (150)

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148. Citrine, Men and Work, Ch.18. Beatrice Webb thought Citrine "the leading mind in the trade union movement." Vol. 47, p.161, 2 October 1933 (unpublished Diaries).
149. Citrine, Men and Work, p. 299. Cf. his article in New Clarion 24 June 1933.
150. Citrine, Men and Work, pp. 294/5.

Citrine followed this with an accurate summary of the main points of the Socialist League's programme - almost certainly derived from "Can Socialism Come by Constitutional Methods?" He then began an almost devastating reply which clearly illustrated the difference of outlook between the two wings of the Movement. He criticised the League for regarding Parliament as a mere sounding-board for the Government. They had given the impression (that was the important point) that effective Parliamentary scrutiny of legislation would cease and that the Government would ruthlessly discharge the mandate it had secured from the majority of the electorate. To Citrine this was anathema. No allowance had been made for the opinions of the minority and no attempt made to accommodate them politically. This was an important point, for Cripps saw the conflict as being one between "Socialism" and "Capitalism" whereas Citrine seems to have seen society more in terms of interest groups. Moreover, Citrine asserted that Parliament had played a useful role in the scrutiny of legislation in the past including the modification of proposals and if this role were to be ended it would effect a Parliamentary revolution by ensuring that "the Government will govern, not as the mouthpiece of the House of Commons, but something dangerously near an oligarchy."(151)

Quite apart from his belief in the absolute value of democracy Citrine's attitude was based on two other considerations. The first consideration was a practical one. If, as was usually the case with politically motivated people, their opponents who were at present in power were to adopt a policy of overriding minorities, or anticipating Cripps and the Socialist League by resorting to dictatorial methods, Labour could hardly object, having advocated such a policy themselves. "I predict," Citrine remarked, "that this sort of wild talk

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151. Ibid., p.296.

is far more likely to produce an atmosphere favourable to dictatorship than anything else" and as such was a danger to the existence of the Labour Movement itself. (152) This was unlikely to have carried much weight with the Socialist League who believed the struggle to be inevitable. As Frank Wise told the Hastings Conference,

"Some people say.....we had better not talk about these things and then perhaps the other side will not think of them; if we only keep quiet, then the dictators will forget to dictate. That was exactly the delusion which carried the German Social Democratic Party to destruction."(153)

The second point Citrine made was more fundamental.

"The theory of the all-powerful Government has not.....been accepted by the Labour Movement. Even within capitalist society, it has been regarded as perfectly legitimate for groups to show their opposition in a constitutional way to acts of the executive of the day. If once the Labour Movement subscribes to the principle that a Government has the right to over-ride all opposition by whatever means in its power, it is difficult to see how an independent Trade Union Movement could continue."(154)

This was the heart of the Trade Union view. The very existence of a free Trade Union Movement was, to Bevin and Citrine, living proof of a democratic society.

As Bevin wrote in the T.W.G.U. Record,

"we are more likely to get what we want by our educational efforts and by organisation on a voluntary basis, and thus securing power by the consent of the people, than if we tried to develop an Organisation to take power by force.....The best way to combat dictatorship is for our people to be true to their democratic faith and to teach the children the value of Trade Unions and to resist with all their power any attempt by anyone to destroy them."(155)

152. Ibid., p.297.

153. L.P.A.C.R. 1933, p.163.

154. Citrine, Men and Work, p.297.

155. T.W.G.U. Record, (May, 1933), pp. 304/6. Cf. Evan Durbin's Critique of the Socialist League in "Democracy and Socialism in Britain", Political Quarterly, Vol.VI., No.3., (July/September, 1935), pp. 379/85 esp. 385.

There is little doubt that the Right was divided from the Left by experience and disposition just as much as ideology. Beatrice Webb regarded Left-Wing extremism as "the occupational disease common among high-strung men and women who come out of a conservative environment into proletarian politics."(156)

Whilst Citrine commented that,

"with rare exceptions most (intellectuals) never really understood the trade union movement. They assigned to it a militant outlook which most of its members did not possess, and they were irritated at the reluctance of the trade union leaders to respond to their flights of idealism in a world of stern realities. Bevin had little time for them.....he resented their intrusion into trade union affairs."(157)

Freedom was essentially empirical and no amount of intellectual sophistry or specious ideology could destroy this belief. The T.U.C. General Council stated its case quite clearly in its Annual Report for 1933.

"There are some who deny that freedom can exist in a capitalist society. They regard it as a bourgeois institution of no real value to the people. It is not to disregard the disabilities of a wages system under capitalist control of industry, to point out that in Great Britain an individual normally possesses certain liberties that are worth preserving. The State has not yet the authority to shoot citizens without trial. Nor do people disappear at the hands of a secret police.....nor is the criticism of the Government a crime.....Against the tyranny of Governments and a return to economic servitude the institutions of free citizenship and the organisations of democracy are our strongest safeguards.....The freedom and independence of the unions would not be worth a days' purchase if these safeguards were destroyed."(158)

The subjection of colleagues abroad, first in Germany and then in Austria, only reinforced these attitudes and it was for this reason that Citrine wrote,

156. Cole, Ed., Beatrice Webb Diaries 1924-1932, pp.96/7. See also Note 17.

157. Citrine, Men and Work, pp.300/1.

158. T.U.C. Report 1933, Appendix C.425-35 (434) See also Para. 40 (433).  
See Also Note 18.

"There is a dictatorship of a different kind in Russia, but a dictatorship nonetheless.....we have to clear our own minds as to whether we really believe in democratic institutions. Far too many people in the Labour Movement are not only critical but scornful of Parliamentary Government. It is about time we cleared the decks for the settlement of the issue of democracy or dictatorship."(159)

Thus it was in terms of "Democracy-v-Dictatorship" rather than "Capitalism-v-Socialism" that the issue of Parliamentary reform was seen, as the General Council made clear,

"Parliamentary institutions have recently come in for a good deal of criticism. There are unquestionably defects in Parliamentary machinery and there is general agreement that institutions which were designed to meet the needs of another period are not sufficiently expeditious and efficient in dealing with complex problems of today. Constructive criticism is desirable and necessary, but it is not in the direction of limiting public freedom that a remedy is to be found.....We should resist any attempt to supersede Parliament or undermine its democratic working. It still remains true that efficient government is no substitute for self-government."(160)

On occasions this distinction was blurred by rhetoric such as that used by Joseph Crompton at the Labour Party Annual Conference in 1933. "Fascism" he declared, "stands for Capitalism, for subjection, for Dictatorship, for War. We stand for Socialism, for freedom, for Democracy, for Peace. There can be no compromise on these great antitheses, no half-way house of accommodation."(161) Yet, as we have noted, they did not see the National Government as nascent fascism and it is clear that their use of the word "capitalist" was in an analytical rather than a Marxist sense. Hence, the overlapping terminology

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159. J. Crompton, Hitlerism (London: T.U.C. & Labour Party, 1933), Foreword by Citrine, p.7. Cf. Citrine's articles on the subject in the Labour Magazine, 1933. For Citrine's specific views on the Russian Dictatorship see I Search for Truth in Russia (London: George Routledge, 1936). The remarkable feature of Citrine's book is not that he found anything wrong in Russia but that he found so much good.
160. T.U.C. Report, 1933, Appendix C. Para.33. p.432.
161. L.P.A.C.R. 1933, p.131. Cf. H.H. Elvin at the T.U.C. in 1933 T.U.C. Report 1938, p.78.

of Left and Right disguised only briefly the fundamental ideological differences between them.(162)

Thus when, on the instructions of the Communist International, the Communist Party, supported by the I.L.P. sought to create a "United Front" against "Fascism" the National Joint Council responded by issuing a "call to the people" reaffirming its faith in democracy and denouncing all dictatorships whether of the Left or of the Right. The British Labour Movement,

"believes that a United Working-class Movement, founded and conducted on the broadest democratic principles, can establish a Socialist Society as soon as the workers are sufficiently advanced in political wisdom as to place their own Movement in the seat of Government, armed with all the powers of the Democratic State. British Labour has lead the world in its claim for Industrial Democracy and its demand for Political Democracy. Its historic task today is to uphold the principles of Social Democracy."(163)

The National Executive Committee spelt out what it meant in its Report to the Annual Conference.

"The Labour Party in planning for the people's freedom realises that it must be a democratic freedom. The Party stands now, as ever, for a free Press; the right of free assembly, the right of free speech, the holding of free elections. The Party stands for these democratic conditions because they are intrinsically good; they are the treasures won by hard effort and much sacrifice by long-dead leaders of revolt."(164)

Joseph Crompton's Chairman's address re-emphasised that the opinion was shared by the leadership of the Movement as a whole.

162. J.F Naylor notes "The Secretary of the T.U.C.....disagreed throughout the decade with a cynical interpretation of the intentions of the National Government." Labour's International Policy: The Labour Party in the Thirties (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1969), p.50.

163. Democracy-v-Dictatorship (London: T.U.C. & Labour Party, 1933), paras. 17 and 18. The statement is published as Appendix IX to L.P.A.C.R.1933, pp.277/8 (277) See Daily Herald, Editorial, 15 March 1933. Cf. "The Labour Party stands firmly for democracy. It is irreconcilably opposed to Dictatorship by any individual or group. It will strenuously resist all attempts on British liberties either from inside or outside the country." Labour's Immediate Programme (London: Labour Party, 1937).

164. L.P.A.C.R.1933, p.5. Italics mine.



"Speaking as a Trade Union official, I believe I can say for my fellow Trade Unionists, that we still believe in democratic methods and principles, and that we will never tolerate dictation from outside, from whatever source it may come. Fascism and Communism alike are a challenge to our democratic institutions and to the system of society based on political, social and economic equality, which we seek to establish. I should have preferred that Labour had been able to pursue its work of emancipation without having to divert even a part of its energies to fight new forms of political dictatorships. The British Labour Movement has declared itself to be uncompromisingly opposed to all forms of Dictatorship. The Labour Party pins its faith to political democracy. It has spent its energies and its limited resources on its efforts to secure a Parliamentary majority. It will not be deflected from its task. Once power has been achieved, it will carry out the will of the people as determined at the polls, with vigour and determination, and it will not tolerate factious opposition and obstruction in the execution of its duty to the electorate." (165)

Herbert Morrison in refusing to accept the reference back of "Democracy-v-Dictatorship" reiterated the point. After reminding delegates of the circumstances leading up to the issue of the Manifesto he pointed out that co-operation with the Communists was impossible "because they themselves believe in a form of dictatorship .... The real point about the Manifesto is that we condemn dictatorship as such, whether that dictatorship is a dictatorship of the Left or of the Right. We cannot hunt with the hounds and run with the hare." (166) The reference back was lost as was a motion regretting the N.E.C.'s failure to participate in the United Front. (167)

The related issues of Democracy and Dictatorship and Parliamentary Reform were both settled at the Annual Conference of 1934. In the ensuing years the struggle between the N.E.C. and the Labour Left was concerned less with the

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165. Ibid., p.135. Cf. Labour's Immediate Programme op.cit., pp. 2/3, and Attlee's speech to the Labour Conference 1937. L.P.A.C.R. 1937, pp 181/2.

166. L.P.A.C.R. 1933, p. 219 Cf. The T.U.C. which argued that participation in the United Front meant "asking those who believe in democracy to unite with those who believe in dictatorship to combat dictatorship." T.U.C. Report 1933, Appendix C. Para 32, p. 432.

167. L.P.A.C.R. 1933, pp.220/221.

possible circumstances surrounding the accession of a Labour Government and the variety of institutional reforms that a Labour Government would instigate than with the international context of the struggle between Fascism and Socialism. Consequently, the issues upon which the conflict was the most acute were those concerned with international affairs, defence, non-intervention in Spain and to a lesser degree, a Popular Front. The question no longer involved the validity of Parliamentary government but the basic principles of intra-party democracy, in particular the demands of collective loyalty and the rights of individual conscience. Increasingly, throughout the decade the snipes at Parliamentary government came from academic circles. By 1940 the anti-Parliamentary movement had long-since run out of steam.

The most obvious reason for this was the gradual but positive hardening of the official Labour line towards the Labour Left. Open misrepresentation of official Labour policy was actively encouraged by the pronouncements of Cripps and other Members of the Socialist League. On 6 January 1934, speaking to a university audience at Nottingham, Cripps had made a speech which contained cavalier references to Buckingham Palace and a country gentleman type of Fascism. On 24 January 1934 the N.E.C. issued a statement attacking misrepresentation by supporters of the National Government, claiming that,

"The attitude of the Labour Party, as has repeatedly been made plain in its official declarations, stands for Parliamentary Democracy. It is firmly opposed to Individual or Group Dictatorship, whether from the Right or from the Left. It holds that the best and indeed the only tolerable form of Government for this country is Democratic Government, with a free electoral system and an active and efficient Parliamentary machine for reaching effective decisions, after reasonable opportunities for discussion and criticism. The Labour Party bases its appeal to public opinion on the urgent need for far-reaching economic and social change as set out in its Programme, to be brought about by constitutional and democratic means. In so far as any statements which are at variance with the declared policy

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of the Party on this question have been or may be made by individuals, these are hereby definitely repudiated by the National Executive."(168)

In February the Communist and Independent Labour Parties renewed their efforts to secure Labour participation in the United Front.(169) Communist tactics throughout the year proved to be irritating, whilst, within a fortnight of Cripps' efforts Lord Rothermere began a campaign in the Daily Mail in favour of Mosley's Blackshirts. Externally the collapse in February of the Austrian socialist and trade union movement, which had generally been thought to be far stronger than that of Germany which had been easily subjected by Hitler in the previous year, was keenly felt in Labour circles.

The collapse of the Austrian movement was a great shock to the Trade Union Movement which lent its support to an N.C.L. Report on Fascism at Home and Abroad.(170) The debate on the issue made it clear that,

"the issue is not so much Fascism or Communism but the dictatorship of the Totalitarian State versus democracy and by 'democracy' we do not necessarily mean effete forms of parliamentarianism, but a State in which all its citizens can obtain a full measure of social justice compatible with right order and reason."(171)

A further resolution, moved by J.R. Clynes, asserted the failure of Capitalism "as a system of life" and reaffirmed,

"complete faith in the principles of Socialism and democracy. We believe that the world cannot be reconstructed by methods of violence and suppression and the Congress.....pledges itself to work wholeheartedly for the maintenance of free institutions,

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168. I.P.A.C.R. 1934, p.9. See Also Note 19.

169. I.P.A.C.R. 1934, pp.10/11. Cripps' speech and subsequent backtracking is to be found in Cooke, op.cit., pp.150/160. See also Sunday Times 7 January 1934. Clynes immediately repudiated what Cripps had said. Times, 8 January 1934. An elaboration of the country gentleman type of Fascism is to be found in Cripps' pamphlet "National Fascism in Britain"(London: Socialist League,1933).

170. T.U.C. Report 1934, pp.435/50. See I.P.A.C.R.1934, Appendix XVII 293/309.

171. T.U.C. Report 1934, p.262. The Speaker was Tom O'Brien. Even the Times was impressed for a short while with the Labour Party's performance. See editorial 10 September 1934 but cf. 4 October 1934.

liberty of speech, of the Press, of public meeting and the right of association. We set our face against any kind of dictatorship as being false to those devoted pioneers, whose sacrifices have brought us so far on the road to the democratic State to be reached by an improved and vigorous Parliamentary system."(172)

The lack of effective opposition, particularly in comparison to the previous year, indicated a falling off in the strength of the Left-Wing.

This trend was also apparent at the Labour Party Conference at Southport. The gap between Left and Right had been widened in principle but narrowed on practical details with the issue of "For Socialism and Peace" a wide-ranging policy document which was based on the possibility of "the achievement of change by the process of consent." The document was uncompromising in its reaffirmation of democracy declaring that the Labour Movement saw,

"no reason why a people who, first in the world, achieved through Parliamentary institutions their political and religious freedom should not, by the same means, achieve their economic emancipation."(173)

On the other hand it recognised the need for reform and prepared a specific document on "Parliamentary Problems and Procedure."(174) The whole tenor of "For Socialism and Peace" represented, "...a challenge to those who were claiming that Socialism could not be brought about by the established methods of Parliamentarianism"(175) and therefore had to be challenged by the Left but the special report on procedural reform was acceptable and, with one small omission, was comprehensive. Thus the Left adopted a dual stance of accepting the special report but rejecting the complete document upon which it was based. Tactically this ploy was a failure. The question of Parliamentary reform was dealt with

172. T.U.C. Report, 1934, p.366. Italics mine.

173. For Socialism and Peace (London: Labour Party, 1934), p.32.

174. For an amended version see L.P.A.C.R.1934, Appendix VIII pp.261/3. Other summaries are to be found in Dalton "The Labour Party Proposals for the Reform of Parliamentary Procedure." Political Quarterly, Vol.5.No.3. (July-September, 1934), and his Practical Socialism for Britain, Ch.VI.

175. Cole, A History of the Labour Party from 1914, p.297.

at the Conference before the fundamental question of democracy was broached so that the most Cripps could offer in his amendment to "Labour's Aims" was "to make Parliament effective" although he admitted during his speech that the previous days' debate had covered the situation. (176) Consequently, on this question Morrison was able to chide the Socialist League in general and William Mellor in particular for using generalities whilst the N.E.C. had been producing detailed documents for discussion. (177)

"Parliamentary Problems and Procedure" was one such document. It arose out of discussions which had taken place since 1931 on Constitutional and Parliamentary questions and represented Labour's most comprehensive statement on the question of Parliamentary reform throughout this period as a whole. The Report itself was divided up into five parts; the Allocation of Parliamentary Time; Financial Procedure; Delegated Legislation; the House of Lords and Emergency Action. The last two sections need not detain us. All that should be said about them is that the Party would not brook opposition from the House of Lords, which, in any event, it would seek to abolish during its term of office and would, if met with resistance on the passage of an Emergency Powers Bill, effectively deal with a situation arising after the accession of a Labour Government to power, and "use all the necessary powers in accordance with Constitutional precedent; and .... would interpret its mandate from the electorate as conferring upon it full authority to proceed in this way." (178)

Having removed the main source of discord that divided it from the Left of these issues the N.E.C. stated its objects in terms with which even Cripps-

176. L.P.A.C.R. 1934, pp. 158/9.

177. Ibid., p. 163/4. The Amendment was defeated by 2,146,000 to 1,206,000 (p.165). Labour's Program (London: Ballantyne, 1934), p.17.

178. Ibid., p. 263. ibid., p. 261.

182. This was printed in November 1934. See Labour's Program and Statistics: Political, p. 52, n.1. and ibid., pp. 295, on 21/22/37, 12 November 1934.

183. Dalton, Practical Socialism (London: Ballantyne).

could have no quarrel.

"The Labour Party stands firmly for Parliamentary Democracy, whereby the will of the people as expressed through their elected representatives in the House of Commons shall prevail, without undue delay, but after reasonable facilities have been afforded for free discussion and criticism." (179)

The purpose underlying the reform bore a distinct resemblance to Cripps' proposals. Parliamentary procedure it was claimed was,

"antiquated and unsuited to modern conditions. It must be brought up to date, so that Parliamentary Democracy may become a reality." (180)

Reform was necessary so as

"to enable a much larger volume of legislation to be passed in the course of a Parliamentary Session, and while retaining all proper facilities for debate, to put an end to the gross waste of time and repetition of discussion on the same points, which are bringing our present Parliamentary proceedings into disrepute." (181)

In order to turn Parliament from a tool of obstructionism into an instrument for positive change, the Party proposed that a permanent Committee of the House be set up, staffed in relation to the party strengths in the House, which would allocate the maximum Parliamentary time for all stages of Government Bills after the first reading. Its recommendations on each Bill would be made at the appropriate stage and would be open to discussion but not debate and would be enforced by the Chairman of Standing Committees who would also be able to select amendments for consideration. (182) In his book, Practical Socialism for Britain Dalton advocated the restriction of the Report Stage to the acceptance of Government Amendments with a maximum time of one day. (183)

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179. Ibid., p.261.

180. Loc.cit., Cf. "to make easier the passage of legislation without placing dangerous powers in the hands of the Government." W.I. Jennings, Parliamentary Reform (London: Gollancz, 1936), p.12.

181. L.P.A.C.R. 1934, p.261.

182. This was granted in November 1934. See Dalton Practical Socialism for Britain, p.52. n.l. and H.C. Deb. 293, cc 2169/2247, 15 November 1934.

183. Dalton, Practical Socialism for Britain.

The N.E.C. proposed that the number of Standing Committees should be increased in number and decreased in size, (184) and the use of existing Standing Orders to enable the whole Parliamentary day, apart from Question Time, to be devoted to the work of the Standing Committee, thus facilitating the passage of a number of measures at the same time. No mention, however, was made of "Functional" Committees and, indeed, Dalton expressed his opposition to them. (185) Certainly the proposals as such reflected no domination of strict Party discipline and allowed for no restoration of the freedom of the individual Members which Cripps had envisaged. The N.E.C. was prepared to reform Parliament with a view to making it more efficient but not necessarily to make it more effective.

According to Dalton, the procedure for financial legislation was "a tedious and stupid anachronism" (186) which required abbreviation. Originally designed to protect the House against the Crown it now consumed one-third of all Parliamentary time (187) in a series of repetitive debates. This was because if the main object of a Bill was to raise public expenditure, or if it involved, even as a subsidiary feature of a Bill, the "creation of a public charge" a Financial resolution had to be proposed and passed through Committee of the whole House and then Report Stage. The N.E.C. therefore proposed to abolish all financial resolutions with the exception of the Budget Speech. The Budget Resolutions might be made on the motion for the first reading of the Finance Bill, thus allowing the Second Reading of the Finance Bill to be used for general debate on the Government's overall plans and proposals. (188) For

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184. Dalton suggested an increase in number from 5 to 7 and in size from between 50 and 60 to a maximum of 30. Ibid., pp. 52/3.

185. Ibid., p.53.

186. Ibid., p.55.

187. Jennings, Parliamentary Reform, p.166.

188. See Note 20.

the purposes of procedure and time-tabling the Finance Bill would be treated as an ordinary Bill as would all Bills having financial provisions but Bills with such provisions, would have these provisions explained in a Memorandum circulated with the Bill. There was no attempt to take away the sole right of the Government to impose public charges.

On the question of delegated legislation the N.E.C. endorsed the broad view that delegated legislation was both necessary and natural.(189) The subject-matter in much modern legislation was necessarily technical. Flexibility was required to allow for adaption and experimentation whilst modern conditions made it necessary to combine Parliamentary Government with swift administrative action. Underlying this was the overall need to relieve pressure on Parliamentary time.

"the Labour Party takes the view that subject to suitable safeguards, the efficiency of Parliament will be greatly increased by the wider use of delegated legislation for appropriate purposes. In matters of legislation, Parliament ought, broadly, to confine itself to two functions:-

- a) It should debate and decide on the principles and general structure of legislation, and
- b) it should examine and approve the Orders and Regulations by which the Departments of State give effect to legislation."(190)

The Report continued,

"A Labour Government.....would seek to make Parliament the place where principles and legislative structure, and not details are debated and decided."(191)

It took the view that in appropriate cases Parliament could use the Standing Committees for determining whether Orders and Regulations fell properly within

189. See The Report of the Committee on Ministers' Powers, Cmd.4060(1932), p.58.

190. L.P.A.C.R. 1934, pp.262/3.

191. Loc.cit.



the terms of the Acts out of which they arose.(192) Dalton, however, went further in suggesting that any Ministerial Order, requiring Parliamentary approval, should be deemed approved unless rejected by both Houses of Parliament within a given period.(193)

The debate on the Report was a short one with Cripps saying that it satisfactorily covered all the points raised at Hastings Conference, a claim which was disputed, in respect of the proposals dealing with the House of Lords by Lees-Smith and Emmanuel Shinwell, before being carried.(194)

It would not be fair to regard the documents as a victory for the Left. Indeed, they brought out the fundamental contradiction in the attitude of the Left, for if "capitalist democracy" was incapable of facilitating the transition to Socialism then reform of the institutions it had fashioned was a waste of time. It was this basic misinterpretation of the nature of the 1931 Political Crisis and of British society in the 'Thirties a misinterpretation caused by subjective ideological bias, that coloured all interpretations of their ideas about Parliamentary reform.(195) In bare detail these proposals, set apart from the context of crisis in which they had been placed, were little more than an ill-assorted mixture of reforms suggested by academics and politicians over a number of decades. The Left was not prepared to admit the eclectic nature of their proposals but it is clear that few were original. Indeed, whereas Laski's initial response to the National Government's use of Orders-in-Council had been hostile J.R. Clynes had immediately pointed out that such

192. Loc.cit., Cf. Dalton, Practical Socialism for Britain, pp.63/4.

193. Ibid., pp.64/5.

194. L.P.A.C.R.1934, pp.148/51. for the whole debate.

195. Cole later admitted that it was "grossly misleading to treat Fascism as the final throes of capitalism in decline....." G.D.H.Cole, A History of Socialist Thought, Volume V, Socialism and Fascism 1931-1939 (London: Macmillan, 1960), p.3.

techniques could be used by a future Labour Government to nationalise essential industries, (196) whilst according to Dalton he first heard the suggestion that financial resolutions be abolished from Lees-Smith, who was hardly a Left-Winger (197) The suggestion that functional Committees of the House be appointed was little more than a regurgitation of the ideas of Fred Jowett, suitably modified to fit in with the proposals made for strongly-mandated government. In all the proposals of the Left can be said to represent the inevitable reaction to the inadequacies of the Second Labour Government set within a superficially popular ideology.

By contrast the proposals adopted by the Labour Party in 1934 reflect the faith of the Movement in the efficiency of democracy and the Parliamentary method. It did not reflect a strengthening or weakening of "gradualism" but a restatement of its value in terms of necessary reform. The inadequacies of a political analysis which took little account of economic forces was fully recognised. "Political forms," wrote Hugh Dalton, "are twisted by economic forces. Citizens, legally equal, wield unequal power. Political democracy will only be fully alive when married to economic democracy in a society of equals." (198) Yet this aim was realisable through Parliamentary means, even if alterations in the procedural details of the House of Commons were necessary. Henderson made this point at the 1934 Conference when, speaking on the question of war and peace, he said,

"We all agree that Parliamentary procedure must be modernised and speeded up, so that it can deliver the goods and give effect to the will of the people

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196. H.C.Deb. 256, cc.436. See Note 21.

197. Dalton, Practical Socialism for Britain, p.56.

198. Ibid., p.32.

without let or hindrance.... But we also agree that Parliament is essential to freedom and democracy, and indispensable both in our struggle for power and in our plans for using power once it has been gained."(199)

Parliament was "the natural instrument" in the struggle for social justice, Nonetheless, there was little doubt that Britain was freer than Fascist countries having,

"periodical free elections and .... between elections, a continuing right of free political speech, discussion and criticism, both inside Parliament and other elected bodies, and outside." (200)

As for the belief that democracy would not work Hugh Dalton wrote,

"I discount heavily, in this common-sense and politically mature country, all panic talk, whether from Right or Left, of an inevitable crisis .... " (201)

Jennings made the same point in relation to the reform of Parliamentary procedure when he wrote,

"the problem of Parliamentary procedure is not a party problem. It would become more acute under a Labour Government which proposed to introduce a considerable number of radical measures. But it is one which demands solution whatever .... the Party situation in the House of Commons." (202)

It was these procedural problems that the Labour Executive sought to solve, not the pseudo-intellectual problems created by the Left.

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199. L.P.A.C.R. 1934, p.157.

200. Dalton, Practical Socialism for Britain, p.32.

201. Ibid., p.15.

202. Jennings, Parliamentary Reform, pp. 9/10.

b) Government and Parliament: The Party in Action:-(i) Procedural Reform.

Although by 1934 the Labour Party had formulated a wide-ranging set of proposals for the reform of Parliamentary procedure it was not until eleven years later that they were in a position authoritative enough to enable them to apply those proposals. Even then, their leaders preferred to use the traditional technique of allowing a Select Committee of the House to examine the question before making too many changes, even though changes that were made were not closely related to the changes advocated in the 'Thirties.

Part of the reason for this was, of course, that some of the points raised by the Party had been met. The abolition of financial resolutions, for example, had been effectively achieved by 1939, largely though not entirely, through the activities of the Labour Party. It is axiomatic that the House of Commons as a corporate body responds to change in a haphazard and slow manner. The urgency of reform which has frequently inspired outside observers has rarely been shared by Members of the House, still less by the prime mover of change the Government itself. Changes in procedure have come very largely because of the Government's willingness to accept the arguments of the legislature, or one of its Select Committees. Such acceptance has never been automatic, neither has rejection been performed in an autocratic manner. Governments appear to have consulted with the Opposition through the usual channels in an attempt to produce a consensus of opinion among the leadership if not the rank-and-file of the main parties.

It has been very rare for a Party to deliberately take the offensive on such a "non-partisan" issue as procedural reform. In the case of the financial resolutions this is what the Labour Party did in fact do, having previously

accepted the Government's refusal to agree to the Report of the Select Committee on Procedure that they should be taken after the Second Reading. The Labour Party's protest arose from the rigidity of the financial resolutions drawn up by the Government which, by their narrowness, prevented effective discussion of the subjects under debate. (203) The Party moved on the floor of the House that Standing Order 63 be omitted from the Standing Orders of the House (204) in order to show its annoyance at the framing of financial resolutions in general and on the Special Areas Bill in particular. Their complaint was that the Government's action was reducing Parliamentary government to a farce. (205)

The end product of the protest was the establishment of the Select Committee relating to Money Resolutions which reported in favour of a declaratory resolution of the House calling for financial resolutions to be expressed in wider terms than its detailed provisions and that such resolutions should come after the Second Reading. (206) The Report was in due time accepted by the Government in practice though the declaratory resolution was not employed. (207) The importance of that acceptance from the Labour Party's point of view was that it was a recognition of the Party's programme of reform on that issue - albeit a small one and it is noticeable that it was on that one issue which the Party actively pursued its declared policy that it achieved its aim.

It may be argued, of course, that the Party had little reason to pursue such details as procedural reform even in those cases where the case for change

203. See H.C. Deb. 321, cc. 544/6 and cc. 815 et. seq. 4 and 8 March 1937.
204. The Standing Order (63) dealt with a recommendation from the Crown which was required before the House could discuss applications relating to the raising of revenue.
205. Ibid., cc. 848/54 (Speech by Aneurin Bevin).
206. Report of the Select Committee on Procedure Relating to Money Resolutions. H.C. 149. (Parliamentary Papers 1936/7, viii, 515). 13 July 1937. See especially Scott Lindsay's evidence on behalf of the PLP pp. 65/77.
207. The Select Committee's recommendations along these lines are to be found in Ibid., para. 6 (i) (ii). For the Government's response see H.C. Deb. 331, cc. 67/105. 1 February 1938.

was so obvious. Moreover, it could be claimed that as the Party was committed to reform when it secured office it was well-advised in following a moderate policy designed to prevent the alienation of its opponents on the question. Finally, there is little doubt that the Party considered that the burning questions of continuing unemployment, Fascism abroad and events at home demanded more attention than that of minor tinkering with Parliament. Yet the Party accepted the general contention that Parliament was too obstructive, filled with the repetitious debate of a "talking shop" instead of being the business assembly it ought to be. They believed with Hugh Dalton that,

"the Parliamentary machinery can be modernised and revitalised so as to enable it to yield a greater legislative output, while democratic principles are fully maintained, and Parliament is better enabled to discharge its functions." (208)

Given that belief the Party's lack of urgency was incredible, a judgement reinforced by the Party's assertion at the outset of war that "the procedure of the House of Commons must be reformed to enable it to grapple with the problems of the positive State." (209) The Party's activity on the question did not accord with its immediacy.

One reason for this was the Party's adherence to the traditional interpretation of the role of Parliament as the grand inquest of the nation. "This House," declared Attlee, "has never been a mere assembly for registration. It has never been a mere debating society." (210) In effect Attlee was arguing that "the most important duty of Parliament is to approve or disapprove the proposals of the Cabinet in office; its business is criticism not legislation." (211) The

208. Dalton: "Labour Party's Proposals for the Reform of Parliamentary Procedure," Political Quarterly, 1934, op.cit., p.45.

209. L.P.A.C.R. 1940, p.195.

210. H.C. Deb. 321, cc. 815.

211. H.J. Laski, "Choosing the Planners" in G.D.H. Cole, et.al. Plan for Britain (London: G. Routledge, 1943), pp. 108/9.

212. H.C. Deb. 318, cc. 1004, 10 May 1934.

Party's commitment was, therefore, the preservation of that traditional role whereby the Commons could influence policy without ruling and the Opposition maintain its constitutional rights against possible Executive abuses of power without necessarily restricting the power of the Executive itself. Thus the Labour Party was concerned less with the functioning of a procedurally perfect Parliament as with an instrument of government which they, by adopting a consensus policy in the present, could use to secure Socialist aims in the future. It was in this way that the Party contrived to give the appearance of conservatism when its policy was essentially pragmatic.

It was for this reason that the Party had little time for the traditional role of the Private Member. Private Members' Bills may provide time for criticism but not for really fundamental action. As Hugh Dalton wrote of Private Members' Bills "it would be better if fewer got a Second Reading, but if most of which got a Second Reading passed, amended where necessary, into law." (212) To the Party the most fundamental changes that had to be made was by the Party as a whole rather than individual members and the usage of private Members' time to further the Party's aims seems to have been thought of sparingly. Indeed, the nearest the Party seems to have been in declaring itself at all was when Mr. Tinker failed to get the Government to consider that it would also give facilities for Second Reading discussion of Private Members' Bills successfully introduced as first reading in two consecutive sessions. (213) Like most political parties the Labour Party's concern for the rights of the Private Member was greater in opposition than in office, but in the 'Thirties it was virtually non-existent.

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212. Dalton, Practical Socialism for Britain, p.58. Cf. Morrison's evidence to the Select Committee on Procedure, Third Report of the Select Committee on Procedure, (H.C. 189, 189/1), Q. 3560/3675 pp 140/8.

213. H.C. Deb. 312, cc. 1826, 26 May 1936.

One reason why the Labour Party did not involve itself more in the general question of procedural reform of the House of Commons in the years 1931-39 can be found in the fact that it formulated its own proposals after the House had examined the question itself. Procedural reform in the House tended to be generational in the sense of its being discussed by a Select Committee every fifteen years, (214) and a general re-examination of the problem in the 'Thirties was unlikely even if it were necessary. The Select Committee of 1932 whilst not the strict successor of that of 1931 used the evidence placed before the previous Select Committee when reaching its conclusions. Starting from the same terms of reference as its predecessor it unanimously concluded that "the Procedure of Parliament is sufficiently flexible to meet all the demands made upon it." The Select Committee proposed a number of changes in addition to those connected with Financial resolutions to which reference has already been made. The Government's attitude was suitably illogical resisting some proposals, rejecting others in a manner vaguely patronising and explicitly inadequate. The Party, in the House, having probably been consulted through the usual channels, did not press their case for further changes to a division. (215) It is significant that the Party made no formal complaint against the Government's proposals but insisted only that the changes would not "infringe the fair rights and opportunities of the Opposition, or unduly strengthen the Government against private Members." (216) Those Labour Members who spoke regarded the changes as making Parliament less obstructive and thus more efficient. The Report of a small expert Committee nominated by the Speaker at the request of the Select

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214. For example, 1902; 1914; 1930-2; 1946.

215. H.C. Deb. 293, cc. 2169/2249. 15 November 1934. See Note 22.

216. Ibid., cc. 2176. Attlee.



Committee which examined the Standing Orders unanimously reported in favour of a reduction in the number of Standing Orders from 104 to 93. The Report was received as unanimously by the Labour Party.(217)

On all these questions the Party's attitude in Parliament represented a compromise between its own demands and the traditions of Parliamentary Government. With the exception of the taking of financial resolutions the Party made no attempt to overthrow accepted Parliamentary rules. For the P.L.P. at least 1931 had made no difference to their assumption that changes in Parliamentary institutions were best made by inter-party consent. One example of this was the Party's attitude to the position of the Speaker. In 1932 the Party Conference had instructed the P.L.P. to introduce legislation changing the method of the election of the Speaker and Deputy Speaker, a resolution implying a sharp departure from the traditional role of those officers of the House as being elected Members.(218) The N.E.C. decided to test opinion in the House of Commons by way of a Resolution, "that the Speaker should not continue to represent a particular constituency upon his election to the Chair, and that the necessary alterations in the law would be proceeded with as early as possible."(219) The Party as a whole took its case a step further by contesting the Speaker's seat in 1935 much to the disapproval of some intellectual circles.(220) Yet when the House of Commons set up a Select Committee "to consider what steps, if any, should be taken to ensure that having due regard to the constitutional rights of the electors; the Speaker during his

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217. H.C. Deb. 281, cc. 865/876 (871) 14 November 1933

218. L.P.A.C.R. 1932, p.71.

219. N.E.C. Minutes Vol.63, E.C.11, 1932/3, 27 July 1933.

220. See, for example, H. Finer, The Future of Government, (London: Methuen, 1946), pp.104/5.

continuance of office, shall not be required to take part in a contested Parliamentary election." (221) Labour Members did not dissent from the Report which reflected the Parliamentary conservatism of J.R. Clynes, George Lansbury, Will Thorne and Sir Robert Young who accepted the need to educate the electorate as to the functions performed by the Speaker on behalf of the House. (222) Whatever radicalism existed in the Party on the question of procedural reform it was not translated into effective action by the P.L.P.

Tactically the policy of securing agreement in the House on procedural changes was useful in allaying fears raised by Cripps and the Socialist League whose sole contribution to the question had been to deter the Party from the appearance of innovation. Yet the Party seemed happy to accept the intellectual analyses of the failings of Parliament without accepting any of the proposed solutions. The Party recognised, as did the Select Committee of 1932, that the problems facing the House of Commons were neither new nor confined to the House of Commons.

"They present themselves in almost every elected assembly in all countries where modern views as to the powers and duties of the State are finding expression and where the vastly complicated social, industrial, commercial and economic questions of our time are demanding parliamentary attention and solution." (223)

However, more importantly, the Party did not dissent from the view that,

"wherever a representative assembly acts as a healthy and vigorous organ of government, its regulations and forms must be such as, while permitting adequate debate and giving adequate powers of initiative to its individual Members, will assist the Executive in providing with regularity and celerity for the vital wants of the State." (224)

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221. Parliamentary Elections. (Mr. Speaker's Seat), H.C. 98,  
(Parliamentary Papers 1938/9, VIII, p.215).
222. Ibid., para. 61.
223. Select Committee on Procedure, H.C. 129, (1932) Op.cit.,  
p.vii. para.2.
224. Ibid., p.vi. para.6.

Parliament remained the grand inquest of the nation.

The only real exception to the acceptance of this traditional role was in fact, an attempt to extend it by use of Departmental Committees. The attempt which came in the form of an unsuccessful amendment to the Report of the Select Committee was general and undefined. The majority of the Select Committee had stated that they were not convinced that these committees would either be sufficiently representative of the House as a whole to achieve the end desired, or balance the grave disadvantages which would, in their judgement, arise from the delays inherent in the system. The Labour Members (T. Cape and R. Davies) proposed to add the words "but they feel that the subject required more detailed examination than has been possible." (225) The Party did not pursue the matter any further. Thus whilst it is true that there has been amongst academics a

"belief that the House of Commons ought to set up specialised Committees of Members who would act as some form of link between the House and the individual Department of State"

that belief has not found many "influential" supporters in the Party, a fact which partially accounts for its failure to have any real impact before 1951 at least. (226)

#### Personal Security.

If the record of the P.L.P. on the question of procedure was barren its support for personal security for Members of Parliament remained consistently strong, if never forceful. To some extent it was unnecessary for the P.L.P.

225. Ibid., para.8.

226. Parliamentary Reform 1933-1950: A Survey of Recent Proposals for the Commons, (London: Cassell for the Hansard Society, 1967) p.45. Attlee did support the idea but put in the context that "I do not think that a Labour Government should waste much time over elaborate attempts to alter procedure but should only make such alterations as are really necessary for effective work." Attlee, The Labour Party in Perspective, p.171.

to exercise militancy on the issue for the growing recognition of the inadequacy of the concept of the part-time Member of Parliament was one aspect of Parliamentary life which changed significantly during the inter-war years. Its demise was never fully accepted, not even in some Labour circles, (227) but the need to provide more adequate salary and conditions for Members gained wider inter-party support. Surprisingly enough it was not a matter which caused great agitation in the Labour Party, although it was never necessary for the Labour Party to state its position on such matters as salaries and pensions.

The question of salaries was dealt with in 1937 when the Government introduced a resolution expressing the opinion of the House that salaries should be increased to £600 per annum. (228) Neville Chamberlain, the Prime Minister, said in moving the resolution that it was based upon the Report of the Select Committee of 1920, which had recognised the inadequacy of salaries but which had not been acted upon owing to the economic conditions of the time. Lees-Smith for the Labour Party argued that not only had Members' expenses increased but that it was essential for the House to recognise the increasing professionalisation of the House in the numbers of Members without resources. Elaborating the point later Tom Williams claimed that Parliament had, "certainly... become a definite legislative workshop. It (was) no longer a playground for the very rich or the less rich." (229) Lees-Smith used the opportunity to raise the general question of the need to provide a pensions fund for Members, which had been raised on a previous occasion and which the Prime Minister had thought

227. Josiah Wedgwood argued during one debate that all financial rewards for public services were undesirable. H.C. Deb. 322, cc.688/691 but of course Wedgwood could afford to be independent.

228. H.C. Deb. 325, cc.1049 et. seq. 22 June 1937.

229. H.C. Deb. 325, cc.1102.

could be discussed by an inquiry of some sort.(230) The opposition to the measure came mainly from Conservatives who argued that the increase should be deferred until the beginning of the next Parliament, for reasons which were characterised by economic arguments but which in fact embodied resentment against the professionalisation of politics.

This professionalisation had been recognised by the Government when they granted a petition of some Scottish Members conceding the right to first class railway travel, including sleeping berths, between London and their constituencies.(231) It was given a further impetus when the Government agreed to set up a Departmental Committee into the question of Members' Pensions which presented its report in December 1937. It was discussed in February 1939 when a Conservative backbencher, Sir Assheton Pownall moved a motion by which the House approved the Departmental Committee's recommendations and declared itself in favour of the initiation of legislation which imposed no charge on the taxpayer.(232) The Committee had in fact proposed the instituting of a pensions scheme, which it regarded as the corollary of the payment of Members, based upon funds provided from Members' salaries at the rate of £12 per annum without tax relief.(233) The strength of the measure was testified by the nature of the opposition shown to it, which came from rich Conservative backbenchers who moved an amendment which read that

"conscious of the fact that salaries were recently increased....and bearing in mind the recent decision not to increase old age pensions (this House) declines to consider a scheme for pensions for itself derived in part from public funds."(234)

230. Ibid., cc. 1055/60. See also the debate on Ministerial Salaries, H.C. Deb. cc. 322 and 639 et. seq.

231. H.C. Deb. 351, cc. 1858/9, 31 July 1937.

232. H.C. Deb. 343, cc. 418 et. seq.

233. "Report of the Departmental Committee on Pensions for Members of the House of Commons", Cmd. 5624 (December 1937)

234. H.C. Deb. 343, cc. 428.

Lees-Smith repeated his claim that the House had to take account of the new type of Member who had entered the House, one without resources. (235) On a free vote the measure was approved, with Labour solidly supporting it.

Throughout the subsequent debate the same patterns prevailed. One Labour Member, Ben Smith, thought the basis of the Bill was wrong (236) but the general Labour view was that it was a step in the right direction. Opposition to the measure was protracted and irrelevant. One member, Hely-Hutchinson, an old Etonian, argued that "if anyone cannot afford to become a Member he need not stand for election," (237) while a Major Proctor spoke of the need to give the old age pensioners a rise, notwithstanding the fact that he later voted against a resolution regretting the Government's failure to provide the necessary means for improvement in old age pensions allegedly on the grounds that it was a vote of censure against the Government. (238) In Committee the Conservatives resisted to the end, forcing an all-night sitting in which they were defeated on all ten divisions they called. (239) As always in such matters the Labour Party was prepared to meet such persistent opposition with persistent advocacy. In a Parliamentary system which encouraged obstructive opposition progress was won by eternal vigilance and the proper exercise of superior voting power.

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235. H.C. Deb. 349, cc. 2509 et.seq.  
 236. Ibid., cc. 2562.  
 237. Ibid., cc. 2521.  
 238. See H.C. Deb. 350, cc. 1717-24. 27 July 1939.  
 239. H.C. Deb. 350, cc. 569 et.seq. 19 July 1939 and 1359 et.seq. 25 July 1939.

(c) Parliament, the Executive and Representation.

One of the problems which presented itself as a result of formation of the National Government was the exact nature of Parliament and the Executive in general and under a Labour Government in particular. During the decade this relationship presented itself mainly in the Ministers of the Crown Act which followed a resolution of the House of Commons declaring itself in favour of the removal of anomalies between various Ministerial salaries. (240) The Labour Party unsuccessfully moved an amendment to prevent an increase in the overall expenditure and moved a similar amendment on the Minister of the Crown Act. (241) The basic argument used by the Party was that the whole structure of government required rationalisation. (242) Not that the Party had done very much previously. The most frequent problem was the chaotic state of the law brought about by the piecemeal development of administrative functions since the 18th century. During the Thirties Viscount Cranborne had the distinction of having two Bills declaring the law so as to remove doubts concerning his eligibility for office. (243) The Labour Party opposed the latter Bill on the grounds that the administrative framework should be reorganised to fit the job, not fit the person into the framework and used the opportunity generally to protest. The Party, however, made no attempt to state a definite position on the question of the relationship between Parliament which was in any way different.

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240. H.C. Deb. 310, cc. 1251 et. seq. 25 March 1936.

241. H.C. Deb. 322, cc. 639-752 (653) 12 April 1937.

242. See, for example, Arthur Greenwood's speech Ibid., cc. 653/64.

243. H.C. Deb. 250, cc. 361/8 25 March 1931 and H.C. Deb. 304, cc. 828 et. seq. 15 July 1934.

from that of its predecessors. (244) Parliament was regarded as the check upon rather than the controller of the Executive. Outside the Left there was little more than a cursory reference by Hugh Dalton as to the possible adoption of occupational groupings as the basis for representation. (245) -

The main activity engaged in by the Party tended to be, as in the case of administrative illegalities, responsive to events rather than the pursuit of well-defined aims. Partly, this was due to the nature of the subject involved. Redistribution, for example, tended to be an inter-party question attracting the attention of such Members like those for Romford who were directly affected. Increased facilities for Blind Voters provided for by a Special Act (246) showed what could be achieved if there was a large degree of agreement on non-controversial technical issues.

Not all issues were technical or non-controversial. The Labour Party resisted Tory measures designed to disenfranchise negligent electors (247) and increase the powers of the House of Lords. (248) Throughout the decade the Party used what few opportunities it had to pursue the fulfilment of the principle of equality in electoral matters in accordance with the Party's general commitment to abolition of plural voting.

David Butler has rightly pointed out that during the 1930's

"the Labour Party .... abandoned all interest in changing the system of voting, despite the fact that in 1931 they suffered the heaviest blow ever to befall a major party (when) their numbers were cut from 288 to 52 and for four years they remained disastrously under-represented in the House." (249)

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244. During the Second Labour Government a Bill was passed to remove doubts as to the meaning of the Succession of the Crown Acts of 1782 and 1801. 21 and 22 Geo. V. Ch. 13 1930-31.
245. Dalton, Practical Socialism for Britain, p.31, n.1.
246. 23 and 24 Geo. 5. Ch. 27.
247. H.C. Deb. 288, cc. 158/62. 10 April 1934.
248. H.L. Deb. 90, cc. 605. et.seq. the 19 December 1933, the debate was centred around Cripps' proposals as set out in Can Socialism Come? See also H.C. Deb. 273, cc. 681. et.seq. 16 December 1932.
249. Butler, op.cit., p.84. Apart from a resolution to the Hastings Conference in 1933 (L.P.A.C.R. 1933, p. 238) the subject of electoral reform did not arise at the Labour Party Conference at all in the 1930's.



There were, of course, strong political reasons for this. The practical failures and political frustrations of attempting to accommodate the Liberals during the Second Labour Government produced a revulsion against changes that would only serve to help that Party, which had itself been decisively split by the election of 1931. Revulsion against coalescence in government produced a widespread desire in the Party for strong government, a desire reinforced by the collapse of the Weimar Republic in the face of Nazism. Writing in 1934 Hugh Dalton asserted that,

"there can be little doubt that (P.R.).....helped to destroy democratic government in Germany by creating an unending series of deadlocks....weak Coalition Governments, and thus discrediting Parliamentary institutions,"(250)

while in a debate in the House of Commons on a Liberal motion on the question of proportional representation Attlee, speaking for the P.L.P., declared that

"it is in those countries that adopted proportional representation on the very best plan that we have seen Fascism," later adding that,

"the enthusiasm for minority representation has only come since the chance of getting a majority has departed from the Liberal Party."(251)

Challenged by Sir Herbert Samuel as to why he had supported the Electoral Reform Bill, Attlee blandly replied that he had not supported the Bill per se but that it was apparently the product of a bargain between the Government and the Liberals. Moreover, while he may have thought P.R. was useful when Labour was in a minority it had no value now.(252)

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250. Dalton, Practical Socialism for Britain, p.35/6. Cf. "there is nothing .....in Proportional Representation to recommend it to the Labour Party." Laski, Labour Party and the Constitution, p.13.
251. H.C.Deb.283, cc.1743/5. et.seq. The terms of the motion read, "that, in order to ensure in future Parliaments a greater correspondence between the strength of opinion in the country and representation in the House of Commons, it is desirable to reform the present system of Parliamentary elections." cc.1725. It was lost by 128 votes to 32.
252. Ibid., cc.1741/8. Cf. Dalton who asserted that the A.V. had been "included in the Labour Government's Electoral Reform Bill of 1931, in order, it appears, to please the Liberals." Practical Socialism for Britain, p.36.

The motion was, like a debate in the Lords on the powers of that House, a pretext to attack the ideas of Stafford Cripps and the Socialist League, a fact which provoked Attlee to retort,

"He (Cripps) is not in favour of a dictatorship, nor am I, but we are in favour of seeing that democracy works. We believe that the majority in the country should rule, and return a majority to this House, and our immediate concern is that there is always a danger that the majority opinion will be thwarted by another unrepresentative House."(253)

The pervasive influence of the "Democracy-v-Dictatorship" debate reverberated throughout the early part of the decade, an influence which perhaps accounted for Attlee's early disassociation from the League. It was in this context of the Cripps' proposals too that G.D.H. Cole wrote,

"To P.R. the Labour Party is opposed, because there is need, above all in a period of rapid transition for an electoral system which will produce a too strong government and give a party which stands for a clear-cut policy a good chance of securing a majority in Parliament," to which he added, "The A.V. on the other hand, ought in my opinion to be seriously considered."(254)

While the Electoral Reform Bill had been the product of compromise the attitude of the Party to electoral matters had been consistently advocated and tenaciously maintained on the Ullswater Committee. Issues raised on that occasion were raised from time to time in debate in the House of Commons. The P.R. motion in 1933 has already been noted. The return of Ramsay MacDonald as Member for the Scottish Universities following his massive defeat by Emmanuel Shinwell at the 1935 General Election provoked a Party motion in the name of S.P. Viant advocating the abolition of university representation.(255) Viant

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253. H.C. Deb. 283, cc.1747.

254. Cole, Plan for Democratic Britain, (London: Odhams Press, 1938), p.241.

255. H.C. Deb. 309, cc.469. et. seq. 26 February 1936.

took the opportunity to attack Universities as a means of perverting the democratic will of the nation and asserted that all plural voting was against the principle of equalitarian democracy to which the Party was committed.

Three years later Major Milner took the opportunity provided by Private Members' time to introduce a Bill designed to prohibit the use of cars at elections in order to take voters to the polls except under the supervision of the Returning Officer.(256) The Party's main emphasis was on the need to remove the alleged undue influence of money in elections. Hugh Dalton had earlier argued that "Our Parliamentary elections are still fought under an electoral law which favours wealthy political parties and certain select groups in the electorate,"(257) and it was this point of view that was most prominent in debate. Arthur Henderson (Junior), for example, pointed out that it was because "we believe that under the present system the greater number of motor cars in use at elections are at the service of one of the great political parties, that we want to place all parties on the same footing."(258) Henderson, like Milner, had claimed that the question was a non-party one and indeed the latter had appealed to the House to support it "on grounds of justice and fair play of adherence to the spirit of the law as well as of letter, and of public right and convenience.."(259) His appeal met with little positive response and a great deal of sarcasm. The measure was talked out.

In the immediate historical context of the 'Thirties the Labour Party appeared not to have achieved very much, an appearance all the more deceptive because of the dominance throughout of the National Government and foreign policy. Yet in the long-term the issues raised and consistently if intermittently pursued by the Party were to find a response during war-time and consummation under the Attlee regime.

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256. H.C.Deb.331, cc.1460.et.seq. 11 February 1938.

257. Dalton, Practical Socialism for Britain, p.37.

258. H.C.Deb.331, cc.1470.

259. Ibid., cc.1466.

(d) The Thirties: An Overview

The most striking difference between the Labour Party at the outset and at the close of the 1930's was the change of emphasis from domestic to foreign affairs. This was in part a product of events but it also represented the re-establishment of Parliamentarism in the Labour Party. Whereas in the early part of the decade the very concept of Parliament as an instrument of change in the transition from Capitalism to Socialism was under attack, albeit from a Left-Wing accorded more status than its real numbers deserved, by the end of the decade the Party was praising Parliament as a living symbol of democratic government in a world too fond of dictatorships. (260)

As has been seen the attack on Parliament was that of a vociferous minority rather than the Party as a whole which like Attlee accepted the rejection of "the method of violence and the device of dictatorship ..." (261) a statement indicative of the degree to which the Party's commitment to Parliamentary government was ostensibly perverted by the antics of the Socialist League. The tragedy of the unnecessary intra-party battle was not only that the Party had to dissipate its energies in bringing dissidents into line but that it was drawn away from the grave problems of the deficiencies of Parliamentary government to the broader question of the sufficiency of Parliamentary government, from the rational electoral considerations of the Party's proposals to questions about its fundamental demands. (262)

260. See, for example, Greenwood's speech on 13 September 1939. H.C. Deb. 351, cc. 663/74.

261. C.R. Attlee, The Will and the Way to Socialism (London: Methuen, 1935), p. 111.

262. Herbert Morrison argued that "if the Socialist League point of view were approved by the Party it would drive us to defend ourselves for the greater part of our time against Tory allegations of Bolshevism and dictatorship...." New Clarion, 30 September 1933.

Thus the question of the efficiency of Parliamentary institutions was a fundamental part of both the Socialist League's indictment of the failure of Parliamentary democracy and the Labour Party's commitment to economic planning. G.D.H. Cole, writing in the context of Cripps' proposals claimed that,

"The Socialist Government will not be able to spare several hundreds of its picked men to sit day after day in Parliament listening to one another talk, when it will need for vital administrative and pioneering work every competent Socialist on whom it can lay hands. It will be best, as soon as Parliament has conferred on the Government the necessary emergency powers, for it to meet only as often as it is needed for some clearly practical purpose, leaving the Socialist administrators to carry on with the minimum of day-to-day interference. There will be no time for superfluous debating while we are busy building the Socialist Commonwealth." (263)

Clearly, in the mind the Left Parliament's role was secondary to the implementation of Socialism.

Yet not all members of the acknowledged Left took so severe a view. Harold Laski, for example, made the important point that "A Parliament is not a collection of distinguished experts," (264) and argued that, "the sooner the function of Parliaments, in all legislative matters, is confined to discussions of general principles, the more satisfactory will be the legislative process. They cannot hope, from their very nature, to be more than organs of critical registration." Those who pin their faith to the revival of the intensity of the classic parliamentary control wholly mistake the inherent requirements of the modern state." (265)

Of course, the I.L.P. adoption of Jowetts' ideas was one example of such faith, although like the various criticisms which also presented themselves in the latter

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263. G.D.H. Cole, "Socialist Control of Industry" in Problems of a Socialist Government, pp. 173. Cf., Cole, The Next Ten Years, pp. 155/6.
264. Laski, Democracy in Crisis, p. 79.
265. Ibid., p. 82. Cf., G.D.H. Cole, Economic Tracts for the Times. (London: Macmillan, 1932), Ch. XIV.

part of the 'twenties they expressed a general dissatisfaction with the capacity of Parliament to deal with expert or technical matters such as economics. By the mid-thirties the capacity of Members and of Parliament was no longer in doubt, the ground of questioning had shifted to the appropriateness of Parliament in dealing with the details of such matters. Parliament's capacity to deal with such questions was no longer doubted.

The position of the Party regarding Parliament in general was basically conservative: Attlee summarising the Party's proposed reforms of the House of Commons placed them in the traditional British mould of reform.

"Most experienced Members of Parliament" he wrote, "would agree that, without in any way lessening efficiency, a great deal of time could be saved by sweeping away obsolete forms and by utilising the personnel of the House more effectively than is done today - when in fact, the greater part of the work falls upon a few." (266)

It was not without reason that a contemporary American commentator could say of Labour politicians that "it is a commonplace observation that Britishers are averse to theorising.....They prefer politicians to 'muddle through' seeking the methods which produce the best results, with appropriate deference to customs and traditions." (267) It was this deference to customs and traditions that caused the Party to support the traditional impartiality of the Speaker, when discussing the Speaker's Seat in Select Committee and to accept the right of the Prime Minister to choose the Cabinet even if advised by a group of party officials. (268)

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266. Attlee, The Will and the Way to Socialism, p.112.

267. D.E. McHenry, The Labour Party in Transition 1931-1938 (London: George Routledge, 1938) p.260.

268. L.P.A.C.R. 1933, pp.8/11. The relevant section of the Report was designed to safeguard the Party - i.e., it was a conservative rather than a reforming measure... In the event Attlee ignored it.

If the Labour Party appeared to be more radical than it was in the 'Thirties this was derived primarily from its ready emphasis on the Fascistic menace throughout Europe and its willingness to over-emphasise the dangers of some measures such as the Incitement to Disaffection Act passed by the National Government.

Yet their protestations, given the context of the 'Thirties was no more radical than their Liberal predecessors, for notwithstanding the publicity given by their opponents to neo-Marxist intellectuals and other admirers of continental philosophy the Party remained first and foremost distinctly British in outlook, a fact which reinforced the Party's commitment to Parliamentary institutions. In a very real sense the Labour Party was the inheritor of the Liberal Parliamentary tradition and the supplanters of a Liberal Party incapable of adapting to changed economic conditions. (269) It was to these conditions that the Labour Party sought to adapt Parliament and it was these conditions, heightened by the advent of war, that began the processes which led to the culmination of many of the reforms advocated by the Party.

See, for example, Lasker's claim that the National Government's agenda was accepted by Strachey and Harold Lasker was not wholly rationalised their own role in "revolutionary" circles by attributing the revolutionary tradition to the Socialists rather than the Fabians, or more subtly rationalising the "revolutionist" in political terminology, and that their practical proposals included elements of the Fabian and F.N. Lasker's proposals for reform. The recent biography of John Strachey by Sir John Gigg, unfortunately, tends not to take these points into the fabric of Strachey's intellectual development. (Lasker, *John Gigg*, London: John Gigg, 1971).

2. "The purpose of Parliament, both before it had the State power given to it afterwards, is to control those institutions which threaten private enterprise by imposing the democratic restraints by which the workers are entitled to share of political power." *Labour*, p. 137/8.

4. See, for example, Lasker's claim that the National Government's agenda was 269. of See Note 23. Lasker represented the best violent outrage of the British Constitution in his time. "The implications of the British Political Constitution," *II*, p. 1. (George Lasker, ed. 1919), pp. 137/8. Lasker's position is that "If a capitalist class had managed to transform all their existing political parties, into a National Government, for instance, the destruction of democracy will be gradually and, if possible, imperceptibly advanced." He continued, "However, as gradually withdrawn from a democratically elected Chamber (of Reform of the House of Lords is envisaged) or alternatively the Chamber may be gradually controlled (of the



1. The distinction is an important one for the "Left intellectuals" of the United Kingdom were in an almost unique position in belonging to a society in which the expositors of organised Communism were the articulators of a tradition both novel and alien to the established traditions of freedom of speech, association and political activity which had been virtually established during the nineteenth century in England. This was reinforced by the role of a non-Marxist, but broadly progressive, Labour Movement, which, although opposed to Communist tactics for a variety of reasons, including its ideological and cultural development, was not averse to allowing Marxists to join it provided they obeyed democratic procedures. As Attlee commented, "The natural British tendency to heresy and dissent has prevented the formation of a code of rigid Socialist orthodoxy." The Labour Party in Perspective (London: Victor Gollancz, 1937), p.30. In the Labour Party "intellectuals" were usually regarded as those who did not owe their position to a Trade Union organisation. New Statesman, 6 May 1944.
2. A Key to Communism; Laski's review of "Marxism and Marxist Thought" by N.I. Bukharin et.al. New Statesman, 20 July 1935, p.102. Cf. John Strachey The Theory and Practice of Socialism (London: Victor Gollancz, 1936). Part IV. Neal Wood regarded Strachey as "a fellow traveller strictly adhering to the Party line." Communism and British Intellectuals (London: Gollancz, 1959). A somewhat cynical Trade Union reviewer wrote of The Theory and Practice of Socialism, "the critical reader of this book does not get very far before he suspects that it is yet another contribution to the insidious propaganda of the Communists to destroy the influence of the present leadership of the Trade Union and Labour Movement. His suspicions will be well founded by the time he reaches the end of the book." "Mr. Strachey Tells Us How", T.W.G.U. Record (December, 1936), p.117. It should be pointed out that the Marxism adopted by Strachey and Harold Laski was one which rationalised their own role in "revolutionary" circles by attributing the revolutionary insight to the bourgeoisie rather than the proletariat or more subtly redefining the "proletariat" to include themselves, and that their practical proposals included strands of the Webbs' and F.W. Jowett's proposals for reform. The recent biography of John Strachey by Hugh Thomas unfortunately tends not to delve deeply enough into the forces behind Strachey's intellectual development. Hugh Thomas, John Strachey (London: Eyre Methuen, 1973).
3. Cf. "The purpose of Fascism, both before it has the State power given to and afterwards, is to smash those institutions which threaten private ownership - to smash the democratic machinery by which the workers may obtain a measure of political power....." Ibid., pp. 137/8.
4. See, for example, Laski's claim that the National Government's specific use of Orders in Council represented the most violent outrage of the British Constitution in his time. "Some Implications of the Crisis" Political Quarterly, II, No.4. (October-December, 1931), pp. 466/9. Cf. Strachey's prediction that "If a capitalist class can succeed in transforming and fusing its existing political parties, into a 'National Government' for instance, the destruction of democracy will be gradually and, if possible, imperceptibly withdrawn." He continued, "Power may be gradually withdrawn from a democratically elected Chamber (cf. Reform of the House of Lords in Britain) or alternatively the franchise may be gradually curtailed (cf. the



## 4. (contd.)

proposals of the British Conservative Party for withholding the franchise from persons in receipt of poor relief)." Strachey, The Coming Struggle for Power, pp. 263/4.

5. As Margaret Cole wrote "Even if the most sensitive could feel that the excesses of post-revolutionary violence might easily increase rather than die down, the continuing high hopes of the Revolution, the knowledge of what its makers had set out to achieve, and were in part achieving, compared with the dead hopelessness of the breadlines and the dole were more than enough to outweigh or even to dispel any beginnings of doubt.....Douglas..... saw in Soviet Russia, the negation of the immoralities of Industrial capitalism and the system of private profit and was eager to follow the gleam without seeking to imitate in detail." The Life of G.D.H. Cole, p. 190. J.T. Murphy thought the existence of a fifth column of counter-revolutionaries headed by Trotsky was nothing extraordinary. Murphy, op.cit., pp. 283/4.
6. The Socialist League was formed out of an amalgamation between the Society for Socialist Inquiry and Propaganda and the affiliationist minority of the I.L.P. led by E.F. Wise, who had refused to follow Maxton and the dis-affiliationists into political oblivion. The I.L.P. affiliationists had insisted on the exclusion of Ernest Bevin, Chairman of the S.S.I.P., from office in the Socialist League. Bevin, for whom the experience merely confirmed his distrust of "intellectuals", wrote to Cole, "I do not believe the Socialist League will change very much from the old I.L.P. attitude, whoever is in the Executive." (Bevin to Cole, 24 September, 1932). Quoted by Pimlott, op.cit., p.19. See M. Cole, The Life of G.D.H. Cole, pp. 175/180, and 191/3. Cf. Bullock, op.cit., pp. 515/6. Bevin clearly resented his exclusion from office by what he considered to be self-seeking elements in the Party. "I shall always watch," he wrote Cole, "so long as I am in the Movement, the antics of careerists who seem to think we have created the Movement as a short of ladder for individualists." Pimlott, loc.cit. Bevin's analysis of the role of the Socialist League proved to be accurate. As Lees-Smith wrote of the Socialist League in 1934, "Its policy and outlook is much the same as those of the I.L.P. when.....it disaffiliated from the Labour Party." "Parties and the Next General Election: Prospects for the Labour Party," Political Quarterly, VI, No.1. (January-March, 1935), pp. 20/28(24). Given this it is hardly surprising that Bevin declared publicly that "I saw Mosley come into the Labour Movement and I see no difference between the tactics of Mosley and Cripps." Daily Herald, 19 February 1937.
7. One post-war observer has noted that "The events of August 1931 were the only substantial piece of evidence against the liberal theory of the State which has been forthcoming since the outbreak of the first world war put an end to the Ulster crisis." Roy Jenkins, Pursuit of Progress: A Critical Analysis of the Achievement and Prospect of the Labour Party (London: W. Heinemann, 1953). Yet while "Faith in the applicability of the liberal theory of the State to a period of transition to socialism did not disappear entirely.....it became very weak. Professor Laski's Parliamentary Government in England gave sophisticated expression to a very general attitude of mind." Ibid., p. 83.

8. "In Britain the strength of the Communist Party and its electoral successes have been negligible. The one Parliamentary seat held by the Communist Party was obtained at the expense of the Labour Party." L.P.A.C.R.1936, p.300. In an official letter to the Communist Party Henderson had insisted that "The Communist Party does not believe in Parliamentary Democracy. Communist Parties are allowed by the Third International to enter Parliament not for the purpose of organic work but in order to destroy Parliament 'from within'." L.P.A.C.R. 1934, p.11.
9. "Once a decision has been arrived at, all must conform. Whatever may have been the difference of opinion.....as to the wisdom of the decision, there is no room for individual action once the die is cast, throughout all Trade Union activities this solidarity obtains." Attlee, Labour Party in Perspective, p.67. For an alternative view see C. Cooke, The Life of Richard Stafford Cripps (London: Hedder & Stoughton, 1957), pp.141/3. Cf. Bevin's speech at the 1934 Conference, L.P.A.C.R.1934, pp.140/3.
10. Many years later Citrine expressed this fundamental difference of approach when he wrote of Cripps, "Like many others I was perplexed to understand how a man of such legal eminence could utter such irresponsible drivel, characteristic of the tyro in political affairs," and of a meeting with the Socialist League "I was astounded at the extreme views expressed which seemed to me to show no awareness of the realities of the political world." Men and Work, p.293.
11. See too his speech to the Party Conference on "Democracy and Dictatorship." L.P.A.C.R.1933, p.219, where he said he would "reserve the right, faced with the use of dictatorial and Fascist methods by the other side, to utilise any method which was expedient or likely to be successful....." Cf. Ernest Bevin "The perils of dictatorship" T.G.W.U. Record May 1933, pp.304/5. "if we, in this country, leave our democratic principles and methods, and start clamouring for a dictatorship of the proletariat, then we must not complain if our opponents clamour for a dictatorship of the Ruling Class and get there first."
12. "This constitutional crisis will thus result either in the capitalists giving way to the will of the people expressed and enforced constitutionally, or in a capitalist or Socialist dictatorship relying for its power upon force alone. Such a dictatorship will almost inevitably lead to revolution and violence with what result it is impossible to foretell." Ibid., p.48. Against this argument Herbert Morrison posed the unanswered question, "And if we were defeated at the Polls by the counter-dictatorship.....?" New Clarion, 30 September 1933.
13. Cf. Laski, "the right, if a Labour Government is unconstitutionally challenged, to utilise the State-power for its defence." The State in Theory and Practice, p.298. For an earlier exposition of this point of view see H.N. Brailsford, Socialism for Today (London: I.L.P., 1925), p.67. Brailsford had argued that "the first open step which a Labour Government takes towards Socialism will at once arouse an embittered and unflinching will to resist. We may have to answer with emergency measures and war-time precautions." However, he wisely added that "even then it would be folly to abandon Parliamentary forms."

14. In "so far.....as it can the obligation of a socialist government in normal times is to throw upon its opponents the burden of the resistance." Laski, Democracy in Crisis, p.252. Such resistance was, of course, inevitable. See Laski, The State in Theory and Practice, p. 316. See also New Clarion, 17 September 1932 where H.N. Brailsford argued that it would be ill-advised to allow the facilities of the new society to be opposed by an unfavourable election result from an ill-educated electorate. G.D.H. Cole, however, did not accept the inevitability of violence, "Peaceably if we may" New Clarion, 27 May 1933.
15. Although this is a far cry from Laski's original criticism of Orders in Council (see footnote 37 and note 4 above) Cripps was still critical at least in 1932, of the "free use" of such orders which he claimed "has converted Parliament into an institution to register the decisions of the Cabinet or of the Ministers." Ibid., p.33. It seems surprising that Cripps should be so critical seeing as he was so willing to use the instruments and techniques for his own purposes. Apparently his main fear was not that such techniques were being used but that they were being used by the Capitalist class and that if a Labour Government used them the Conservative forces in society might use the Courts to invalidate them. Moreover, Cripps seemed peeved by the fact that it was the National Government rather than its Labour predecessor that had used the procedure, whilst R.H. Tawney noted, "the present government has shown that wealth can be redistributed, and existing contracts broken by the convenient procedure of Orders in Council. The precedent should be remembered. An Emergency Powers Act is on the statute book and Labour must be prepared to use it, and, if the powers which it confers are insufficient, to pass another." 'The choice before the Labour Party', Political Quarterly, III, No.3. (July-September, 1932), pp. 323/45(328).
16. For criticism of the idea in respect of Parliament and the Cabinet see Hugh Dalton, Practical Socialism for Britain (London: George Routledge & Sons, 1935), pp. 386/9. It should perhaps be pointed out that whilst the proposals referred to here involved Cabinet administration it is probable that Cripps regarded them as being applicable to the Commons as well. Dalton clearly recognises this by proposing that the number of Standing Committees be raised from 5 to 7, whilst it would be inconceivable that Cripps would forgo the logic of examination at the highest rather than a secondary level. However, if all M.P.'s were to be usefully employed a variety of committees would have to be utilised.
17. In context Mrs. Webb was referring to Susan Lawrence and obviously she did not apply this to Cripps. Instead she wrote in terms of ambition and personality clashes: of "a growing jealousy among the other candidates for eventual leadership at Stafford's rapid rise as left-wing leader of the younger generation of intellectuals. Stafford is a dear good fellow: he has the manner, the character and the personal conduct for leadership, whether he has the health and the intellect for the role of The Leader I rather doubt. He is curiously childish in some of his reasoning." Unpublished Diaries. Vol. 47, p.81, 2 June 1933. Italics in the Original.

18. Beatrice Webb summarised Henderson's views as follows: "I am not going to throw away the principles of political freedom and personal liberty, in which I am a life-long believer, until I am convinced that the parliamentary system cannot be worked in the interests of the common people.... I am not going to advocate any form of dictatorship, until I am convinced that the parliamentary system under a constitutional majority, as we know it, is a failure from the workers' standpoint and that there is a desirable alternative." Unpublished Diaries, Vol. 47, p.107. 5 August 1933. Italics in the Original.
19. The New Statesman whilst criticising Cripps also criticised the Labour Party for going out of its way to repudiate him. 3 February 1934. An early draft of the resolution was approved by the N.E.C. on 20 December 1933 but was not issued pending consultation between the Constitutional Sub-Committee and various members of the Party who had made individual pronouncements on the subject. N.E.C. Minutes 64, E.C.4, 1933/4, M.108. The Constitutional Committee which drew up the draft was headed by Clynes and included Dalton, Laski and Lees-Smith. Attlee, Citrine and Cripps were absent from the meeting. (N.E.C. Minutes, 64. Constitutional Committee Minutes (13) 30 November 1933. They were, however, present at two subsequent meetings when the matter was thrashed out in full. ((15 and 16) 16 and 18 January 1934, 45a and 45ai).
- At the N.E.C. Meeting on 24 January an attempt was made by Susan Lawrence, Herbert Morrison and J.C. Swan to modify the tone of the last sentence, it failed. N.E.C. Minutes Vol.64, E.C.5, 1933/4. 24 January 1934.
20. Under the existing procedure taxation was made valid from the moment the Budget Resolutions were passed, that is, at the Committee Stage of the Budget Resolutions - hence the change would be more convenient. Jennings whose original manuscript for his book was read by members of the N.E.C. suggested the division of the Finance Bill into two separate Bills, one dealing with policy and the other an annual taxation Bill. Ibid., Ch.VII and Preface, Jennings Parliamentary Reform.
21. Cf. Editorial in the Daily Herald, 14 June 1933. "The present government has set us a splendid example of how to push through legislation in an emergency. A House of Commons controlled by a Labour majority will be just as fearless. We shall use our power to press for all forms of legislative enactments, Emergency Power Bills, Orders in Council, Proclamations by His Majesty the King, Provisional Orders and all other forms of constitutional procedure." By contrast see the New Statesman's assertion at the time that the Orders provided "the legal basis for an extra-Parliamentary form of Government - a mild form of Fascism." 10 October 1931 and Laski's view in the Political Quarterly, Vol. 2. No. IV, (September/December 1931) pp. 466/9.
22. Amongst the changes accepted was one which Dalton had advocated: the extension of the right of the Chairman of Committees to select amendments. When this was brought before the Commons Attlee commented, "Although we are in Opposition, we do not take any different line on this question from what we would take if we were in office, because we consider that when the time comes in which we shall be in office, we shall be concerned to see that this House does its work properly and expeditiously." See also footnote 82 above.

23. Of course it can be argued that Socialism did not provide an answer to the problems of 1929-31, although there is no evidence that distinctly Socialist measures could not have worked had the Second Labour Government tried to implement them. The possibility of this happening was, of course, impossible given the Government's dependence upon the Liberals in the House of Commons and the domination of Snowden's outdated free trade ideas. It is true that Keynes' economic doctrines proved to be more useful to the post-war Labour Government than many of their own ideas but this was because the Attlee administration possessed a degree of intellectual and political flexibility not possessed by Keynes and which had caused the latter to alienate many influential leaders of the Party. See F. Williams, Nothing So Strange, p.108/110.

It is the duty of the Government to ensure that the public safety is maintained in all circumstances. The Government has taken steps to ensure that the public safety is maintained in all circumstances. The Government has taken steps to ensure that the public safety is maintained in all circumstances.

**CHAPTER SEVEN**

Emergency Powers (Defence) Act 1939 has been passed, and this is a very important piece of legislation. It appears to be necessary in the interests of public safety, the defence of the realm, the maintenance of public order and the efficient prosecution of any war in which we are engaged.

**REPRESENTATION IN WAR AND PEACE**

It is the duty of the Government to ensure that the public safety is maintained in all circumstances. The Government has taken steps to ensure that the public safety is maintained in all circumstances. The Government has taken steps to ensure that the public safety is maintained in all circumstances.

The Labour Party has accepted the necessity of these powers and the repeal of such regulations as early as 1944, following the publication of the Report of the Enquiry Committee and the inter-party debate over Parliamentary reform.

1. The Emergency Powers (Defence) Act 1939, 2 and 3 Geo. 6, c. 41.
2. The Emergency Powers (Defence) Act 1939, 2 and 3 Geo. 6, c. 41.
3. 2 and 3 Geo. 6, c. 41, para. 1 (1). All defence regulations pursuant to the Act are to be in force for a period of 20 days ending with the first day of the month of August, or such shorter period as may be specified.

The opportunities and realities of power.

At the outbreak of war Parliament granted the Government wide discretionary powers in a series of Acts, (1) designed to provide the Executive with the freedom from Parliamentary interference that was necessary in a war-time situation which demanded speedy action. Ironically the powers which the then Conservative Government was granted were the kind of powers which Sir Stafford Cripps had suggested that a Labour Government might have to adopt in the face of determined capitalist opposition to Socialist policies. (2) Under the Emergency Powers (Defence) Act 1939 the Government was able to enact "such Regulations.... as appear to him (the King in Council) to be necessary or expedient" for public safety, the defence of the realm, the maintenance of public order and the efficient prosecution of any war in which His Majesty might be engaged and for maintaining supplies and services essential to the life of the community. (3) In addition the Crown was authorized to make regulations for more specific purposes including the imprisonment of persons whose detention appeared to the Secretary of State to be expedient in the interests of public safety or defence of the realm and the amendment or suspension of any enactment and application of enactments with or without modification. These powers were extended by the Emergency Powers Acts which were annually renewable.

The Labour Party had accepted the necessity of these powers and the employment of such regulations as early as 1934, following the publication of the Report of the Donoughmore Committee and the intra-party debates over Parliamentary reform.

1. The Emergency Powers (Defence) Act 1939. 2 and 3 Geo.6ch. 62.
2. Can Socialism Come? Op.cit.
3. 2 and 3 Geo. 6. Ch.62, Para. 1 (1). All defence regulations pursuant to the Act lay before Parliament for a period of 28 days during which either House could, by resolution, annul any regulation.



It is true that before entering the Coalition various Labour leaders, including Greenwood and Morrison, had argued that the rights of Parliament must be maintained, in particular, against undefined or broad powers, but having joined the Government the Labour leadership generally, and Morrison specifically, were loath to have their judgement questioned. In response to criticism from the House, Attlee retorted "Parliament has to trust its Ministers, or, if it distrusts them to take action accordingly,"(4) while Morrison, who had no intention of allowing Regulation 18B to be discontinued while he was Home Secretary protested that Parliament's job was not that of Court of Appeal in individual cases but of matching their criticism that his decisions were wrong with evidence. "what the House must do," he declared,

"is to keep a watch on the Home Secretary, to have a Debate, to look out for cases where in their judgement he has gone wrong, if they can get evidence that he has (Interruption). I know the limitations of the House. I agree that it is not altogether cricket, but I cannot help it."(5)

For those Members who did not accept the Executive's innocence such an interpretation of the Executive/Legislative relationship was unfair to the House which did not have, and was regularly denied, access to the evidence upon which the Executive based its decisions.

Morrison's interpretation of the relationship by which the Government ruled and the House of Commons criticised was consistent with the Gladstonian tradition, continued by Cripps in the inter-war period of Parliamentary confusion.

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4. H.C. Deb. 369, cc.876. Attlee argued that the Government could not report all the facts to the House, without destroying the basis of 18B. Cf. Morrison's argument along the same lines in H.C. Deb. 391, cc.503.
  5. H.C. Deb. 381, cc.1509. It was not without reason that Tribune regarded Morrison as "a dangerous debater who is not over-scrupulous in his choice of arguments" (15 January 1943). Morrison was insistent that on the question of Regulation 18B there should be no recourse to an investigation by a Committee of the House as opposed to the existing Advisory Committee. See CAB 65/19.91(41)9.8 September 1941.



It was shared by the majority of the P.L.P. but not by a minority, led primarily by Aneurin Bevan and Emmanuel Shinwell, who regarded the Government as often ham-handed and certainly over-sensitive to what the dissidents regarded as constructive criticism of the war effort and administrative incompetence. (6) It was a view echoed by the journals of the Left such as the New Statesman, which regularly criticised the Government's frequent resort, early in the war, to the use of Secret Session, and, as victory drew nearer, the continuance of the Electoral Truce.

The operation of the Electoral truce had caused disquiet among the left-wing of the Labour Party which saw little difference between an allegedly pro-Fascist Chamberlain and the openly-Fascist Hitler. Although this was an extreme view it was certainly true that Chamberlain's continuance as a Cabinet Member after his defeat and resignation as Prime Minister in May 1940 was widely resented. These views were well expressed by the publication of "Guilty Men" (7). Growing dissatisfaction, first with the conduct of the war and then with the projected principles of the reconstructed peace, coupled with a number of instances in which Labour's participation in the Coalition seemed like that of a junior partner, (8) produced a certain degree of intra-party factionalism and the support of Labour intellectuals for independent candidates against Conservative candidates in otherwise unopposed elections to Parliament.

On the floor of the House the constituted Opposition was composed of a motley collection of malcontents commonly concerned to check the Executive with

6. "By insisting on rigid party discipline since 1940, the Government have often deprived themselves of effective Council by the House itself." H.C. Deb. 404, cc.683. Aneurin Bevan, 31 October 1944.

7. Cato, Guilty Men (London: Victor Gollancz, 1940). See Note 1.

8. On one occasion the Conservatives carried their opposition to the appointment of one Labour Member, Major Milner as Deputy Chairman of Ways and Means to the floor of the House where they protested they had not been consulted. H.C. Deb. 386, cc.252/267. 20 January 1943. See also the comments of New Statesman, 23 January 1943 and "An Unnecessary Incident" Economist, 30 January 1943.

a view to providing intelligent and constructive direction to otherwise arbitrary and often incompetent and foolish decisions by administrators. Inevitably they were, and to some extent still are, characterised as the defenders of life, liberty and the principles of democratic society,(9) but essentially, notwithstanding the overriding aim of winning the war the aims of the various sections of the Opposition were more concerned with securing the peace which, ideologically at least, was seen in Party terms. Thus while Members of all Parties were concerned with application of the Emergency regulations to Members of Parliament as an infringement of Parliamentary privilege and a dangerous use of power by the Executive against the Legislature, the individual cases of Captain Ramsay and John McGovern attracted a different response from the B.L.P. In a debate on a motion that the operation of Regulation 18B should be reconsidered,

"and, in particular, that the detention of an honourable member for over four years without trial or charge conflicts with the ancient and well-established right of the House to the service of its Members.....and ought to cease unless justified to the House, if necessary, in Secret Session"

only one P.L.P. Member, R. Stokes of Ipswich, voted in its favour.(10) In the McGovern case several Labour Members spoke vigorously against the decision which prevented McGovern from travelling to Ireland on Parliamentary business.(11) Again, when the Home Secretary released Oswald Mosley late in 1943, the main opposition came from Labour Members.(12) In the nature of things this was natural.

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9. Amongst their activities were opposition to the Parliamentary recess and the use of Secret Session.(See H.C.Deb., 374.cc.39. 9 September 1941 and H.C.Deb. 363, cc.1193/1206. 30 July 1940.)
  10. H.C.Deb. 400, cc.2317, et.seq. 16 June 1944.
  11. H.C.Deb. 374, cc.1703, et.seq. 21 October 1941.
  12. H.C.Deb. 395, cc.395, et.seq. 1 December 1943.

17. See House of Commons Debates (Commons Debates) 1st 1941, 4 and 5 Dec. 1941. See also 1941, 10 Dec. 1941, 11 Dec. 1941, 12 Dec. 1941, 13 Dec. 1941, 14 Dec. 1941, 15 Dec. 1941, 16 Dec. 1941, 17 Dec. 1941, 18 Dec. 1941, 19 Dec. 1941, 20 Dec. 1941, 21 Dec. 1941, 22 Dec. 1941, 23 Dec. 1941, 24 Dec. 1941, 25 Dec. 1941, 26 Dec. 1941, 27 Dec. 1941, 28 Dec. 1941, 29 Dec. 1941, 30 Dec. 1941, 31 Dec. 1941, 1 Jan. 1942, 2 Jan. 1942, 3 Jan. 1942, 4 Jan. 1942, 5 Jan. 1942, 6 Jan. 1942, 7 Jan. 1942, 8 Jan. 1942, 9 Jan. 1942, 10 Jan. 1942, 11 Jan. 1942, 12 Jan. 1942, 13 Jan. 1942, 14 Jan. 1942, 15 Jan. 1942, 16 Jan. 1942, 17 Jan. 1942, 18 Jan. 1942, 19 Jan. 1942, 20 Jan. 1942, 21 Jan. 1942, 22 Jan. 1942, 23 Jan. 1942, 24 Jan. 1942, 25 Jan. 1942, 26 Jan. 1942, 27 Jan. 1942, 28 Jan. 1942, 29 Jan. 1942, 30 Jan. 1942, 31 Jan. 1942, 1 Feb. 1942, 2 Feb. 1942, 3 Feb. 1942, 4 Feb. 1942, 5 Feb. 1942, 6 Feb. 1942, 7 Feb. 1942, 8 Feb. 1942, 9 Feb. 1942, 10 Feb. 1942, 11 Feb. 1942, 12 Feb. 1942, 13 Feb. 1942, 14 Feb. 1942, 15 Feb. 1942, 16 Feb. 1942, 17 Feb. 1942, 18 Feb. 1942, 19 Feb. 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There were, of course, occasions when the issues enjoined between the Executive and the Legislature were, in fact, primarily constitutional issues which adversely affected the House of Commons. Three Acts had been passed without opposition at the outset of the war limiting the applicability of disqualifying legislation to Members who joined the Armed Forces,(13) became Regional Commissioners (14) or were appointed under the Ministers of the Crown (Emergency Appointments) Act 1939.(15) In 1941, however, having already appointed Sir Stafford Cripps and Sir Samuel Hoare to Ambassadorial posts in Moscow and Madrid the Government, owing to ambiguity over the application of the Place Act of 1707,(16) introduced a Bill designed specifically to allow Malcolm MacDonald to retain his seat in the Commons on his appointment as High Commissioner to Canada. MacDonald himself had offered to resign but the Government took the view that it would be an unnecessary loss to the House.(17) Indeed the Prime Minister took it further and made the matter one of confidence a fact which somewhat scattered the Labour opposition.(18) It did, however, bring out an interpretation of Parliament and its role that is significant in the history of the Labour Party. The Government's view was that the prosecution of war and the service to the state that it required was the primary service that the citizens could perform. They were willing to allow the appointment of a Select Committee to enquire into the whole constitutional position of Offices of Profit under the Crown but those who were thus appointed were part of a "roll of honour". This interpretation was challenged by Aneurin Bevan who declared,

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13. The House of Commons (Service in His Majesty's Forces) Act 1939. 2 and 3 Geo.6. Ch.85.
  14. The Regional Commissioners Act, 1939, 2 and 3 Geo.6. Ch.76.
  15. 2 and 3 Geo.6. Ch.77.
  16. There had, of course, been previous occurrences of such ambiguity.
  17. The House of Commons Disqualification (Temporary Provision) Act 1941: 4 and 5 Geo.6. Ch.8. See Note 2.
  18. H.C.Deb. 369, cc.655. et.seq. (Second Reading), 27 February 1941, cc.795 et.seq. (Committee), 4 March 1941. See Note 3.

"I regard service to this House as the highest service a citizen can render, taking precedence even over service in the Armed Forces. If that is not the case, what is the meaning of constitutional government?"(19)

Bevan's statement is important in that it cogently expresses the two fold acceptance by the Labour Party of the central role of Parliament in the political system and an assertion of the primacy of the institution as the method of achieving social change. Whilst the exercise of power might, in fact, lie with the Executive, this was less important than the representation of the interests of the community through election to the legislature.

The performance of this representative function was the subject of increasing criticism as war progressed. The New Statesman, for example, constantly expressed dissatisfaction with the personnel involved in the war effort and those sympathisers of Hitler introduced by the Conservative Party into the Commons through by-elections. It was argued "the political truce serves to hide from the House of Commons much that is occurring in the country"(20) and taking the view that the future lay between Communism and Socialism expressed disquiet at the Government's treatment of Parliament. In an editorial on 1 February 1941, it declared,

"Ultimately the only answer to the Communists is to show that capitalism can be transformed peacefully even in a democracy such as ours is today,"

while sixteen months later it spoke of,

"the degree to which Parliamentary institutions become discredited when there is a growing disparity between what the nation requires and the House of Commons is prepared to accept."(21)

19. H.C. Deb. 369, cc.715.

20. "The British Tradition" New Statesman 5 April 1941. Tribune took a similar line throughout the war.

21. H.J. Laski, "The Labour Conference and After" New Statesman, 6 June 1942.

in Week 1943. See H.C. Deb. 387, cc.1004-10 and H.C. Deb. 386, cc.1/2, 1/10. See also the comments of the Illustrated, 22 June 1942 (D. 11) and New Statesman 10 March 1943 (103).

As the end of hostilities drew near these ideas found expression in the demands of back-bench Labour Members for a general election which they argued was required in order to restore the balance of representation between a Parliament predominantly elected in 1935 and an electorate whose liberty had been preserved by armed forces consisting in the main of youngsters who had not been able to vote because of the electoral truce or inadequate registration procedures.

Thus the major issues which affected the Labour Party on the question of Parliamentary reform were three fold. In the first place there was the control of the discretionary power of the Government, authorised under Acts approved by Parliament. Secondly, there was the question of the relationship between the Crown and Parliament as seen in the dispute over the MacDonalld Bill. Finally, there was the question of the representative qualities of the House. The first issue was concerned not simply with the broad issues of personal and civil liberties but with the need to control such regulations as were issued. The initiative on this matter came not from Labour Members in either Government or opposition who, as we shall see, regarded the development of such regulations inevitable, necessary and, in post-war terms, essential to the transition to peace if the Labour Party should be elected to office, but from Conservative back-benchers who had great distaste for such regulations. On the question of representation the initiative came mainly from Liberal and Commonwealth Members, particularly Sir Richard Acland, who used the opportunities afforded by the annual renewal of the Prolongation of Parliament and Local Elections and Register of Electors (Temporary Provision) Acts to press for reforms.(22) It was in

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22. Acland also raised the question of Parliamentary reform by opposing the Government when it moved in Parliament writs for Eddisbury and Daventry, in March 1943. See H.C.Deb. 387, cc.1003/10 and H.C.Deb. 388, cc.1/5; 61/70. See also the comments of the Economist, 20 March 1943 (p.355) and New Statesman, 20 March 1943.(183).

response to the comments made by these Members that the Government set in process the chain of events that led to the Speaker's Conference of 1944 and the war-time measures emanating from it. For the Labour Party the main criticism of the continuing problems of registration came predominantly from outside the House, mainly from the intellectual Left. As we shall see this was because the presence of the Labour leadership in Government meant that such criticism as was expressed came from the N.E.C. The remaining issue of the relationship between the Legislature and Executive was the first to be raised and solved and, therefore, as a matter of convenience, will be dealt with first.

The background to the MacDonald Bill has been mentioned above. In the debate on the Bill the Labour Party took the view that the question was "essentially a House of Commons matter." (23) Aneurin Bevan argued that it was necessary "to limit the extent to which the Executive can absorb Members of the House into the Administration," (24) while Lees-Smith led the other Labour Members in agreeing with the Government that a Select Committee on the whole question was essential. (25) Josiah Wedgewood introduced a note of extreme Parliamentarism into the proceedings by declaring, "This Bill enables something to be done which .... may be in our own personal interests but which is against the traditions of Parliament and against the wishes of the constituents of many Members who are being deprived of their representation." (26)

By way of contrast Major Milner argued that the Bill was necessary, and dealt forcibly with the arguments raised against it, denying that Members who joined

23. H.C. Deb. 369, cc. 713. (Aneurin Bevan)

24. Ibid., cc. 717. (Lees-Smith)

25. Ibid., cc. 664/8.

26. Ibid., cc. 718/9. (Josiah Wedgewood)

H.C. Deb. 369, cc. 713.

Ibid., cc. 717.

Ibid., cc. 664/8.

Ibid., cc. 718/9.

the Administration were "by the mere acceptance of their purely honorary offices made dependent upon or necessarily supporters of the Government" or that the constituencies involved were disfranchised.(27) The Committee stage produced more general criticism of the passive role of Parliament in the conduct of the war. Bevan speaking in Committee declared,

"I hope that there will emerge in this House a far greater spirit of independence than has been shown in the last 12 to 18 months. It would be disastrous if the House of Commons did not gain in vitality as the war went on .... It is becoming, not less, but increasingly difficult for independently-minded Members to state their point of view, and to exert influence upon the Executive." (28)

Following the Second Reading a Select Committee was set up to inquire into "Offices or Places of Profit Under the Crown." (29) Its Report in October 1941 came to the conclusion that "in the main the law and practice as to disqualification by reason of office under the Crown is on the right lines," and that all that was necessary were changes in the law to remove anomalies and bring it up to date. (30) To effect this the Select Committee recommended,

"that steps should be taken to draft and introduce in the House of Commons as soon as practicable a comprehensive Bill setting forth the law on this subject on the lines of the existing law and practice, with such of the alterations or new provisions .... in this Report as the House of Commons may approve...." (31)

The Select Committee took the view that with specific exceptions (totalling a maximum of 80 in all and 60 for the Commons) all holders of office under the Crown should be disqualified from membership of the Commons. The existing

27. Ibid., cc. 687. Cf. H.C. Deb. 365, cc. 1075/9 where he argued for greater involvement of Members in the running of the War.
28. H.C. Deb. 369, cc. 812
29. Report from the Select Committee on Offices or Places of Profit Under the Crown. H.C. 120, October, 1941. (Parliamentary Papers III, 487, 1940/1). The Party claimed part credit for the setting up of the Committee. See L.P.A.C.R. 1941, p.68.
30. H.C. 120, p. XIV., para. 21.
31. Ibid., pp.XIV/XV, para. 22.

proportion between Ministers and parliamentary secretaries laid down in the Ministers of the Crown Act 1937 should be maintained and there was no need for an increase in the overall Membership of the Commons.(32) The need to continue the House of Commons (Temporary Provision) Act 1941 for a further limited period because of war-time necessity was accepted but it was recommended that the existing emergency legislation be terminated as soon as practicable, if possible before the cessation of hostilities. They accepted that the existing situation was both abnormal and temporary but stressed the general belief that,

"the limitation of the number of Ministers qualified to sit in the House of Commons is regarded by Your Committee as of great importance; they also regard it as a matter which should be specially watched and insisted upon by the House because of the natural tendency to increase the number of government departments and of Ministers."(33)

They also thought that the open-ended nature of the Ministers of the Crown (Emergency Appointments) Act should be amended to restrict its duration to a more specific date.(34) Underlying the Report were three broad principles; that the holding of certain non-ministerial offices was incompatible with Membership of the House of Commons; that there was a need to limit the control or influence of the Executive over the House which the existence of an undue proportion of office-holders in the Commons tended to produce, and that the essential conditions of a certain number of Ministers being Members of the House for the purpose of ensuring control of the Executive by Parliament should be maintained.(35)

The importance of this Committee is that it acted as a Committee of the Legislature declaring its views on the constitutional relationship between the Executive and the Legislature. There is no evidence from the proceedings of

32. Ibid., p.XVI/XVIII, para.25.

33. Ibid., p.XXXIX, para.82.

34. Ibid., p.XI, para.83.

35. Ibid., p.XIII/XIV, para.19.



the Committee that anyone thought the hierarchal or constitutional relationship between Parliament and the Executive should be fundamentally changed. There was no attempt by the Labour Members of the Committee to argue a constructive or radical Labour Party alternative. Both the Report and its proceedings indicated an assumed acceptance of existing constitutional developments as the reference point from which to start and as a consequence the presentation of such outmoded and, in realistic political terms, irrelevant eighteen century principles of representative government were not even questioned. The Labour Party was essentially a constitutional party refusing to recognise the conflict between firm, effective government and a critical legislature. For the Labour Party as a whole the traditional role of the Executive as the "King's Government" and the House of Commons as the "Grand Inquest of the Nation" were sacrosanct. In Opposition they defended and extolled the role of Parliament as, for example, in 1937 in the debate on Ministers of the Crown Act, while in office Parliament became an inconvenient restraint on their power, especially if it was as active as the Select Committee on National Expenditure.(36)

Yet there were a variety of means by which the House could be used by the Executive. On questions such as this one it was always possible to assess the strength of opinion in the House by allowing a debate, which, following the expressed view of the Select Committee, they did.(37) The debate, which took place on 5 February 1942, was on a motion recommending the Select Committee's Report "to the consideration of His Majesty's Government".(38) Pethick-Lawrence made the point that the Select Committee was in effect asked to work within an

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36. See Note 4.

37. H.C.120, p.XL iii para.89.

38. H.C.Deb. 377, cc.1290 et.seq. See Note 5.

existing, essentially conservative, constitutional structure composed of myths and conventions and that it proceeded on the principle that these would continue to exist. The Report, in his view, was

"in accordance with the general conservative tendencies of this country, that it does no harm, that it preserves the framework of our Constitution and.....does not prevent those changes which the efflux of time and the economic, industrial and political life of the country .....demand."(39)

Aneurin Bevan praised the Report as "one of the best reports that I have ever seen coming from a Select Committee" and addressed himself mainly to the possible confusion over the actual ending of the emergency situation and its possible application in future situations.(40) Recognising the necessity of revamping the roles of Government and Parliament he declared,

"It is always necessary not only that the Government should be powerful, but that the critics should be powerful if representative government is to continue in wholesome fashion."(41)

Thus whilst Bevan accepted the existing constitution as being the most effective means of governing, he envisaged a positive critical role for Parliament. Years later he expressed the same view in In Place of Fear. "Parliamentary democracy,"

he wrote,

"is essentially government by discussion. But if discussion is not quickly followed by resolute and decisive action then the vitality of democracy declines.....Parliament does not keep the ring, Parliament is one of the contestants in the ring.

It is not above the battle. It is a weapon, and the most formidable weapon of all, in the struggle."(42)

39. Ibid., cc.1307.

40. Ibid., cc.1312/18.

41. Ibid., cc.1318.

42. A. Bevan, In Place of Fear (London: MacGibbon & Kee, 2nd Edition, 1961), p.49.

Bevan, of course, took the view that the constitutional and political sovereignty ultimately lay with Parliament, therefore, its role must not be restricted because it did work and could work to bring about Socialism by using its power through the role of the organised Party of the working class. To the Parliamentarian in a democratic system Parliament was supreme. By 1942, therefore, even on the Left of the Party the neo-Marxism of the Socialist League and Harold Laski had taken their place in the museum of discarded ideas. For the Government, Arthur Greenwood announced that Part I of the Report (that dealing with permanent peace-time legislation was under consideration) and that certain recommendations made by the Select Committee in Part II would be introduced in a forthcoming Bill, an attitude which James Maxton recognised as amounting to a refusal to legislate.<sup>(43)</sup> The Ministers of the Crown and House of Commons Disqualification Bill <sup>(44)</sup> incorporating two recommendations of the Select Committee was passed through its Second Reading and subsequent stages in a matter of hours on 18 February 1942. It was renewed annually for the next two years before being allowed to lapse.<sup>(45)</sup> Its enactment did not completely abolish anomalies as the Arthur Jenkins Indemnity Act showed.<sup>(46)</sup> The Select Committee had looked at, but decided against discussion upon the practice of the Re-election of Ministers.<sup>(47)</sup> This practice had been repealed first in part in 1919 and then completely in 1926. The fact that no opposition was forthcoming from the Labour Party in 1941 is a further illustration of two

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43. H.C. Deb. 377, cc. 1323/5. Greenwood. cc. 1334. Maxton. Churchill had told his Cabinet colleagues "that he saw no reason why a Select Committee of the House should not be set up to make recommendations in regard to the position... after the war." CAB 65/13. 20(41)7. 24 February 1941. Italics Mine. Legislation was not forthcoming until 1957.
44. Enacted as 5 + 6. Geo. 6. Ch. 11. Minister of the Crown and House of Commons Disqualification Act, 1942.
45. See Note 6.
46. Enacted as 5 + 6. Geo. 6. Ch. 1. Jimmy Maxton used the Second Reading as an opportunity to enter a mild protest over the triviality of the case. H.C. Deb. 376, cc. 1408/12.
47. H.C. 120, p. XVII/XIX, para. 27.

themes underlying the Labour Party's conservative attitude to constitutional change. When the post-1918 Coalition Government decided to abolish the procedure, whereby certain office-holders had to re-apply under the Succession of the Crown Act, to the electorate, it was opposed by the Labour Party, which was at that time attempting both to preserve the integrity of the Parliamentary system and establish itself as the alternative government. Their opposition to the Re-election of Ministers Act was, therefore, based on short-term considerations. They rightly took the view that the Government was seeking to avoid rejection of its candidates for office by an electorate stamped into the "Coupon Election" of the previous year. The Party's opposition was, therefore, directed against the political nature of the Bill, especially its timing rather than the constitutional issue involved. At a time of widespread industrial unrest, they argued that the reduction of any contact between the legislature and the electorate was detrimental to Parliamentary government. In particular the Party objected to its retroactive clauses which obviated the need for the re-election of four individual Ministers involved. Thus the Party was concerned to gain political advantages from opposition to politically-motivated changes in the constitutional structure. It offered no alternative theory of the constitution to that already in existence other than to support the continuance of a system descended from a totally different undemocratic political system which had originally been intended to sustain the political power of a privileged group. It may, of course, be argued that the duty of an Opposition is to oppose and, indeed, in its Annual Report to Conference the parliamentary party claimed that its opposition was designed to secure modification and claimed credit for obtaining an amendment "providing that only those who are promoted to office in the first part of a new Parliament shall be exempted from a by-election."<sup>(48)</sup> David Butler, who perhaps

48. L.P.A.C.R. 1919, p.58.

underestimates the importance of political background to the introduction of the Bill, quite rightly notes the irony of the fact that the Labour Party in 1924 was the main beneficiary of the 1919 Act.(49) In 1926 political motives accounted to a large extent for Labour's opposition to the Bill. As in 1918 the 1924 Election had produced an unrepresentative Parliament. Thus, although Clement Attlee militantly argued that the Labour Party was absolutely opposed to the Bill on the principle and that "no opportunity should be lost of allowing people to say what they think of the Government of the day" his comment that "it is not a time when we should take away any opportunity of the electorate saying what they think of the Government as the electors of North Hammersmith did the other day"

indicated the political motives involved.(50) By 1940 there was no political reason to restore the practice.

The control of Statutory Instruments by Parliament was one aspect of the Executive/Legislature relationship which caused the Labour Party little difficulty. The reason for this was that the Party had constantly taken the attitude that the increasing complexity of modern industrial society made delegated legislation an inevitable development. The use of Orders-in-Council by the National Government, 'though railed against at first by intellectuals like Laski, was welcomed by J.R. Clynes as a means of effecting Socialism.(51) Laski and Cripps soon accepted this notion even extending it to make the use of such Orders by a Labour Government challengeable only in Parliament not in the courts, as was the case previously.(52) This was, in fact, the situation created under war-time

49. Butler, op.cit. p.62. See Note 7.

50. H.C.Deb. 196, cc.1871/2.

51. See Footnote 196 p.354. Ch.6. above.

52. Cripps, Can Socialism Come? p.54.

Report of the Committee on Ministers' Powers, (1929) Cm. 4060, para. 10, and Laski, 'A Member of the Executive Committee', ibid. para. 10.

H.C.Deb. 196, cc. 1871/2, 27 December 1937.

H.C.Deb. 196, cc. 1871/2, 27 December 1937. H.C.Deb. 196, cc. 1871/2, 27 December 1937. H.C.Deb. 196, cc. 1871/2, 27 December 1937.

legislation. (53) In the intra-party debates in the Labour Party in the 'thirties the Party had confirmed the inevitability of delegated legislation and in its policy statement on the "Problems of Parliamentary Government" incorporated the recommendations of the Donoughmore Committee concerning the setting up of a Parliamentary Committee to scrutinise Orders and Regulations falling properly within the terms of the relevant Acts of Parliament. (54) There was, however, no response from the Government and apart from brief discussion on a motion presented by George Strauss, little response from the Legislature either. (55)

Parliament willingly gave up its legislative initiative at the outset of the war and it was not until 1943 that "demands for more effective parliamentary control over the Executive became commonplace in the House of Commons and grievances were increasing." (56) These demands came not from the P.L.P. but from back-bench Conservatives. On three occasions in the first seven months of that year they advocated the setting up of a Select Committee to "vet" Orders and Regulations before they were laid on the Table of the House. (57) Apart from concessions on the simplification of Orders the Government refused to accede to the Conservative's demands. Herbert Morrison for the Government argued that Parliament had freely delegated the responsibility for regulations, subject to Parliamentary checks, to the Executive and the Executive could not be expected to share that responsibility with a Select Committee. Whilst he was prepared to agree that the views expressed by the Donoughmore Committee were applicable in time of peace they were not applicable in time of war. The strain of appearing before a Select Committee

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53. J. Eaves, Emergency Powers and the Parliamentary Watchdog: Parliament and the Executive in Great Britain 1939/51 (London: Hansard Society, 1957), pp. 39/43.
54. L.P.A.C.R. 1934, p.263. Cf. Report of the Committee on Ministers Powers, Cmd. 4060 op.cit., Harold Laski was a Member of the Donoughmore Committee.
55. H.C. Deb. 330, cc. 1239 et seq. 27 December 1937.
56. Eaves, op.cit., p.103.
57. 19 January 1943. H.C. Deb. 386, cc. 149/180: 26 May 1943. H.C. Deb. 389 cc. 1593/1694 and 15 July 1943 H.C. Deb. 391, cc. 425/536. See also Eaves, op.cit., pp. 105/6.

would be an intolerable burden on Ministers and officials, would impair efficiency and introduce delay. Whilst not unsympathetic to the alternative of a Committee with powers to examine Departments the Government had not been convinced that it would achieve anything. It was the duty of Members to be vigilant and of the House as a whole to exercise its functions of guardian of the Executive.(58) Labour speakers did not fully support the Government's resistance to change, they declared that change was necessary and urged the Government to assist the House in setting up effective machinery.(59) Not infrequently Labour Members berated the Conservatives for using the issue of Delegated Legislation in order to prevent a post-war Socialist Government from passing necessary post-war-legislation.(60) In particular Labour speakers rejected the specific scheme proposed by the Conservatives.(61) Ellis Smith summarised Labour's attitude when he said,

"The question whether great executive power is good or bad depends upon how the power is used and upon the type of Government"

although the debate revealed certain differences between P.L.P. Members on the desirability of a Select Committee.(62)

The Government's resistance, however, was apparently based on differences within the Government itself as much as traditional executive resentment against interference from the legislature.(63) By the time of the next full debate on 17 May 1944, on a motion calling for the establishment of a Select Committee,

58. H.C.Deb. 389, cc.1646/69 passim. "The real aim should not be to resist the principle of delegated legislation but rather.....to devise a Parliamentary check whereby the Government may be prevented from running away with the show." H.C.Deb.413, cc.1050.

59. See, for example, H.C.Deb. 389, cc.1622/9. Silverman: cc.1633/46 Ellis Smith.

60. Ibid., cc.1623/4. Silverman. See Note 8.

61. The Conservatives had proposed to set up a Parliamentary Committee to examine Questions before they were laid on the Table.

62. H.C.Deb. 389, cc. 1644. See Note 9.

63. See Note 10.



the Government was expected to be more co-operative.(64) All the old arguments were used by Labour speakers who, in speeches interlaced with accusations of political motives on the part of the Conservatives, took the view that if any Select Committee was to be set up it should have effective powers but should not be used as a reactionary piece of Parliamentary procedure to block necessary social reconstruction in the post-war period. In other words, delegation of legislative power to the Executive was good and the legislature should exercise a sustaining and clarifying role rather than one which involved a judicial or restrictive function.(65) Replying for the Government, Herbert Morrison, who had made a number of speeches since the last Debate on the subject in the House, envisaging an increase in delegated legislation in the post-war period, announced a change in the Government's attitude and proceeded to survey the general problems involved in setting up particular kinds of Committees with a view to ensuring that the House could fully express its wishes.(66) Claiming that the previous attitude of the Government had been based upon "the nature and quantity of Defence Regulations which were being turned out (at that time)" he said that the Government were "most anxious that delegated legislation shall be subject to effective Parliamentary checks and, wherever necessary, effective Parliamentary control."(67) He took the view that the Committee should have the power to send for officials and papers but not the Ministers concerned and declared that the Committee would be given the help of Counsel. The motion was withdrawn and a month later a Select Committee on Statutory Rules and Orders was set up.(68) By its terms of reference the

64. H.C.Deb. 400, cc.202 et.seq. See Note 11.

65. See John Wilmot, H.C.Deb. 400 cc.219/226 and Malwyn Hughes cc.276/80. See Note 12.

66. H.C.Deb. 400, cc.258/75 passim. See Note 13.

67. H.C.Deb. 400, cc.262. Italics mine.

68. See Note 14.



Committee was designed to sift through Orders to check for abuse of delegated powers not to concern itself with the merits of policy or legislation. This was important for it preserved the conventional division between Executive and legislature which had been challenged by the activities of the Select Committee on National Expenditure.

The Labour Government of 1945-51 reinforced the power of the Executive with the passage of a number of Acts designed to deal with the nation's continuing economic difficulties. At the same time, however, the powers of the Select Committee were extended to enable it to report an instrument on the grounds of delay in laying it before Parliament.(69) Arguments on the Labour side tended to be repetitions of those given during the war although the accession to power of a Labour Government reminded Labour backbenchers of their legislative role. The Reports of the scrutinising Committee were instrumental in securing uniformity in the delegated legislation itself, mainly for the benefit of efficiency in the House.(70) Individual Labour Members of the scrutinising Committee used the opportunity to re-emphasise the need for Parliamentary control of the Executive.(71) For some Members of the Labour Party, however, the continuance of Emergency powers meant the effective negation of Parliamentary democracy and they left the Party altogether.(72) For most Labour backbenchers however, the additional powers obtained were symbolic of the determination of the Government to defend its power against alternative extra-Parliamentary influences. As Richard Crossman said in the debate on the Supplies and Services (Transitional Powers) Bill,

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69. The Select Committee has been known as the Select Committee on Statutory Instruments since 1946. For details of the powers taken or extended by the Labour Government, see Eaves, *Op.cit.*, Ch.6.

70. See Note 15.

71. See, for example, Raymond Fletcher, *H.C.Deb.* 414. cc.147.

72. Raymond Blackburn and Ivor Thomas, for example. See Blackburn's speech on the Supplies and Services (Transitional Powers) Bill. *H.C.Deb.* 441, cc.1867/70 8 August 1947. Cf. *The Erosion of Freedom* (London: Times Press, 1964). Blackburn, of course, had other more personal problems. See *I am an Alcoholic* (London: Allen Wingate, 1959). For Thomas see *H.C.Deb.* 457, cc.108/119 (a speech followed by severe boozing).

"This Bill is a symbol of one fact - this is not going to be another 1931."(73)

Thus in the maintenance of Parliamentary democracy the Labour Party adopted a variety of stances often tactically dictated by the roles of individual Members in the political structure but fundamentally motivated by the desire to use the instruments of power to achieve social change. In practice this involved the implementation of trends already in existence and at first resisted by older generations of Labour leaders and thinkers. The use of emergency powers justified their continuation and made the use of delegated legislation respectable as a normality by 1951, notwithstanding Conservative opposition. The Working of the Select Committee on Statutory Instruments merely reinforced these trends by introducing a bi-partisan examination of delegated legislation. On the general question of such legislation the Labour Party can be said to have acted differently from any other political party. The length of time involved in securing changes in the control of delegated legislation by Parliament, however, broadly agreed by an impartial Commission such as the Committee on Ministers' Powers, was not excessive in terms of change in the constitutional arrangements in Britain. Indeed, had it not been for the war the setting up of effective Parliamentary machinery might well have been postponed for considerable time. The Labour Party's role was one of constructive suggestion, motivated very largely by their general desire to implement social and economic changes, and it was the Party's conscious, unswerving and empirical application of the principles of change by the Attlee administration that removed relatively minor issues from long-term contention by riding out short-term criticism, much of which was based on opposition for its own sake.

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73. H.C. Deb. 441, cc. 1819. 8 August 1947. (1947) 17.507.

The same broad conclusion is true of the third issue which was raised in an acute form during the Second World War, that of Parliamentary representation. The suspension of electoral activity at the major Party level nationally and the complete abandonment of local elections, coupled with the "freezing" of the existing electoral register in October 1939 served as the reference point for those groups demanding electoral reform.(74) The Labour Party was not particularly active in articulating these demands most of which apparently came from the Liberals, although the P.L.P. supported such efforts in the House as the malfunctioning of war-time elections - to the detriment of the progressive cause - became clearer. However, as is so often the case in British politics, especially when change is required, the role of individual Ministers was vital in ensuring that changes would be made. As early as 1940 Herbert Morrison was promising that once the primary aim of winning the war was in hand, attention would be paid to the question of electoral reform.(75) In 1942 Morrison set up a departmental Committee to consider whether improved electoral machinery and methods of registration could be devised, especially in the immediate post-war period, and to examine the technical problems involved in the redistribution of seats. Its Report,(76) as David Butler says, "served as a basis for the interim arrangements on registration and the permanent solution of the redistribution problem."(77)

The Report argued that the pre-war system of registration was inadequate to cope with the mobility of population produced by war-time and likely post-war

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74. See Butler, *op.cit.*, p.87. Subsequent by-elections therefore were held on the 1939 Register.
75. *H.C.Deb.* 365, cc.1059/1061 23 October 1940.
76. Report of the Committee on Electoral Machinery, Cmd.6408 (1942/3) iv.297. See Note 16.
77. Butler, *op.cit.*, p.88. but not without complaints that the Government was dragging its feet. New Statesman, 20 March 1943.

situations and recommended a system of continuous registration based upon the National Registration Machinery. The idea of basing the electoral register on the lists obtained by the local Food Officers which this entailed had long been advocated by Left-Wing journals.(78) On the question of redistribution the Committee apparently followed the broad precedent of the 1917 Speakers' Conference for its definition of issues. It forcibly pointed out that since the reports of the Boundary Commission issued at that time the question of redistribution had been no-one's business and recommended that there should be a permanent Commission with the Speaker as ex-officio Chairman to deal with the question of a non-party basis. The Committee advocated separate Commissions for England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland and recommended that these proposals be effected by Orders in Council after approval by Parliament. The Report surveyed, but made no positive recommendations about, the merits of partial or complete redistributions, although in a reservation the Labour Members of the Committee, made it clear that they considered a partial distribution to be undesirable and likely to cause controversy while a full redistribution was not practicable until a complete resettlement of the population had taken place.(79) As we shall see, with little modification this attitude was consistently advocated by the Labour Party in the ensuing debates on the question.

The immediate product of the Committee's recommendations was the Parliament (Elections and Meetings) Bill, which dealt with the question of registration. Moving the Second Reading of the Bill on 26 October 1943, Herbert Morrison declared its purpose to be,

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78. See for example, Tribune, 2 April 1943.

79. W.G. Hall (M.P. for Colve Valley) Garro -Jones (M.P. for Aberdeen) and G.R. Shepherd (National Agent) Cmd. 6408, p.32. The Agent had, in fact, asked the N.E.C. for guidance on the question and the N.E.C. had come out against a redistribution of seats in war-time. N.E.C. Minutes 85, E.C.18, 1941/2, M.290, 25 March 1942.

"to provide an efficient and effective system of registration of electors, despite the difficulties .....brought about by war-time conditions...(and) to modernise the law as to the direction and conveyance of Parliamentary Writs."(80)

Basing the new scheme upon the National Registration system the Act provided for three parts to the new register upon which any election held during the emergency would be fought. There was a civilian register, based on a two months' residence qualification; a business voters' register on the same basis and a Service register, although a business voter had also to be an occupier of premises to qualify.(81) A variety of means were provided for proxy, absent and other kinds of voters. In view of the fact that the minimum time required for the publication of the register would be thirty-six days after the initiation of the election the Government proposed to postpone the dissolution of Parliament until thirty-six days after the Royal Proclamation had been issued.(82) Hence it was expected that polling day itself would not take place until about seven-and-a-half weeks after the issue of the writ while the period the country would be without a Parliament would be approximately three weeks.

There was little opposition at the Second Reading, although Charles Ammon, who was elevated to the Lords the following year and served on the Speakers' Conference as a Labour peer, regretted that there was no assimilation of the local government and Parliamentary franchises upon which the Committee had looked with favour.(83) Protests against the Bill came mainly from Conservative and Commonwealth members, although Evelyn Walkden wanted assurances that voting

80. H.C. Deb. 393, cc.58. The Bill was enacted as 6 + 7 Geo. 6.Ch.48. Plans to introduce a Bill on redistribution were postponed after the Government had decided to call a Speakers' Conference to inquire into electoral matters. See Butler, op.cit., p.89.

81. The Act placed the obligation to register on the voters themselves. See CAB 65/50. 47(45)2.

82. H.C. Deb. 393, cc.66/7.

83. Ibid., cc.70. Cmd.6408 p.8. para.27.

facilities would be sufficiently extended to servicemen.(84) At the Committee Stage (85) there were a number of Conservative amendments, but only one, that concerning the business premises franchise, which was pushed to a division, causing the Labour Party to participate from a Party point of view. Once again it reiterated its consistent philosophical position which John Wilmot summarised when he said in response to a Conservative interruption,

"The only tenable principle of voting is that each citizen in respect of his citizenship shall be entitled to one vote in the place where he lives."(86)

In the absence of Herbert Morrison, Attlee and Thomas Johnston led the Labour forces into the lobby to make sure the amendment was defeated. Included in their ranks were a number of Members who were later to represent the Labour Party on the Speakers' Conference.(87)

A quarrel arose over an amendment which provided for the continuation of plural voting by virtue of a person being the spouse of a registered person, who could apply on their behalf. The P.L.P. made attacks on the principle of plural voting in which, according to Glenvil Hall, a Member of the Committee, it had acquiesced but refused to see extended.(88) The amendment itself was negatived but a similar one was drawn-up by the Government, and passed through the House. The protest continued on every occasion plural voting was mentioned during the Committee Stage, despite the Chair's attempts to remind Members that the issue was one for the proposed Speakers' Conference and not for the Committee.(89) Apart from this and the question of postal voting facilities for servicemen, the P.L.P.

84. H.C.Deb. 393, cc.98/9. Walkden was Labour M.P. for Doncaster.
85. Ibid., cc.685, et.seq. 3 November 1943.
86. Ibid., cc.728.
87. Foster, Ammon, Green and Parker.
88. H.C.Deb. 393, cc.743.
89. See, for example, Charles Ammon's protests. Ibid., cc.1022/4.

took little interest in the Bill which petered out in a series of Conservative amendments and Labour demands to get on with the Bill. (90) The Act proved to be more complicated in its application than was at first envisaged owing to the shortage of competent staff and an Amending Act was passed abolishing the qualifying period. (91).

The motion welcoming the Government's proposal to set up a Conference on Electoral Reform and Redistribution was discussed in the Commons on 1 and 2 February 1944. (92) As David Butler points out the debate was "notable for harmony rather than enlightenment." (93) In his introduction of the subject Herbert Morrison recalled the history of electoral reform in general and of redistribution in particular. He expressed the hope that the Speakers' Conference would agree on "the principle of redistribution and the direction to the boundary commissioners," for although the Government approved of the views of the Departmental Committee on the question it was far better to obtain all-party agreement upon it. The Home Secretary also raised some of the questions he considered the Conference would have to discuss and said that the Government hoped for early consideration of redistribution, methods of elections and the merging of the Parliamentary and local government franchises. (94)

The question of proportional representation was, in fact, "the main issue on which the debate showed any great difference of opinion," (95) with the Liberals in its favour and the Labour Party attacking it. Arthur Woodburn, who later sat

90. Reference in the Annual Report was brief. (L.P.A.C.R. 1944, p.58).
91. Parliamentary Elections (War-Time Registration) Act, 7 + 8 Geo.6. Ch.24. In addition to removal of the two months residential period and putting back the qualifying date by one month. The proposal was opposed by the Conservatives. See CAB 66/49, 44(214) "Registration of Parliamentary Elections" 20 April 1944 and CAB 66/42, 56(44)4, 24 April 1944.
92. H.C. Deb. 396, cc. 1154. et seq. 1288 et seq.
93. Butler, op.cit., p.91. Shared to some degree by the Press. Economist, 5 February 1944 (168/9).
94. H.C. Deb. 396, cc. 1154/68.
95. Butler, loc.cit.



in the Conference, came out forcibly against P.R. He argued the classic liberal theory that democracy involved the operation of democratic machinery by democratic people and that the majority must take account of minority opinions. He believed that every Member under the existing system dutifully gave expression to minority points of view when necessary. The real, although not the only, purpose of elections was to choose a Government.(96) Woodburn also attacked plural voting (although he excepted the City of London) criticised the buying of seats, reiterated the P.L.P. views, expressed on the Departmental Committee, regarding the postponement of redistribution until after the war. In passing he made the interesting observation,

"that the House of Commons does not proceed according to the views of the electorate as expressed at the last general election....no institution (is as) sensitive to public opinion as the House of Commons."(97)

Most of what Woodburn said was endorsed by Conservative Members. The question of candidates' personal expenses received particular attention and although the Speaker ruled that the question might be out of order the tone of the debate caused the question of candidates' and Members' expenses to be "added to the draft terms of reference."(98)

Glenvil Hall, who also became a Member of the Conference, echoed Woodburn's sentiments on P.R., redistribution and called for the abolition of double-membered constituencies and the abolition of the use of cars at elections.(99) Thomas Johnston remarked that in Scotland they had had P.R.,

96. H.C. Deb. 396, cc.1188/1203.

97. Ibid., cc.1202.

98. Cf. the draft terms H.C. Deb., 396 cc.1163 and the final terms in Letter from Mr. Speaker to the Prime Minister, Conference on Electoral Reform and the Redistribution of Seats. Cmd. 6534 p.2.

99. H.C. Deb. 396, cc.1228. Most of the Labour M.P.'s who served on the Speaker's Conference participated in the Second Reading debate.



"for educational authorities between 1919 and 1929 and our experience was such that there was no body of opinion at the reorganisation in 1929 which advocated its continuance."(100)

Throughout the debate it was made clear by Government Speakers that the matter was one for Parliament not the Government to decide. Other Labour Members emphasised the same objections to plural voting and the need to restrict the influence of outside organisations during elections.(101) The important point about the objections raised by the P.L.P. concerning the questions to be placed before the Conference is that they were in essence those objections which had been advocated by Labour Members before the Ullswater Committee in 1930. There had, in fact, been no retreat on any of the major questions involved. As a whole the Labour remained opposed to P.R., plural voting, the use of vehicles at elections and the influence of money in the political system. Their views of Parliament remained basically that of democracy-v-dictatorship. As Greenwood said, "Hitler's challenge was a challenge to our Parliamentary institutions." Those institutions had not been as effective in the past as they might have been but they were "the symbol of an order of democracy....."(102) Fearful of the return of an unrepresentative Parliament a significant number of them felt that redistribution should be postponed until after the post-war resettlement.(103) There were, of course, exceptions like Sir Robert Young, a life-long supporter of P.R., who spoke in its favour.(104) S.O. Davies questioned Government's sincerity and said he would vote against the motion if possible, if necessary.

100. Ibid., cc.1234.

101. See, for example, Greenwood, Ibid., cc.1288/92.

102. Ibid., 1288, Cf. Milner in October 1940. H.C.Deb. 365, cc.1075.

103. See, for example, Woodburn (cc.1197) Hall (cc.1230) Guy (cc.1305/7) Cf. Parker who argued for immediate general redistribution (cc.1351).

104. Ibid., cc.1312/20.

while John Parker doubted if the University seats would be abolished in the present Parliament, and, therefore, advocated the abolition of the registration fees and the elimination of certain malpractices at University elections. (105) The last contribution was an important one in that it epitomised the Labour Party's attitude of compromise in the political situation of 1944. Parker's reference to the "present" Parliamentary Session is also significant in the light of later claims that there was a "bargain" between the Parties on certain questions before the Speaker's Conference, although Parker's contribution was a personal rather than a Party one.

The Conference's terms of reference were set out in the Prime Minister's letter to the Speaker. They were,

"To examine, and if possible, submit agreed resolutions, on the following matters:-

- (a) Redistribution of Seats;
- (b) Reform of franchise (both Parliamentary and local government);
- (c) Conduct and costs of Parliamentary elections, and expenses falling upon candidates and Members of Parliament;
- (d) Methods of election." (106)

The Prime Minister reminded the Speaker that the Home Secretary had hoped the Conference would submit early reports on redistribution and the question of assimilating the Parliamentary and local government franchises. He also expressed the Government's wish that the Conference should consider these views on the question of redistribution and the recommendations made by the Departmental Committee on Electoral Machinery and the required machinery involved. (107)

105. Ibid., cc. 1339/42 (Davies) 1356/7 (Parker).

106. See Note 17.

107. Cmd. 6534., Loc. cit.

The Conference, however, felt that it could not report on the question of the redistribution of seats and the assimilation of the local government and Parliamentary franchises until it had settled the question of the methods of election, in particular whether or not to adopt any measure of Proportional Representation, but also because redistribution was likely to be affected by their decisions on the business premises qualification and on University representation. After five meetings discussing the question of Proportional Representation resolutions in favour of some form of P.R. were defeated 25:4 and 24:5. (108)

The Labour Party Members appear to have voted unanimously against the change. A further resolution advocating the alternative vote was also heavily defeated by 20 votes to 5, although two Labour Members abstained from voting on the issue. (109)

As for the franchise the Conference recommended the assimilation of the Parliamentary and local government franchises, the retention of the business premises qualification for occupiers of businesses, but not their spouses, and the retention of University representation and methods of election, provided all graduates were automatically registered and that no fees were charged for registration expenses. It also recommended by a majority of 21:8 that persons be restricted to one residential and one business qualification only. A resolution to abolish plural voting was defeated by 25 to 6 and one recommending the extension of the franchise to eighteen-year-olds was defeated by 16 to 3.

The rest of the Report dealt with the question of redistribution which the Conference favoured "as soon as practicable" and it provided temporary rules whereby "abnormally large" constituencies, i.e. those which by 1939 had grown

108. Ibid., p.8.

109. Loc.cit. See Note 18.

to more than 190% of the average size, were to be subdivided, up to a total of twenty five new seats. After this subdivision the Boundary Commission should prepare a full redistribution scheme. The number of seats should, the Conference recommended, remain substantially unchanged and in particular there should be no reduction of the number of Members returned for Scotland, Wales or Northern Ireland. The quota for each seat should be ascertained by dividing the total electorate by the number of seats (other than University seats), with a tolerance of 25% for existing boundaries. Double-Member constituencies should be divided. Parliamentary boundaries should, where convenient, coincide with local government boundaries. On the only contested proposal it was decided by 15 to 13 (with all the Labour Members among the minority) that the City of London should continue to return two Members. The Conference also proposed that there should be separate Boundary Commissioners for England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, with the Speaker as ex-officio Chairman of each. The periodic review of the Boundaries should be made at intervals of not less than three or more than seven years, with the right to submit special reports at any time. Their reports should be laid before Parliament and the changes made by Order in Council open to modification and subject to affirmative resolutions. The first comprehensive scheme of redistribution should, however, be effected by an Act of Parliament not by Order in Council. The redistribution proposals followed were clearly those recommended by the Departmental Committee.

A second letter from the Speaker to the Prime Minister was published in July 1944. This dealt with the question of "the conduct and costs of Parliamentary elections and expenses falling on candidates and Members of Parliament," which had been added to the original Government terms of reference

owing to the views expressed in the Debate of 1 and 2 February 1944.(110)

The Conference put forward a number of recommendations which can be divided into two broad camps. Those dealing with election and candidates' expenses and those dealing with wider electoral questions.

On the one hand it proposed to reduce the candidates' expenses to £450 plus 1d. per elector in the boroughs and 1½d. per elector in the counties; to include agent's fees in the maximum election expenses and allow the payment of speakers' expenses although these had to be included in the expenses. The Conference also proposed to amend Section 34 of the Representation of the People Act to include expenditure incurred by political and other organisations, or individuals, for the purpose of promoting or procuring the election of a candidate or candidates. This would not, as David Butler seemed to think, have made such expenditure illegal, as much as have brought it all under the control of the Election Agent.(111) Other recommendations concerned with expenses included the provision at a minimal cost of state-supported schools for election meetings, a slight modification in the conditions surrounding the payment and forfeiture of deposits and provision to be made for easier relief from venial errors made in returns of election expenses. The Conference, moreover, placed on record its depreciation of the payment by candidates to charities and other organisations which specifically benefitted the constituencies, as well as expressing its strong disapproval of contributions made to party organisations designed to influence the choice of candidates.

Among its wider recommendations were that poll-cards should be issued by the returning officer only. that there should be greater provision of polling

110. Conference on Electoral Reform and the Redistribution of Seats. Letter dated 20 July 1944 from Mr. Speaker to the Prime Minister. Cmd.6543.

111. Butler, op.cit., p.94.

facilities, especially in rural areas; that local variations in the hours of polling should be abandoned in favour of a 7 a.m. to 9 p.m. national standard; the broadening of the Absent Voters' lists to include invalids; the outlawing of broadcasting by British subjects from outside the United Kingdom in order to influence an election, while finally the Conference asked the Government to keep the whole question of Service Voters under review and recommended that the existing method of registration should be improved by the introduction of automatic registration.

All told the Conference's recommendations were a victory for the consistency of the Labour Party for clearly, as David Butler shows, it was the Conservatives who had dropped their objections to the restriction of election expenses, primarily for party political purposes. (112) Most of the recommendations, however, were the embodiment of earlier Labour policies. (113) Yet, as became clear later, the Conference was an exercise in compromise and compromise was not always easy to achieve even in a war-time situation. Resolutions recommending the abolition of the deposits and to reduce its conditions to one-tenth of the poll were defeated without division, while another designed to reduce it to £100 was defeated 18 votes to 4. Moreover, the Conference considered this "the regulation of broadcasting within the United Kingdom for election purposes" was beyond their terms of reference. The clearest division in the ranks of the Conference came on a resolution recommending "that some additional limitation and regulation be imposed on the number of conveyances plying with voters to the polling booths." It was defeated by 15 votes to 14. The

112. Ibid., p.95. The purpose of the first part of the report was to provide a basis for a long, slow, gradual change in the distribution of the
113. Butler's assertion (p.96) that "the Labour Party, feeling more affluent than formerly, and conscious of the need for campaign publicity in order to counter a predominantly Conservative press, were perhaps not so eager for a change as they had been," is pure speculation the basis of which is destroyed by his own footnote. In addition Tribune did report "a great deal of dissatisfaction expressed by Labour Members with the Report." Tribune, 9 June 1944.

decisions of the Speaker's Conference were to become controversial but in 1944 the main results of the Conference were two Bills incorporating a large part of its recommendations. The Redistribution Bill was given a Second Reading on 10 October 1944.(114) It was based on the unanimous recommendations of the Committee on Electory Machinery, and followed closely the detailed recommendations of the Speaker's Conference. The Bill provided for the appointment of permanent Boundaries Commissioners, periodical reports and the immediate division of constituencies with more than 100,000 electors. By subdividing the 20 largest constituencies the Bill created the maximum number of new seats (25) recommended by the Conference. The Government, whose case was presented by Herbert Morrison, also took the opportunity to announce its support for the Conference's decision, however close, (115) to preserve the City of London as a separate constituency, although its right to return two Members would be open to debate at the time Parliament debated the first general scheme of redistribution. Although given a free hand in coming to their recommendation, which could be rejected or amended by Ministers if necessary, the supremacy in all these matters lay with Parliament which besides settling the basic principles must deal with the Commission's recommendations itself.

In his speech on the Bill, Arthur Woodburn dealt with the question of compromise. He recalled the abortive nature of the last Speakers' Conference (by which he meant the Ullswater Committee) which had failed because of the selfishness of the various parties - an attitude alien to the tolerance basic

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114. H.C. Deb. 403, cc.1610. et. seq. At the time the Government was considering Vivian Committee's report they decided to introduce separate Bills for registration and representation. It was not expected that a "redistribution carried out for the purposes of the first post-war General Election would remain valid for long, since substantial changes in the distribution of the population are to be expected during the post-war years." CAB 66/38, W.P. 274. 25 June 1943. See Also CAB 65/34. 89(43)6. 28 June 1943.
115. The Conference had decided in favour of two-member City representation but Morrison warned the Cabinet to expect opposition from the Labour Party on the issue. CAB 66/52. W.P.(44) 391.



to the Parliamentary system. He was proud of the Conference's achievements and looked forward to the full implementation of its recommendations in later Bills. As for the City of London and the University seats he looked forward to these returning Labour Members in the future but he did not regard this an important issue.(116) Frank Bowles raised doubts as to the wisdom of too frequent reviews.(117)

The Liberals, however, moved a motion rejecting the Bill on the grounds that it gave "no assurance of securing fair representation in this House of the electorate in proportion to the votes cast."(118) Among their supporters were Sir Robert Young and one other Labour M.P., J.R. Leslie who joined those in favour of the motion which was defeated by 202 votes to 18. Both these Members spoke in the Debate in favour of P.R. as a fairer means of representing the electorate, while Pethick-Lawrence spoke at length about the difficulties of P.R. (large constituencies, complete loss of touch between M.P. and electorate, the by-election problem etc.).(119) All three speakers frankly recognised that the Labour Party was against P.R. The Annual Report felt moved to record the Party's challenge to P.R.(120) The only other Labour Party contribution came from George Strauss who attacked the privileged position of the City of London.(121) J.R. Leslie also attacked the privileges of the City in his speech, as had Bowles earlier in the Debate, but the sum total hardly justified Butler's biased statement that "A few Labour speakers protested against the privileges of the City of London and against university representation."(122) The protests were

116. H.C. Deb. 403, cc. 1624/5.

117. Ibid., cc. 1638.

118. Ibid., cc. 1643.

119. Ibid., 1665/70 Young; 1673/4, Leslie; and 1677/83 Pethick-Lawrence. Mr. Leslie was a Member of the Executive Committee of the P.R. Society.

120. L.P.A.C.R. 1944, p. 78.

121. H.C. Deb. 403, cc. 1697/8.

122. Butler, op.cit., p. 97.



obviously deeply felt and widely held in the Labour Party.

When the Committee Stage was taken on 12 October further disputes arose over the City of London which was the subject of an amendment eliminating its privileged position. Morrison reiterated the Government's view and added that he,

"personally, as a Londoner and as a Member of Parliament, but particularly as a Londoner, would feel regret if the political and Parliamentary identity of the ancient City of London was completely abolished."(123)

John Parker attacked the provision for two Members for the City and seemed to imply by his abstention that he felt bound by the decision of the Speaker's Conference, while Woodburn noted that "what this Parliament does cannot bind any future Parliament" and indicated that the question was in effect being deferred until the next Parliament.(124) Other Labour Members spoke against the continuation of the City except for W.H. Green, another Londoner, who defended its continued representation in the House. The amendment was defeated by 163 votes to 38 with the bulk of dissidents belonging to the Labour Party, including W. Foster, who apparently felt no obligation to abide by the decisions of the Speaker's Conference although a member. On a debate to reject the clause which excluded University constituencies from the Boundary Commissioners' consideration the dissidents numbered only 16, of whom 10 belonged to the Labour Party - all of whom had voted against the previous amendment. Notwithstanding favourable comments in favour of the continuation of University representation by Ivor Thomas and Pethick-Lawrence (both of whom were University voters) only three P.L.P. Members changed sides and voted against the amendment.

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123. H.C. Deb. 403 cc.1993. Morrison was in favour of the restriction of City representation to one Member, (CAB 66/52 W.P. (44)391,) but the Cabinet decided to leave the issue until the Boundary Commissioners had reported (CAB 65/43 94(44)2 20 July 1944) and later to the House of Commons CAB 65/43 111(44)5 28 August 1944 and CAB 66/54 W.P. 460.

124. H.C. Deb. 403, cc.2014.

The Representation of the People Bill was introduced on 13 December 1944 and given a Second Reading six days later.(125) It provided for the assimilation of the local government and Parliamentary franchises, modifications in the electoral machinery and the resumption of local elections which had been suspended throughout the war. Among its miscellaneous provisions was one setting the date for the Boundary Commissioners to begin their enquiries on 15 October 1946.(126) In the week prior to the debate Morrison had announced the Government's recognition of the unsatisfactory nature of the services' proxy vote and had set up a Conference under the Chancellor of the Exchequer (Sir John Anderson) to consider the practicability of extending postal votes to members of the services and war workers abroad.(127) In the debate Morrison added that the Government would do its utmost to table Amendments to the Bill on the point before the Committee Stage.

Morrison had characterised the Bill as "the culminating point in the series of electoral reforms which began with the great Reform Act of 1832 (in that) it extends the principle of universal adult suffrage....."(128) and used this as an excuse for the fact that some "miscellaneous recommendations" of the Speakers' Conference were not included in the Bill. John Parker, who had been a Member of the Conference expressed the personal view that the Speakers' proposals regarding the abolition of the qualifying fee and the automatic registration of all graduates should be adopted in the Bill. He also expressed

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125. H.C.Deb. 406, cc.1263 and cc.1646 et.seq.
126. Representation of the People Bill (Parliamentary Papers 1944/5,II, 105). See H.C.Deb. 406, cc.1653/6. Cf. Butler, op.cit., p.99. The date was later brought forward by 12 months.
127. H.C.Deb. 406, cc.1335/6 14 December 1944. The Daily Herald had already complained that little progress had been made toward ensuring that the Armed Forces were registered for proxy vote. Servicement had not been informed of their rights. 2 June 1944.
128. H.C.Deb. 406, cc.1646.

the general view of the Labour Party that the university seats as a form of double voting ought to be abolished. He also claimed that the Conference's suggestion that no person should be entitled to be registered for more than one business premises if such an arrangement was practicable, ought to have been included in the Bill, and wanted to know why the suggestion of the Conference on this point was not being carried out. As a final point Parker raised the question of making sure the registers were kept up to day so that a Parliament might be returned on a fresh register.(129) Other Labour Members attacked the retention of plural voting while certain of the arrangements about the registers came under fire from both Labour and Liberal Members. The question of P.R. which was originally raised by a Liberal Member provoked an argument between Pethick-Lawrence and Pritt over the Conference's deliberations.(130) Pethick-Lawrence stated that he was opposed to plural voting but that the Conference "came to an agreed compromise" on the issue.(131) Like Parker, he wondered what had happened to the proposals about the University franchise. Overall, however, the P.L.P. welcomed the Bill, wished that it had gone further and did not force any division.

At the Committee Stage on 17 January 1945 the Government moved the new clause it had referred to at the Second Reading enabling servicemen to claim both the business franchise and postal votes, the latter along the lines suggested by the Committee under Sir John Anderson which had reported earlier that month.(132) The Committee, which consisted of 37 Members in addition to

129. Ibid., 1670/3 passim.

130. Ibid., 1693.

131. Ibid., 1694.

132. Report of the Conference on Postal Voting for the Forces, Seamen and War Workers Abroad, Cmd.6581. (Parliamentary Papers, 1944/5, V, p.51.)

the Chancellor of the Exchequer, (133) had unanimously recommended the substitution of postal votes for proxy votes and had drawn up a scheme to effect the changeover. (134) These were included in the Bill with little discussion.

Considerable discussion, however, occurred on a new clause to abolish plural voting, moved by Lady Megan Lloyd George. Pethick-Lawrence reiterated that the retention of plural voting was a compromise, a modus vivendi between the views of the Labour Party and those of the Conservatives who had conceded the abolition of the spouses' qualification in respect of the business vote and of the registration for University graduates to vote. He felt bound by the compromise at that stage. (135) A number of Labour speakers supported the clause although Liberals were the most prominent participants in the debate with Independents, Communists and the I.L.P. all expressing opinions in favour of abolition of plural voting. Herbert Morrison stated his position quite clearly.

"It is no use my standing up and seeking to defend the principle of plural voting. I cannot do it because.....I do not believe in plural voting. I would abolish it today if I could and if I had a Parliamentary majority."

The retention of plural voting was, therefore, a compromise made by responsible parties, unlike the Liberals who were not in a position of responsibility, and those who agreed to the compromise must stand by it. "I quite agree," he went on, "that that does not bind the Members of the Labour Party, and they are free,

133. The Labour Members on it were, Arthur Woodburn, W. Glenville Hall, and George Shephard.

134. Cmd. 6581, op.cit., especially para.22. p.6. Cf. H.C.Deb. 407, cc.267/70.

135. H.C.Deb. 407, cc.295/8.

if they think it right, to vote against the compromise which their representatives on the Speaker's Conference accepted." (136) He wondered, however, whether they could have done better. Forty-one Labour Members evidently thought they could, and voted with the minority as the clause was defeated 123 votes to 57.

At the report stage the Liberals attempted to give local authorities the option of using the S.T.V. at local elections. Pethick-Lawrence once again spoke, this time against the clause while MacLean Watson spoke in favour of P.R. but refused to vote for the clause as it stood and abstained on the vote. Only two Labour Members were to be found in the minority as the clause was defeated by 208 votes to 17. Thus in these debates the majority of the P.L.P. stuck to the declared principles of equal voting which the Labour Party had consistently advocated since the First World War. This is not to say that the Labour representatives on the Speaker's Conference were not representative of the Party but it did indicate that they did not produce terms which were binding upon their colleagues. This had in fact obtained what they could in a difficult political situation. The Bill became law in February 1945. (137) The early announcement of the election date effectively postponed electoral questions, other than those concerned with the efficient collation of the register for some voters. The election itself, apart from Churchill's vain and foolish attempts to revive the spectre of the Socialist League in the guise of the 'Laski controversy', was, in fact, proof of the varieties and limitations of faith in democracy brought about by a war fought in its name. (138) The Labour Party anticipated their return to office from the by-election results which had continued into early 1945. (139) The realisation of their hopes, coupled with

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136. *Ibid.*, cc.309/12. *passim*.

137. As 8 + 9 Geo. 6. Ch.5.

138. See Note 19.

139. See Note 20.

the experience of strong government during the war, had successfully dispelled the identification of the Party with extremism and vindicated the Democratic Socialist view that the transition to political power was possible. On a number of occasions the Labour Party had stated its belief in the power and prestige of Parliamentary institutions, and even Churchill's attempt to raise the Laski bogey during the campaign of 1945 did not destroy that faith. The next five years was to prove the acid test of Socialist theories.(140)

Among the problems facing the new Labour administration was that of electoral reform, of which the war-time measures had been clear harbingers. Permanent problems of electoral reform obviously required permanent legislation but in the interim period a number of measures were introduced to deal with the problems arising from the war-time situation. The response of the Conservatives to these necessary measures helped to stir the needless controversy which surrounded the later debates on the Representation of the People Bill.

The Elections and Jurors Bill provided for the continuation of the existing register until the end of 1946 and the extension of postal voting facilities.(141) The issue of a supplementary register in February 1946 would help to keep the register up to date but it was the Government's intention to return as soon as possible to the traditional practice of register by canvass.(142) The Conservatives attacked the Bill on two points; the fact that it ignored many recommendations of the Speakers' Conference and its perpetuation of the war-time system of registration, which they claimed was inefficient, had only been intended as a temporary expedient. The Government and the P.L.P. were as one in pointing to the administrative difficulties involved in the traditional method of canvassing

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140. See Note 21.

141. Enacted as 9 + 10 Geo. 6. Ch.21.

142. H.C.Deb. 416, cc.447 et seq. 21 November 1945. See speech by Ede cc.447/55.

at a time of reconstruction when man-power was severely stretched.(143) One or two Members spoke of the need to ensure that Service voters, many of whom had not been able to exercise their voting rights at the election of 1945, were given full opportunities to register and vote.(144) Many Labour Members also intimated their awareness of the wider problems of redistribution caused by the temporary nature of a demobilising population. In general, however, the salient facts of the discussion of the Bill centred around the continuation of the war-time registration procedure which, all sides agreed, should be revised when the Report of the Home Office Committee on Electoral Registration was received. In fact, when the Report was issued it came out in favour of the pre-war method of canvassing as against the National Registration system of compiling the register and, more importantly, reported against the requirement of a qualifying period in favour of the system whereby all persons normally resident in each constituency on a given day would be included in the register - with two registers each year to ensure that it was as up to date as possible.(145) The Committee which had been composed of official experts, M.P.'s and the Party agents, by abandoning the qualifying period in the interest of efficiency, implicitly criticised the controversy stirred by the Conservatives in the House of Commons.

As will be shown later much of the controversy over the changes in the electoral system was a simple attempt to avoid discussing the real issues involved whereas the attitude of the Labour Party remained consistent in principle and pragmatic in application throughout. This is not to deny that there were certain

143. See for example, speeches of Fraser cc.495/508 and Swingler cc.466/9.

144. See for example, speeches of Swingler, loc.cit., and Lang 480/1.

145. Report of the Committee on Electoral Registration, Cmd. 7004 (1946/7, Parliamentary Papers, Vol. XI, p.377).



assumptions made in connection with the expected legislation of electoral reform, not the least of which was that it would derive its strength, if not its whole being as the Conservatives were to contend, from the recommendations of the Speakers' Conference. The Reports of the various bodies set up during the war, and renewed by the Labour Government, because they reported on the terms of reference set during the Coalition, naturally reinforced these assumptions. The two Reports of the Committee on Electoral Law Reform, for example, dealt with detailed questions on corrupt practices and administrative changes arising out of the Speakers' Conference.(146) Thus the final Report referred to University electors, expressed its views on election expenses and motor vehicles (the latter with some division) as if the decisions of the Speakers' Conference were not to be altered.

The pragmatism of the Labour Party and the extraordinary sensitivity of the Conservatives was shown in the Government's proposal in November 1946 to amend the rules governing the drawing of constituency boundaries to prevent the dismemberment of old established communities which the rigidity of the old rules had threatened to bring about. The amendments of the rules, which were both necessary and reasonable were subjected to a vitriolic and ignorant attack from Mr. Churchill who was gently reprimanded by the Speaker for accusing the Home Secretary (Mr. Ede) of gerrymandering. He (the Speaker) had observed the working of the Commission and felt obliged to support the deputy-Chairman who denied that the amendment was the result of political pressure. Even the impartiality of the Chair, however, could do little to restrain the Conservatives' politically-inspired anger.(147) The harmony which marked the Second Reading

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146. Interim Report of the Committee on Electoral Law Reform, Cmd. 6606 (Parliamentary Papers 1944/5, v, p.59) and Final Report of the Committee on Electoral Law Reform, Cmd. 7286, (Parliamentary Papers 1947/8 XI, p.72).

147. See H.C.Deb. 430, cc.77/86.



of the Bill a month later, attributed by Mr. Peake for the Conservatives, to consultation between the parties, was indicative of the consistency of principle and pragmatic practice of the Labour Party as well as the paucity of the Conservatives original arguments.(148) David Butler, whilst admitting that "the heat aroused by Mr. Ede's first announcement was obviously fanned to unnecessary heights by Mr. Churchill....." regards it simply as,

"a significant indication of how explosive an issue redistribution was. It was well known that the Labour Party would lose seats by an equitable redrawing of boundaries. The Conservatives were very ready to suspect that Labour would try to evade inflicting this hardship upon itself."(149)

In my estimation Butler pays too high a compliment to Churchill for the Conservatives tended to take their lead from their leaders' extremism on constitutional matters for which Attlee's terse comment "he will behave like a child" seem appropriate.(150) The process of redistribution meanwhile continued with the publications of the reports of the four Boundary Commissions in 1947, which proposed quite a number of alterations to the existing constituencies.(151) In the case of England the Commission justified the continued existence of eight boroughs over 80,000 on the ground that if they were divided special claims would be made for boroughs just under 80,000 and that the divided seats would be abnormally small. They took the view, the significance of which will become apparent later, "that the creation of eight additional seats in these cases

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148. See H.C. Deb. 431, cc.1557 et.seq. 13 December 1946. The Economist in endorsing the principles of relative equality of Members and maintenance of local communities had thought Churchill's original protest "political horseplay." 23 November 1946 (826).
149. Butler, op.cit., pp.104/5.
150. See Loral Moran: Winston Churchill, The Struggle for Survival 1940-1945, (London: Constable, 1966), p.777. See also Ch.30. "A year of recovery" pp.306/317 for Churchill's general state of mind during 1946. For the implications at local level in one constituency at least see Lord Wigg, George Wigg (London: Michael Joseph, 1972), pp.148/9.
151. Cmd. 7231 N. Ireland; Cmd. 7260 England; Cmd. 7270 Scotland; Cmd. 7274 Wales. (All 1947/8). The N.E.C. authorised the National Agents Department to make the appropriate representatives to Ministers as soon as the Report was published. N.E.C. Minutes Vol.94. E.C.2, 1947/8, M.27. 25 June 1947.

would do little to solve the general problem of equal representation....."(152)

In the King's Speech in 1947 the Government announced

"a measure to reform the franchise and electoral procedure and to give appropriate effect to recommendations of the Commissions appointed to consider the distribution of Parliamentary seats."(153)

The publication of the text of the Bill in January 1948 revealed a comprehensive reform of electoral legislation, most of which was the re-enactment of existing statutes. Among its provisions were the abolition of the qualifying period of residence for electoral registration, the reinstatement of two registers a year, the granting of postal voting facilities to a large number of citizens, the abolition of plural voting and the reduction of expense maxima, the legislation of payment of speakers and a complete redistribution of seats.(154) In short, the Bill embodied the principal reforms the Labour Party had advocated since the First World War. In the Debate on the Address in the House of Lords in October 1947, the Lord Chancellor, Lord Jowitt had declared that the Bill would not include proportional representation but that it would

"contain provisions for the electoral reform arising out of the recommendations of the Committee of Electoral Registration, the Speakers' Conference and the Committee on Electoral Law Reform."

Jowitt then added,

"If, as I fully expect, the noble Viscount (Samuel) is familiar with all the proceedings in these Committees, which I am not, he will know precisely what the Bill is going to do."(155)

This was not intended to indicate that the Bill would be based exactly on these

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152. Cmd. 7260, para.15.
153. H.C. Deb. 443, cc.6.
154. Enacted as 11 + 12 Geo. 6. Ch.65.
155. H.L. Deb. 152 cc.70. Butler, op.cit., p.108. has apparently reworded the quotation.

Committees' recommendations but was, as Jowitt himself protested later, a light-hearted remark, (156) nonetheless it was seized upon by opponents of reform as a way of avoiding an examination of the merits of the changes proposed. Discussion of the Bill, therefore, revolved less around its provisions as upon the question of whether the Labour Party was guilty of a breach of faith in departing from the recommendations made by the Speaker's Conference. It has already been argued that the Labour Party was consistent in its demands since the First World War, and it is clear that the agreement of 1944, the nature of which will be discussed below, was a recognisable half-measure dictated by the circumstances of the time rather than a negation of the principles in which the Labour Party believed.

It was claimed by the Conservatives that the "bargain" was in fact a gentleman's agreement whereby the franchises for local elections had been assimilated to that made for parliamentary purposes and the vote given to the spouses of business electors abolished in return for the cessation of Labour's demands regarding the abolition of the business and university franchises. By breaking this agreement and departing from the custom

"that matters affecting the interests of rival parties should.....be settled.....by an agreement reached by either between the leaders of the main parties or by conferences under the impartial guidance of Mr. Speaker...."(157)

the Labour Party was guilty of bad faith. The Conservatives, it was claimed, had kept their part of the bargain, despite having been in a position in which

156. H.L. Deb.; 157. cc.303. In fact the Economist commented at the time of the Bill's publication, "Since much of the ground covered by it had been carefully prepared by the Speaker's Conference of 1944 it might have been expected that the conclusion reached would have been embodied in it." 7 February 1945. The Economist had thought that some form of plural voting would be maintained. (See 25 October 1947. p.673).

157. H.C. Deb., 447, cc.859/60. (Churchill).

they could have thwarted the will of the Labour Party. Now that the Labour Party was in a similar position it had allegedly broken the rules of the parliamentary game, out of malice against their continued rejection by the educated electorate of the Universities and for party ends. They were subjecting tried and proven methods of electoral working to logical and probably unworkable absurdities.(158)

The question of whether there was a bargain or not was confused by the intensity of party exchanges in the House and the differing interpretation of what did or did not constitute a "bargain". According to David Butler,

"there can be no doubt that there was a bargain. In the debates in 1944 and 1945 Mr. Woodburn, Mr. Pethick-Lawrence and Mr. Morrison all referred to it, and in 1948 no responsible Labour member denied that there had been a 'bargain'."(159)

In my estimation Butler is wrong in using the term "bargain". It is true that Labour speakers in the 1944 Debate made certain references to the conclusions arrived at by the Speaker's Conference, in what was occasionally very loose language, which the Conservative Opposition readily quoted out of context during the debates of 1948. There may well have been an understanding or accommodation but there was no bargain, despite the Conservatives' interpretation of the Conference's conclusions in such terms.

The atmosphere of the Speaker's Conference had been one of conciliation and compromise, a recognition, heightened by the war-time atmosphere of the electoral truce, that the philosophy of "all or nothing" was the philosophy against which democracy was fighting.(160) In such an atmosphere it was possible

158. See the speeches of Churchill, Ibid., 857/72, Peake 996/1011, Maxwell-Fyfe 1093/5. Cf. Lord Salisbury H.L. Deb. 157, cc.295/304.

159. Butler, op.cit., p.111.

160. See, the speech by Arthur Woodburn, H.C. Deb. 403, cc.1622/3. For a Conservative view see Margesson H.L. Deb. 157, cc.307/11. The authenticity of the Labour view-point is supported by the brief references in its Report made to the questions raised. See, for example, L.P.A.C.R.1944, p.68.

to arrive at what Pethick-Lawrence in 1944 called "agreed solutions" which it was thought would survive. Yet, Herbert Morrison was quite correct in pointing out that

"all these concessions and.....accommodations were within the political circumstances and the political facts of the Parliament of the day, and could not be within the political circumstances and the political facts of any other Parliament."(161)

Moreover, there was not, nor could there be, an exchange of the assimilation of the franchises for the permanent maintenance of the plural vote as this would be tantamount to claiming that all these items were in the control of the Conservative Party which plainly, they were not.(162) Furthermore, Morrison explicitly denied in the 1948 debates that there was a bargain, either at the Speakers' Conference or in the Government, implying

"that any party which was returned was obligated to carry out every one of those recommendations in the next Parliament....."(163)

John Parker, who was a Member of the Speakers' Conference himself, was quite emphatic when he said

"there was certainly no idea of any bargain being made between parties, beyond the fact that we were trying to reach some kind of agreement regarding legislation that might be introduced in the lifetime of the last Parliament."(164)

Attlee interrupted Churchill's venomous attack on the Labour Party to explicitly say of the 1944 Redistribution Bill

"we were dealing with legislation to be introduced in that Parliament. The proposals came from the Speakers' Conference; they were agreed by that Government, and the Bill was introduced. There was no pledge whatever with regard to future legislation."(165)

161. Morrison, H.C.Deb. 447, cc.1106.

162. Woodburn made this point. Ibid., cc.1011/2.

163. Ibid., cc.867.

164. Ibid., cc.904. Italics mine. Cf. Morrison cc.1103.

165. Ibid., cc.866.



Butler's assertion, therefore, that in 1948 no responsible Labour member denied that there had been a "bargain" cannot be substantiated.

The essence of the 1944 Debates had been summarised by Morrison himself when he had vainly attempted to persuade Labour Members to support the retention of plural voting. Asking Labour Members to consider whether they could have done better than the representatives who served on the Speakers' Conference he observed,

"I would say, if the men and women we had on the Speakers' Conference had done (good business) and, on the whole, have done well, and have come to an accommodation, I think the right thing to do is to stand by them when it comes to a vote in the House of Commons. I have not got to do so, but they did well, they served their principles well, they came to an accommodation, and I am going to stand by them now that it has come to a vote in the House of Commons. That is the spirit in which I would appeal to my honourable Friends....."(166)

The division list showed that his appeal fell on deaf ears.

During the 1944 Debates John Parker had not been prevented from arguing that the City of London should be treated the same as other constituencies even though with one specific exception, all the individual Labour representatives on the Speakers' Conference voted in favour of its provisions. The main P.L.P. argument in 1948 was that by doing so those representatives, whose views did not bind the Labour Party as a whole, had discharged their obligations to the compromises agreed to. It was not possible for that Parliament to bind its successor, especially as the Parliament of 1944 was patently unrepresentative. As for the notion that it was customary for such matters to be settled by agreement between the parties that was not the case in 1928 when Baldwin had equalised the franchise.(167).

166. See H.C.Deb. 407, cc.312. Ironically Morrison's argument in cc.310/11 (which he admitted to be hypothetical) was indicative of the bargain mentality and was inevitably used against him.

167. See H.C.Deb. 447, cc.1050. Mackay and cc.1108.Morrison.

There is, in fact, little doubt that no "bargain" as such, existed but that informal agreements not to press certain claims were made in order to ensure that the 1944 Speakers' Conference should be more fruitful than the abortive Conference of 1930. This was more important during war-time as Churchill had announced that no controversial legislation should be introduced during that session. To reach agreed compromises was not the same as demanding a bargain and in claiming that there was a bargain Butler is clearly mistaken. The Conservatives for their part may well have interpreted their "concessions" in terms of a bargain and drawn strength from some careless remarks by Labour spokesmen, but their pleas to the Government to change its mind were based on opposition to change rather than constitutional principles. When Osbert Peake, for example, asked the House

"Is it not clear that what has happened it that large numbers of the Socialist Members of this House, newly elected in 1945, have failed adequately to appreciate the extent to which their party had been committed in 1944 by their representatives on the Conference and by the action of the Lord President in 1945, in securing the fulfilment of his part of the bargain?"(168)

What he was really asking was that the opportunity for change should be deferred until the Conservatives were once more in a position to thwart it.

It has been argued above that the main features of the Bill were the embodiment of measures consistently advocated by the Labour Party. A number of Labour Members reiterated this point during the debate. Ronald Mackay in his speech on the Second Reading declared, "The Labour Party have stood for the proposals in this Bill for many years,"(169) while Chuter Ede reminded the House

168. Ibid., cc.1009, for a Labour Party view of the role of their representatives at the Conference see Lord Shephard H.L.Deb. 157, cc.315. See Note 23.

169. H.C.Deb. 447, cc.1047. See Note 24.

172. Ibid., 447, cc.1073. The Second Reading is to be found in cc.1073-1084.

that "In 1931, I voted for the abolition of university representation. I have always believed in it."(170) Underlying this was a difference in philosophy concerning democratic participation. These differences, as we shall see, in reference to the Second Reading, were incompatible and one is reminded of the tactics of Sir William Bull in the attitude adopted by the Conservatives towards the alleged "bargain". The contentious items (plural voting in particular) were indefensible anomalies and to divert attention away from that fact it was necessary that the Conservatives should concentrate on the tactical limitations afforded the Labour Party in 1944 Parliament.(171) The passage of the Act through the Commons, when not concerned with acrimonious exchanges about the alleged bargain, centred upon familiar arguments. The most contentious issue seems to have been the abolition of plural voting which excited letters in the Times from interested parties in the Universities and the appearance before the House began the two-day debate on the Second Reading of the sheriffs of the City of London in full regalia, exercising their ancient privilege to present a petition which on this occasion asked that their separate representation be maintained.(172)

Opening the debate Chuter Ede described the main provisions of the Bill and deliberately emphasised, where necessary, the differences between the Government's proposals and the recommendations of the various committees upon which the proposals were originally based. During his speech Ede stated that the residential vote of the City was only 4,600 (one-eleventh of the national average)

170. H.C.Deb. 447, cc.925.

171. A similar situation had, of course, arisen in 1925 when the Conservatives had used the tactical limitations of the 1924 Labour Government as an excuse for resisting a Labour proposal for electoral reform. See above. J.P.W. Malleliu writing in Tribune called it "a most distressing performance" and likened the "intemperate tirade" to the "Gestapo rampage" of the 1945 Election, 20 February 1948.

172. H.C.Deb. 447, cc.801/3. The Second Reading is to be found in cc.839 et.seq. and 993 et.seq. 16/17 February 1948.



and consequently could not be defended and gave a great number of historical examples to prove how politically unenlightened University electorates had been in the past. (173) Both these themes, particularly the latter were emphasised by over half of the Labour speakers. Mr. Bing curtly reminded Churchill that he had voted for the abolition of the University franchise in the 1906 Parliament but that it had been defeated then by the House of Lords. (174) A number of references were made to the reactionary political views of the Members returned by the Universities, Although most of the Labour Members who did refer to this fact went on to make more fundamental points against University representation. Mr. Wells, for example, claimed that "there is no a priori case .... for the maintenance of the representation of any particular interest ...." (175) Mr. Titterington confessed that he was "unable to see why there should be any discrimination for voting purposes between the miner and the medical man, or why a member of a university should have preferential franchise because of the fact that he has been associated with an educational or academic institution." (176)

The underlying philosophy was the responsibility and right of individuals in a community to participate in the administrative forms of that community. The principle was one of "one man, one vote." In reply to this only Mr. Strauss, Member for the Combined English Universities, put up any theoretical defence of the University franchise and he did so by quoting, at length, arguments used on previous occasions by Lord Hugh Cecil and Eleanor Rathbone. He alone recognised

173. Ibid., 839/57, passim. Ede had earlier pointed out that although the Bill included items not recommended by the various committees only nine recommendations proposed by the Speaker's Reports and the Report of the Committee on Electoral Registration and of the Report of the Committee on Electoral Law Reform had not been adopted in the Bill, Ibid., cc. 542/3.
174. H.C. Deb. 447, cc. 872.
175. Ibid., cc. 892, M.P. for Walsall.
176. Ibid., cc. 882, M.P. for Bradford South. Cf. Woodburn cc. 1018.

that the Labour Party

"object to the university seats because their existence conflicts with the Hon. Members' theory of Parliamentary representation.....that (it was) a ground of principle."(177)

Other speakers were unable to produce one substantial argument in favour of the retention of University representation, a fact which undoubtedly led the Conservatives, when finally returned to office, to abandon their declared policy of reintroducing the University franchise. The only Labour Member who spoke in favour of the continuance of University representation did so as a "traditionalist."(178)

Apart from three Labour references to Proportional Representation, two of which were hostile, and P.L.P. demands for the introduction of legislation to limit the use of vehicles at elections the main question with which the debate was concerned was redistribution.(179) Individual constituencies were referred to by the representatives while a number of Members thought England was under-represented and accordingly called for an increase in the number of seats allotted to the country.(180) John Parker also made a strong plea for the simplifying and consolidation of the disqualifications for Membership - an issue not raised by the Labour Party since the 1920's.(181) Mr. Mackay added a plea for compulsory voting.(182) In his winding-up speech Morrison reiterated the Government's rejection of proportional representation. It was,

177. Ibid., cc.1035. Sir John Anderson did "venture to put forward the view that as a matter of theory and principle, there cannot be anything undemocratic in classifying voters according to their personal and individual quality." Ibid., cc.887.
178. Mr. Skeffington-Lodge, Ibid., cc.1089/92. In the tradition of Major Church no doubt!
179. Mackay who had just written "Coupen or Free: Being a Study in Electoral Reform and Representative Government (London: Secker & Warberg, 1943), and was a Member of the P.R. Society, spoke in favour of P.R. Ibid., cc.1044/56, Berry cc.918 and Morrison cc.1111/2 against. Both John Parker cc.906/7 and Greenwood cc.1081/3 referred to the motor vehicles question.
180. See, for example Titterington, Ibid., cc.882/5, Parker 905/6, Wigg cc.928. Dalton cc.929/43 and Yates 945/7.
181. Apart, of course, from the controversy over war-time legislation.
182. Ibid., cc.1054/5.

"not conducive to the best form of Parliamentary government. We have come really to believe that after years of argument. There used to be a strong body of opinion in the Labour Party in favour of it, but after years of argument that is our conclusion."(183)

Recalling the phrasing with which he had defended the retention of the City of London he fortuitously found a saving sentence he had used on that occasion

"It may be in the future the day will come when the question will have to be looked at" (Official Report 12 October 1944, Vol.403 cc.1993) "Sir, the day has come."(184) Suitably admonished the House gave the Bill a Second Reading by 318 votes to 6.

The arguments about the bargain also pervaded the Committee Stage of the Bill. On the first day in the Committee an attempt was made by the Conservatives to save University representation on the grounds that education provided the value to enrich the "one man, one vote" principle which was not per se sufficient to stand alone. Apart from the notion that independent representation based on education qualifications was a good thing the only real defence of continued university representation was that it had been recommended by the Speakers' Conference, and that its abolition was a blow to the professional classes. The Labour Party reiterated its opposition to the principle of plural voting in general and special representation in particular. Morrison cogently expressed their view when he said, "the objection we have is that this means a plural vote and a type of Parliamentary representation which is not rationally (or)..... constitutionally justified."(185) The fact that there was an ever increasing

183. Ibid., cc.1111 Morrison, of course, had been a strong opponent of P.R. during the 1920's when the principle had some noted admirers in the Labour Party. The New Statesman reviewing Mackay's book had thought the A.V. worth considering. 5 February 1944.

184. H.C.Deb. 447, cc.1113. There is little doubt that Morrison was poking fun at those who had read too much into his speeches of 1944.

185. H.C.Deb. 448, cc.1940. 16 March 1948.

proportion of graduates to the rest of the population was irrelevant, it was a matter of extending the democratic principle of equality against an elitist and class institution. Apart from Mr. Skeffington-Lodge who declared his intention to vote against the Government (which he did) all the Labour Members who participated in the debate asserted the principle of "one man, one vote". Winding up for the Government Chuter Ede said that he regarded the Bill as inevitable and one which the Labour Government had a moral obligation to introduce. The Government felt free to deal with the contents of the Bill in accordance with its interpretation of existing circumstances.(186)

The same pattern of charge and defence continued to characterise the rest of the Committee's deliberations. To prevent serious discussion of the principles of privilege underlying plural voting Conservative Members tried a variety of tactics from the reductio ab absurdum to the quoting of Morrison's sentiments for the City of London which he expressed in the debates of 1944.(187)

It was frequently asserted that logic was not in the British tradition and should not be applied to the constitution, although it did not appear to be understood that the logical application of the "one man, one vote" principle need not necessarily be enforced to the point of absurdity. For the Labour Party it was not only a matter of principle but of empirical practicability.

"We deny," said Chuter Ede, "that the number of 4,600 people.....justified the creation of a separate constituency for this one borough (the City of London). We feel that it is appropriate that the electors here should be joined with some electorates which will justify the return of a single Member of Parliament."(188)

186. Ibid., cc. 2003/10.

187. See, for example, Captain Crookshank's contribution. Ibid., 2105/2116.

188. Ibid., cc. 2145/6. See also cc. 2148.

The debate also raised the question of the relation between the Executive and the House on the overall point concerning the function of a Speaker's Conference. As Mr. Naylor pointed out, to accept the view that agreement between the parties at a Speaker's Conference should be binding on the House of Commons was to undermine the role of the House as the place where the final decision had to be taken. (189) As a matter of practice inter-party agreement might make otherwise controversial legislation more acceptable to the major political groups in the House which is what Herbert Morrison was getting at when he said in 1945

"If when .... compromises (are) made, everybody is going to act as if there had been no Conference, it seems to me that the utility of the Speaker's Conference will not be so great." (190)

He had made the point in order to illustrate the flexibility of the British Parliamentary system which had by tradition found it politically expedient to prevent political clashes over constitutional questions. Yet disagreement was inevitable on occasions, and on such occasions the House had to be the final arbiter. Thus under no circumstances did the Government ever claim that the decision belonged to the Executive alone, although no attempt was made to leave the matter to a free vote. In the Gladstonian tradition the Government gave the lead which the House, in practical terms the Party, could accept or reject by their attitude on the Floor of the House or in conversation with the Whips. Neither freedom nor coercion entered into the question; it was the traditional working of the processes of the House.

Such sophistries were, of course, overlooked and whatever hope for rational discussion may have been held was lost when it was learned that the Government

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189. Ibid., cc. 2194/5.

190. H.C. Deb. 407, cc. 310. 17 January 1945.



had asked the Boundary Commission to say how those eight seats with more than 80,000 electors should be divided in two and how the boundaries in nine of the largest English boroughs should be redrawn in order to give each of them one more member. Consequently, on 24 March 1948 Mr. Ede moved an amendment to increase the number of seats to 625. The seventeen new seats went to England which, as we have seen, was regarded by a number of Labour backbenchers as being under-represented while certain constituencies mentioned in the Amendment (Liverpool and Bradford, for example), had had pleas submitted on their behalf during the Second Reading. Although Ede made no reference to backbench opinion it was clear that representations had been made, considered and accepted.

The Government's procedural approach to the matter was severely mauled by Churchill in his most vitriolic manner. Ignoring the merits of the scheme the leader of the Opposition attacked the Government's conduct as "one of the shabbiest political manoeuvres which we have on record." (191) The procedure was indicative of the arbitrary regulation of voting and the shaping of constituencies, in order to secure the permanent demands of the party in power. The abusive tone and content of Churchill's speech buttressed by the claim that the Boundary Commission had ceased to function after the Reports of the previous October, was clearly designed for party political purposes and to divert attention away from the merits of changes. (192)

Replying to the charges Morrison pointed out that the Boundary Commission were a permanent body empowered to continuously review the redistribution of seats. The Government had taken the best advice from the Boundary Commissioners

191. H.C. Deb., 448, cc. 3046.

192. See Note 25.

on the question of revision. They were within their statutory rights and not guided by the partisan motivations of the Conservatives. Morrison recalled that he had asserted, at the time of the House of Commons (Redistribution of Seats) Bill in 1944, the right of the Government to ask Parliament to modify the Commissioners' proposals and the rights of Members to propose amendments to the Bill implementing the Commissioners' Report.(193) The debate was punctuated by acrimonious interruptions from opponents of the Bill and general approval from Members in affected constituencies 'though the bi-partisan approach was vitiated by party considerations. Not satisfied with the Government's explanation the Conservatives continued their objections to the White Paper still further. In a subsequent White Paper issued by the Boundary Commissioners the Commissioners themselves settled the issue with a firm rebuke to the Conservatives:

"One of the representations addressed to us came from a political organisation in Manchester which opposed the White Paper proposals for the division of that borough on the ground that they were not free from political bias. While the decision to give extra representation to the borough was taken by the Government, the scheme set out in the White Paper was one which was prepared by the members of the Commission and this fact was announced in the House. We regard the suggestion that the scheme was dictated by political bias as offensive to the members of the Commission and we take strong exception to it."(194)

The actions of the Labour Government were those actions which any Government would have adopted. Having agreed to a policy statement they were prepared to allow representations from interested parties in the constituencies which in this case happened to be in the majority of cases, represented by

193. H.C. Deb. 448, cc. 3047/56. passim.

194. Representation of the People Bill: Report of Boundary Commissioners for Elections on Representations relating to certain proposed new constituencies, Cmd. 7400, (1947/48), p.2.

Labour Members who, it should be noted, frequently spoke with local inter-party support.(195) It was the classic Executive/Legislative relationship at its democratic best.

At the Committee stage a number of amendments were moved implicitly criticising the procedure followed by the Boundary Commissioners in arriving at their conclusions. Mr. McLeavy moved that the Commissioners be obliged to hold a local public enquiry if requested to do so by the local authority in the areas affected. The amendment was well supported by a number of Members from all sides of the House but was resisted by the Government on the grounds that the speeches in the Committee would give some guidance to the Commissioners. The rest of the Committee stage followed the familiar pattern of unnecessary opposition on technical matters designed to obscure the principles involved and, from the division lists, motivated mainly by party considerations. One which was possibly not in this category was a Conservative attempt supported by the Liberals to reduce the percentage conditional for forfeiture of the deposit to one-tenth of the poll where more than three candidates were standing. The proposal, which had been recommended by the Speakers' Conference, was resisted by the Government on the grounds that it would encourage splinter parties.(196)

A number of new clauses to the Bill were moved. A Labour Member, Mr. McLeavy, for example, proposed that the use of cars to take electors to the polls should be prohibited.(197) Under the clause there would be a pool of

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195. See H.C.Deb. 448, cc. 3077/8. Mrs. Castle, and cc. 3081/3 Mr. McLeavy for Labour, and cc. 3078/9, Vice-Admiral Taylor for the Conservatives.

196. H.C.Deb., 449, cc. 1650/6.

197. Ibid., cc. 1923/44.



cars under the general direction of the returning officer who would allocate the vehicles as necessary. McLeavy received solid support from Labour backbenchers on the issue, which was sympathetically received by Chuter Ede. The clause as drafted, however, he regarded as incomplete and he promised to see if anything could be done along the lines suggested by the time the Report Stage was reached.

When the First Schedule, specifying the new constituency boundaries came before the House at the end of April 1948, (198) the Conservatives announced that they had asked the Boundary Commissioners to consider certain other constituencies where the quota was too high, a fact which the Government received with apparent phelgm. John Parker, however, attacked the Conservatives' actions,

"there was a case for the Government of the day asking the Boundary Commission to look at certain proposals and make reports back, but it becomes a different thing when groups in the House ask for the views of the Boundary Commissioners upon certain schemes." (199)

The statement was illustrative of the general view of the Executive/Legislative relationship held throughout the Labour Party; the Government governed, the House criticised. Yet the ultimate authority to accept or reject the Commissioners' Report lay with the House and consequently unless the House decided otherwise it was legitimate for Members or groups of Members to make representations to the Commissioners who were after all an autonomous and independent body. In this respect the Labour Party's acceptance of a strong executive lead in Government was traditional in a situation where new interpretations of its relationship with Parliament were really necessary. Even when these representations to the Commissioners were heard, the House would

198. H.C. Deb., 450, cc.38. et.seq. 217 et.seq. 26 and 27 April 1948.

199. Ibid., cc.46.

make the final decision. During the debate on the First Schedule, a number of amendments were made in pursuit of local representative interests, often on an inter-party basis.(200) The debate, in fact, illustrated the operation of the traditional method of raising on the floor of the House matters which had been the subject of representation elsewhere. Where such matters had been successfully advocated in private they received official legitimisation in Parliament itself; where not, they were resisted by the Executive which, of course, dominated the legislature. The Government was, at this stage at least, still prepared to consider grievances aired on the floor of the House if it was felt necessary and make adjustments at the Report Stage.

When the Report Stage was taken on 14 and 15 June the Government introduced a new clause dealing with the use of motor vehicles for conveying electors to the poll.(201) The clause allowed the candidates to register one car with the Returning Officer for every 1,500 electors in the counties and 2,500 in the boroughs. For the purposes of election expenses each car would incur £2 election expenses. Introducing the clause the Home Secretary said that the latter provision was designed to deter candidates from using cars unnecessarily, while the ratio of cars to electors was lower than that provided for in the 1931 Bill,(202) but conditions had altered significantly since then, particularly in the provision of polling facilities. "The general effect of the Clause," he declared, "will be strictly to limit the organised use of cars on behalf of a candidate, without attempting to prohibit their use by private individuals for taking themselves or their families to the poll."(203) The object of the

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200. See, for example, the debate and vote on the Commissioners' proposals for Plymouth. Ibid., cc. 68/86.

201. H.C.Deb. 452, cc.49, 14 June 1948.

202. Ibid., cc.52. Ede mistakenly referred to the Representation of the People Act 1931.

203. Loc.cit., Cf. Arthur Woodburn, "The Bill only seeks to remove the undesirable use of cars and not any legitimate or desirable use of cars." Ibid., cc.103.

clause was to introduce fairness between parties, or in the words of John Parker, "to see that the advantages of wealth are removed...." (204) This theme of political equality was common to most of the speeches made by the P.L.P., who frequently asserted that cars gave unfair advantages to the Tory Party. One or two Labour Members pointed to the real difficulties of enforcement involved in the Clause while one Member thought the sum of £2 an insufficient deterrent to the illegal use of cars and that it diminished the amount available for legitimate expenses incurred in the fighting of an election. (205) During the debate the Conservatives argued that the Clause infringed the agreement reached between the parties at the Speaker's Conference and later, on the Second Reading of the Bill, which were being discussed between the Agents, to which Arthur Woodburn replied by arguing that cars represented a loophole in the otherwise unanimous agreement reached on expenses. (206) The meagre amount involved was, in fact, eventually abandoned by the Government, (207) and the Clause despite Conservative taunts that it was a reactionary measure, was passed by 269 votes to 114. In the event the Conservatives were right and the Labour Party wrong in attaching so much importance to the use of vehicles at elections. In the past such a Clause might have been useful but the immense social changes that were taking place fully justified the repeal of this restrictive legislation in the late 'fifties.

Notwithstanding the various procedural changes made in 1946/7 to increase the efficiency of the House of Commons the obstructive nature of Parliament still

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204. Ibid., cc. 57. Cf. Mr. Collins (Taunton) "this clause puts right an injustice under which the Labour Party has suffered for a long time." (cc. 62).
205. Mr. Bramall (Bexley) Ibid., cc. 67.
206. Ibid., cc. 95/6.
207. Ibid., cc. 165/8.

made it possible to hold up Government business as the Report Stage of the Bill proved. Amendments, of which all save one, were resisted by the Government, were moved by the Opposition in the alleged hope that they would be listened to 'though mainly to make debating points. It could be argued that the debates did serve to analyse in detail the practical aspects of the clauses under discussion, particularly that concerning motor cars. However, the discussion which followed on University representation and the City of London were in fact only useless repetitions which wasted Parliamentary time. In all, some two-and-a-half hours were wasted on these two issues.(208) By contrast the transfer of the City of London from Shoreditch and Finsbury to Westminster, and the increase of expenses by  $\frac{1}{2}$ d. per elector to allow for inflation since the new scale had been proposed in 1944 were the product of discussions between the Government and represented interests, and in the latter case, three-party agreement, and were presented to the House as fait accompli and in an informative sense. They met no opposition from the Labour benches. A Conservative proposal to create a further five constituencies was greeted by the Home Secretary with scepticism, although he promised to listen to the debate before making up his mind on the merits of the case which, if genuine, represented a more reasonable use of the Commons for purposes of detailed discussion of the application of certain general principles.

In some ways this was what the reformers of the 'thirties had envisaged and, indeed, the Report Stage tended to characterise the House of Commons as the register of a powerful Executive which was not deaf to the pleadings of those who were adversely affected by the general principles approved of by the legislature.

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208. Ibid., cc.170/210 and 259/274.

The floor of the House remained the place where grievances were aired, questions raised and where the Government was obliged to answer or be condemned for its silence or evasion. The ultimate sovereignty of the House was never in doubt.

The Third Reading proved to be as acrimonious as the previous stages, although it did provide the Home Secretary with the opportunity to discuss some of the practical consequences of the Bill, such as the new form of the ballot paper and of the official poll card. He reiterated the Government's basic policy with regard to the controversial questions of University seats, representation of the City of London, the disparity between the size of borough and county seats in England and the use of motor cars at elections. He reminded the House that he had listened to representations and had dealt with them on the basis of merit alone. This claim was denied by the Conservatives who moved a resolution declining a Third Reading,

"to a Bill which repudiates agreed recommendations of Mr. Speaker's Conference, 1944, and disregards for the purpose of Party advantage the findings of the Boundary Commission....."(209)

During the debate which followed one or two Labour Members protested at their constituencies' treatment under the Commission's proposals but the Government's majority was hardly dented.(210) The Bill sped through the Lords where it was treated by the Conservative Peers as "of more direct concern to the House of Commons than to the House of Lords" and received the Royal Assent at the end of July 1948.

David Butler takes the view,

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209. Ibid., cc. 1367 et seq. (1377) 23 June 1948.

210. Neil McLean (Glasgow, Govan) and Mr. Medland (Plymouth, Drake) for example. Ibid., cc. 1402/4 and 1427/9.

"that the whole passage of the Bill might have been, almost equally tranquil had it not been for the question of 'good faith'. The great majority of the changes effected by the Act were the product of inter-party agreement and, therefore, unlikely to provoke much comment."(211)

Yet as has been argued, the charges of bad faith were largely the tactics of obstruction; of unreasonable opposition to reasonable measures, a conclusion surely borne out by the total lack of opposition to the re-enactment of the Act of 1948 in three consolidating measures in 1949.(212) Whilst it could be claimed that the conventions of the constitution prevented the re-opening of the question after so short a space of time the obvious conclusion seems to be that the opposition to the measures of 1948 was insincere politicking for, as the Economist noted when the Bill first came out,

"Though the abolition of the business vote was not recommended by the Speaker's Conference, it was perhaps too much to expect that a Labour Government would preserve something which looks so much like a capitalist vested interest and it would be difficult in these days to defend it on any sound political principle."(213)

Given the general commitment of the Party over the previous twenty years to the establishment of "one man, one vote" the journal's reference to "the caprices of political opportunism" indicated a general unwillingness to accept the principle, or more likely the Labour Party's right to implement it. The Labour Party was, of course, fortunate to be in a position whereby democratic change would apparently bring political benefits, but this was not entirely a matter of good fortune; the Party's principles were important.

211. Butler, op.cit., p.137.

212. The House of Commons (Redistribution of Seats) 1949 Act, 12 + 13 and 14 Geo.6. Ch.66. The Representation of the People Act 1949, 12 + 13 and 14 Geo.6. Ch.68 and the Election Commissioners Act 1949 12,13 and 14 Geo.6. Ch.90. The effects of the Act on the 1950 General Election see H.G. Nicholas The British General Election of 1950 (London: Macmillan, 1951), Ch.1.

213. Economist 7 February 1948. Few doubted the principle behind the reform. See for example Sunday Times 1 February 1948 and Daily Telegraph 31 January 1948.



Yet the opposition of principles without taking practicalities

into consideration would have been futile. Hence the Party's appearance of duplicity in its attitude towards reform. The Party's aim never altered during the 'forties, although its tactics varied. One man, one vote, was the ultimate ideal, the details were negotiable. It was this which caused the Government to use the opportunity for Government retrenchment in late 1949 to abolish the autumn registers for which they had fought so long. (214) Significantly, too the Government's resistance to proposals by Labour backbenchers to introduce a clause to facilitate the compilation of a supplementary register at the cost of some £15,000 out of the estimated annual saving of £800,000 secured by the abolition of the second register, was in the tradition of the Labour Government's deference to Departmental advice on technical matters and of a lack of attention to details in allegedly peripheral matters.

16(1) 13 February 1941.

for example, although the Committee's evidence to the Bill to be wrong, Sir Henry Gwynne said that the Minister rejected the issue as a matter of expediency rather than principle. (111, cc. 116. The Tax Enquiry Committee, 1941, p. 116. The Bill was passed on 1 March 1941.

The Select Committee on National Expenditure, established by the House of Commons in 1941, through its investigation of various administrative departments "the weight of public opinion was generally assumed as more effective than the Select Committee of Ministers or the various Standing Committees. (H.C. Political and Public Administration (London: James Cresswell, 1941), p. 13. The Committee's evidence to the Select Committee on National Expenditure, 1941, p. 116. See also the Committee's evidence to the Select Committee on National Expenditure, 1941, p. 116.

Mr. Greenwood (the Minister without Portfolio) said the House, "The Government decided this deliberately in order that there should be no suggestion of (their) wanting the right of taxation to be used as a means of raising money for the Government's general expenditure."

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214. H.C. Deb. 470, cc. 223/41 (Second Reading) and cc. 1044/58 (Committee Stage) 22 and 29 November 1949. The demand for autumn registers seems to have remained largely unspoken. Only once did the matter reach the N.E.C. Minutes Vol. 74, E.C. 14, (1936/37), 28 July 1937.

## CHAPTER SEVEN - NOTES

1. The book went through twenty-seven editions in one month and its banning by all leading booksellers caused Hamilton-Fyfe to comment that "the incident shows how powerful might be the forces behind a Fascist Coup after the French model" Britain's War-Time Revolution (London: Victor Gollancz, 1944), p.79. Not only the Left was concerned however. On 26 June 1940 S. Bradley "raised the question of the inclusion in the War Cabinet of certain members who had formed part of the late Government." This was followed by "considerable discussion" and a decision to consult Attlee and Greenwood about the question. N.E.C. Minutes Vol.82. E.C.5. 1940/41 M.79. J.T. Murphy had stated the Left-Wing attitude at the 1935 Conference, when he said, "There are times when negative action is positive. There are times when it is well to remember that the positive action of fighting your enemy at home is greater in value than fighting the negative disaster of defending your enemy abroad. Our enemy is here." L.P.A.C.R. 1935 p.197. Cf. his speech at the 1939 Conference in the debate on Labour's attitude to the Popular Front. L.P.A.C.R.1939, pp.291/299 (Debate) p.293/4(Murphy). The same theme runs through the Left-Wing contributions to the debates in the following year on Labour's entry into the War Cabinet and on the Electoral Truce (See L.P.A.C.R.1940, pp. 123/34, 141/3.)
2. The Cabinet rejected a variety of expedients to evade the law such as appointing MacDonald as a special envoy. Instead it was successfully argued that "It is much franker and better to come to the House of Commons with a straightforward Bill to regularise the past doubtful cases and to provide machinery whereby the House would in future be acquainted with the true facts." CAB 65/17: 16(41)8. 12 February 1941.
3. Aneurin Bevan, for example, although he considered the Government's attitude to the Bill to be wrong, told Sidney Silverman that if the Prime Minister regarded the issue as a matter of confidence he felt bound to accept his opinion. Ibid., cc.716. The New Statesman asserted that if the matter had been left to a free vote the Bill would have been defeated on the Second Reading. 1 March 1941.
4. The Select Committee on National Expenditure acted throughout the war as an irritant on the Executive through its investigations of current administration. It carried "the weight of an all-party Committee with full access to the facts" New Statesman 31 May 1941, and as such was generally accepted as more effective than the Select Committee on Estimates or the Public Accounts Committee. R.W.S. Pollard How to Reform Parliament (London: Forum Press, 1944), p.15. Its activities caused consternation even at Cabinet level. See Herbert Morrison's evidence to the Select Committee on Procedure. H.C.Deb. 189/1 p.107. Q. 3229 and Morrison's subsequent comments.
5. Arthur Greenwood (The Minister without Portfolio) told the House, "The Government desired this debate today in order that there should be an opportunity of (their) learning the views of Members of the House. We have given some thought to the problems arising out of the recommendations, and we have arrived at certain provisional conclusions, and it seemed right, before we put the Bill before the House that we should take the opportunity of collecting the voices in the Chamber today." cc.1323.



6. There was no opposition to the re-enactment of the measure in 1943, but great resistance to it was expressed in the 1944 Debate. "See H.C. Deb. 396, cc. 1971/2002; 2086/2112, 10 and 11 February 1944," mainly in protest at the Government's somewhat perfunctory presentation of the Bill. See also L.P.A.C.R. 1944, p.68. The Cabinet had decided on 13 February 1941 (when the measure was first discussed) that it would be annually renewable but would not continue in force after the emergency was ended. CAB 65/17. 17(41)4. For the Debate, in 1943 see H.C. Deb. 393, 109/54 and 813/28.
7. Butler attributes the opposition to the Bill "partly to the attempt to enact constitutional legislation so hurriedly, partly to the retroactive provisions which obviated the need for the re-election of the four ministers primarily concerned but mainly to fundamental objections against the ending of a system which had so long exposed governments to the constant criticism of the electorate." In a footnote he argued that in practice the effectiveness of this control was minimal. The nearest he comes to recognising the existence of political motives is his comment that in 1926 "in the Labour arguments it is hard to find anything more than obedience to the maxim that the duty of the Opposition is to oppose." (p.54).
8. Cf. New Statesman's comment that "Judging by the rapidity with which the Tories adopted delegated legislation when they changed the Constitution and the fiscal system in 1931 the rights of Parliament only play an important part in their thoughts when vital matters like the financial orthodoxies are at stake." 11 March 1944.
9. It should be noted that Labour Members did support complaints against individual pieces of delegated legislation. In the New Statesman 31 May 1941. Laski had pointed out "The House is still .... a place where the details of administration may be scrutinised by inquiry." Tribune complained that "A disturbing aspect of this affair is that the Labour Party which should be guardian of civil liberties has not taken the initiative. They and not the Tories should have been foremost in insisting that Parliament's control over delegated legislation should be strengthened." Tribune, 26 May 1944.
10. Morrison had stated in the course of one Debate, "The Government have their point of view, I have my point of view and some Hon. Members have a different point of view." Ibid., cc. 1668. Morrison had presented a Memorandum in the Home Policy Committee arguing against the setting up of a Standing Committee CAB 75/15. H.P.C.(43), 5th Meeting, 16 February 1943.
11. The motion welcomed the setting up of a Select Committee "without power to send for persons, papers or records .... (but which should) carry on a continuous examination of all Statutory Rules and Orders and other instruments of delegated legislation presented to Parliament ...." According to the Economist 26 February 1944 the earliest draft of the motion had 138 signatures (p.269).
12. The Parliamentary Report to the Annual Conference stated that "The Party supported the principle of the motion, subject to certain conditions, which provided that the rights of private Members should not be diminished and there should be no delays which would hold up the work of the Government." L.P.A.C.R. 1944, p.76.

13. In a speech at Bradford in March 1944 Morrison had called for changes in Parliamentary procedure to speed up legislation on the mass of post-war problems. "Parliament must be prepared to leave to the Executive the task of working out the details within the policy (that) Parliament has approved and implement them by means of departmental regulations and orders." Daily Herald, 6 March 1944. See also the speech at Dundee, Daily Herald, 3 October 1943.
14. With wider terms of reference which were apparently based upon the Donoughmore Committee's recommendations. H.C. Deb. 401, cc. 310. As Morrison was to admit later this was because of the strength of feeling in the House of Commons. H.C. 189 189-1 Q. 3683. In fact only three weeks after the House approved the setting up of the Select Committee the Home Secretary admitted to the House that owing to a Departmental oversight a number of regulations had not been placed before the House some years earlier and that it would be necessary to rectify the error and bring in an Act to relieve him of any consequences which he might possibly incur from the failure involved. H.C. Deb. 402, cc. 761/7, 1207/51. Morrison regarded it as "a good example of the way in which, even at a time of national emergency, the supremacy of Parliament remained inviolate." Morrison, Autobiography, p.184.
15. Following the Special Report of the Select Committee the Government introduced the Statutory Instruments Bill (enacted as 9 + 10 Geo. 6. Ch.6) which among other things provided for a uniform period of 40 days during which instruments had to lie on the Table of the House. Previously this period had varied from 20 to 40 days. See Special Report from the Select Committee on Statutory Rules and Orders, H.C. 113 (1943/4) and H.C. Deb. 415, cc. 1095 et seq. and Eaves, op.cit., pp. 157/160.
16. This was commonly called the Vivian Committee. At a Cabinet Meeting it was decided on Morrison's suggestion "After the prolongation Bill had been passed, the Home Secretary should take steps to instigate an Inquiry into the working that would be necessary if circumstances should render an early Election desirable. The Inquiry should, however, be carried out with the minimum of publicity." CAB 65/19: 100(4)1 6 October 1941. He did not think that failure to make changes in the franchise law would make it impossible to hold an election likely to return a House of Commons tolerably representative of the nation. CAB 67/9: (W.P. 41 CG. 106). 3 October 1941. The Committee's terms of reference had been "to consider whether for effecting the purposes of the present system of electoral registration improved methods and machinery can be devised, having regard to the circumstances likely to obtain in the period following the cessation of hostilities and to examine the technical problems involved in any scheme of redistribution of Parliamentary seats by way of preparation for consideration of the principles in which any scheme should be based."
17. Letter from the Prime Minister to the Speaker 1st February 1944. Quoted Cmd. 6534, on pp.2/3. The Party had called for "A Commission to inquire into and report on all aspects of the working of the Election System since the last war, with a view to such reforms as experience shows to be desirable" L.P.A.C.R. 1943, p. 171, but its approval was formal and its mover significantly

17. (cont'd.) later became a permanent Transport House Official (H.R. Underhill). In addition, an all-party motion in the Commons calling for the appointment of a Conference received the support of some 22 Labour Members. See Manchester Guardian, 13 May 1943. The Labour Organiser had been critical. At the time of the appointment of the Speaker's Conference it posed the question, "just what is Labour's policy on Electoral Reform? We have said elsewhere that Labour's policy is made by Conference. Very well, trace Conference decisions back 40 years and all one gets is a series of unimportant, scrappy and even contradictory Friday's resolutions. The N.E.C. has never once reported or presented an adequate policy on this important matter. Conference has had no lead and no chance to approve form or frame a policy. And the Speaker's Conference will have almost finished its work when the Labour Party Conference meets." Vol. 24. 266, (February, 1944), p.4. Italics in the Original.
18. James Griffiths and John Parker (letters to author). See also N.E.C. Minutes 89, 57E Elections Sub-Committee, 9 March 1944 and New Statesman 4 March 1942. J.S. Middleton, the Party Secretary, also favoured P.R. See N.E.C. Minutes, 85, E.C. 15, 1941/2 M.217. 4 February 1942. Labour Members on the Conference had frequently consulted Transport House Labour Organiser Vol. 24, No.272 (September, 1944) p.9. The New Statesman was critical of the Conference's conclusions in general and the retention of the plural vote in particular. New Statesman 10 June 1944. Neither was Reynolds News impressed, 4 June 1944.
19. Tribune commented before the Election "If democracy survives in this country, it will be in spite of Winston Churchill," 18 May 1945. Churchill's actions during the campaign only served to reinforce the trend towards his defeat and he can have gained little satisfaction out of the humiliation of Laski in the Libel case that arose from an incident at Newark. Accounts of the campaign can be found in R.B. MacCallum and Alison Redman, The British General Election of 1945 (London: Oxford University Press, 1947), Ch.7 and 8., and of the Libel Case in Laski-v-Daily Express Newark Advertiser Co.Ltd, and Parlby (London: Daily Express, 1948).
20. The Left had long demanded the return to the normal working of representative government. See New Statesman 12 February 1944. The Party as a whole, hung on and asked that the election be postponed until the autumn partly in order to ensure that improvements could be made in the Electoral Register. See Attlee's letter to Churchill 21 May 1945. L.P.A.C.R. 1945, pp. 87/8. Cf. Ellen Wilkinson's Chairmans Address, Ibid., p.78.
21. Lees-Smith had asserted on 23 October 1940, "I believe that Parliament stands very high in the estimate of the people today. It was never higher in my life-time." H.C. Deb. 365, cc. 1065. Cf. "The flexibility and poise of the British Parliamentary institution has been a beacon to democrats everywhere throughout the War. It is of the highest importance that when in so many countries democracy will be striving to rebuild its institutions, the British Parliament should continue to show an example of temperate control and cool efficiency." Daily Herald, 7 October 1944.

22. The Speakers' Conference had suggested that a Committee should be set up to examine certain detailed suggestions for the amendment of the electoral law. The Speaker had elaborated the points in question in a letter to Herbert Morrison who sought and secured Cabinet approval for the Committee to be set up. See CAB 66/56.WP (44)591 and CAB 65/44.WM 144(44)1.
23. The vague nature of the alleged 'agreement' is well illustrated by the speech of Sir H. O'Neill (a member of the Conference) who told the House "Agreement was reached in the Speakers' Conference on certain controversial matters. It was understood that if one party gave way on one thing the other party would give way on another. This was, at any rate, my understanding of it.....I think it is not denied that there was an agreement. The only thing that is denied is whether (it) binds this Parliament. I maintain that it does, or that it ought to." H.C.Deb. 448, cc.1943 Italics mine. In view of Sir Hugh's apparent desire to have it all ways, one can sympathise with Mr. Eric Fletcher's (Islington, West) wish to have all future discussions written down, recorded and published. Ibid., cc.1958. Minutes of the Conference were, in fact, kept and Butler, op.cit., p.116, refers to them but unfortunately the documents concerned are not available for inspection.
24. Not the least of which was the Conservative majority over all other Members combined. See Economist 19 February 1944 (pp.234/5). The New Statesman asked, "Can it be true that the Labour Party has agreed to be represented in the Speakers' Conference on electoral reform on a basis corresponding to its (strength) in the present Parliament?.....The House of Commons, elected in 1935, cannot possibly be trusted as representing rightly the present state of public opinion; and it is entirely unjust and inconsistent with the conditions of Coalitions, as we understand them, for the Tories to use their war-prolonged majority to force electoral changes which suit them at the expense of other parties. Surely the Labour Party ought to insist on full equality with the Tories as a necessary condition of taking any part in the Conference, which will be settling the conditions not only for the vital post-war election, but also presumably for some time to come." 12 February 1944.
25. According to Ede, Ibid., cc. 3023/35, the first indicators of how the constituencies could be divided was received from the Commissioners towards the end of 1947 although the information was only published the week before the debate in the form of a White Paper. Representation of the People Bill, Statement showing the name, contents and electorates of certain proposed new constituencies. Cmd. 7363 (March, 1948). No active recommendation for a division was made by the Commissioners and the final decision was left to the Government and the House. The Text of the letter from the Boundary Commissioners announcing that they had prepared a scheme for implementation should the House decide in its favour can be found in H.C.Deb. 448, cc.3114. Cf. cc.3121/3. The Government was not completely blameless for even if the substance of the changes were acceptable the method and timing were objectionable. Economist 27 March 1948.

If we understand the role of Parliament in the field of parliamentary government, we shall be able to understand the consistent attitude of the government of the day, the attitude which it took in the field of the House of Commons reflected the result of a general policy which was adopted in regard to the kind of that held by its members. The role of individuals in this process was vital. There is little doubt, for example, that the influence of Parliamentary life on the members of the House of Commons.

**CHAPTER EIGHT**

The case of David Kirkwood is well-known. The House of Commons explained of the blinding influence of Parliament.

"The House of Commons is not a school of political training; it is a school, and it is a school of all kinds. It cannot live in it for years as a 'training' of the other side ..."

**THE POST-WAR YEARS**

... the new Labour Government... the social life of the country... own class... the very man and woman... of Labour is represented."

These views were not confined to the House of Commons... found Parliament..."

"It is an Iron Rule and it is... these and suddenly a... Black and... House of... All this... because it is... legislation."

... of the... the House of Commons... its culture... 1945...

1. D. Kirkwood, *The Life of David Kirkwood* (London: George G. Harrap, 1937), p. 111.
2. H. S. Branson, *The House of Commons: A History of the House of Commons and Parliament* (London: George Harrap & Co., 1941), p. 117.
3. Willis Toole, *The House of Commons: A History* (London: Robert Hale, 1937), p. 117.
4. *Ibid.*, pp. 118 and 121.



## Parliamentary Conservatism.

If the achievements of the Labour Government of 1945/51 in the field of parliamentary representation completed the triumph of its consistent adherence to the principle of "one man, one vote," the other measures it took in the field of House of Commons reform represented the pursuit of a general outlook which was different in degree rather than kind from that held by its opponents. The role of individuals in this process was vital. There is little doubt, for example, that the influence of Parliamentary life had a mellowing effect on most members of the P.L.P. The case of David Kirkwood is well-known. (1) Fenner Brockway complained of the blunting influence of Parliament.

"The House of Commons is more than a scene of political conflict; it is a Club, and if one is human at all one cannot live in it for years as an 'enemy' of the other side .... social contact was inevitable and very often one saw Labour M.P.'s falling to the glamour of the social life of the other side, steadily leaving their own class behind them and becoming conditioned by the amenities and atmosphere of the class which exploited the very men and women they had been sent to the House of Commons to represent." (2)

Such views were not confined to the 'twenties. Bessie Braddock, amongst others, found Parliament confusing at first.

"Is it an Itma Parliament .... doors here and doors there and suddenly a curtain will be swung aside and Black Rod appears telling us to go to the House of Lords. All this soulless ritual will have to be changed because it is obstructing Socialist legislation." (3)

Yet by the end of the Attlee Government she had apparently become accustomed to the place. (4) Herbert Morrison had long since become accustomed to the House of Commons and its culture. Referring to the new influx of the P.L.P. in 1945 he

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1. D. Kirkwood, My Life of Revolt (London: George G. Harrop, 1935), Ch.17.
  2. A.F. Brockway, Inside the Left: Thirty Years of Platform, Press, Prison and Parliament (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1942), pp.222/3.
  3. Millie Toole, Mrs. Bessie Braddock MP: A Biography (London: Robert Hale, 1957), pp. 137/8.
  4. Ibid., pp. 149 and 151.

wrote, "On the first day of assembly they broke the rules by singing the 'Red Flag.' Some did not know the words and some, judging by the rendering, the tune. The brief performance horrified some of the Tories and I must admit # mildly disturbed me. These youngsters still had to absorb the atmosphere of the House...." (5)

There were other occasions when the Labour Party failed to remove some of the deadweight of Parliamentary tradition. When the House of Commons was bombed in 1941 the Tribune called for "a completely new building, with every modern device." (6) It went unheeded. Churchill, moving the motion for the acceptance of the Report of the Select Committee which had mirrored his own desire that it should be build in the old style, found opposition from Mr. Tinker and David Kirkwood who wished the Government to pay more attention to the housing of the people, rather than the people's representatives. (7) Their support came from the I.L.P. and independents - the rest of the P.L.P. who bothered to present themselves at the debate voted for the reconstruction of the Chamber to which they had become accustomed.

In such a situation it was inevitable that the individuals whose task it was to formulate governmental policy on the question of procedural and other reforms. That individual was Herbert Morrison, whose outlook was to operate the institutions already in existence rather than to change them in any radical way that would lead to fundamental divisions between himself and his political opponents.

Morrison's parliamentary conservatism was evident in his attitude

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5. Morrison, Autobiography, p.251, Italics mine.
  6. Tribune, 16 May 1941.
  7. Report from the Select Committee on House of Commons (Rebuilding). H.C.109, (1943/44), and H.C. Deb. 407, cc. 1003 et.seq. 25 January 1945.

to reform. Traditionalist to the core he described marching through the Lobbies as "a useful and pleasant occasion." (8) Moving slight modifications in the hours of the meeting of the House, Morrison countered suggestions that fundamental changes should be made in the role of Members of Parliament, saying "I do not want Parliament to become exclusively a body of full-time Members of Parliament," (9) on the ground that it would be isolated from the day-to-day life of the nation. His conservatism on this occasion contrasted with his attacks on the P.L.P. in the early 'twenties before he entered Parliament. Part of the general, though not specific, criticism made in those years was against the dual role of P.L.P. Members with additional Union responsibilities. Morrison, of course, was not the only individual with the desire to preserve the traditions of the House of Commons. The famous expulsion of Garry Allighan, Member for Gravesend, from the House in October 1947 showed that there were many who believed that the term "Honorable Members" had some meaning. (10) The nature of the incident, however, the revelation of confidential information received as a Member of Parliament for gain and the unfounded allegations that others were so occupied, leads one to the conclusion that the eventual outcome was a reflection of internal P.L.P. wrangling as much as the maintenance of Parliamentary prestige and privilege. Indeed, the insistence of the Government, to pursue the matter in the House, against the advice of the Opposition, and after Allighan had made an overfull confession of guilt in which he excused his actions as errors of judgement rather than breaches of privilege, reflected an excessive respect for backbench opinion. (11) Once the Government's motion

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8. H. Morrison, Government and Parliament: A Study from the Inside (London: Oxford University Press, Second Edition, 1959).
  9. H.C. Deb. 421, cc. 2217/58 (cc.2255) 12 April 1946. The motion was opposed by 17 Members mainly Members of the P.L.P.
  10. H.C. Deb. 443, cc. 1094 et seq. 30 October 1947.
  11. H.C. 138 (Parliamentary Papers 1946/7, ix, p.561. See Note 1.



deeming Allighan to be

"guilty of dishonourable conduct which deserves to be severely punished as tending to destroy mutual confidence among Members and to lower this House in the estimation of the people"

had been approved in a relatively straight party division over the Conservatives who had argued that the motion improperly extended Parliamentary privilege (12) by proposing to punish an offence which was not against the law, immediately changed their views. They began to argue that as the House had taken its decision the only punishment worthy of the offence was expulsion, an argument which found favour amongst the younger Left-Wing Members such as Harold Lever. Morrison, however, now the defender rather than prosecutor of parliamentary conservatism, argued for tolerance - expulsion was too severe - and he gained the support of a number of backbenchers who called on their fellows to support their colleagues. It was all to no avail and Allighan was expelled by 187 votes to 75. (13)

The P.L.P.'s action seemed to reflect internal divisions for no earlier breaches of privileges merited such severe action at all. (14) The context of the Allighan case in the history of relatively poor relations between the P.L.P. and the Press also indicates that on this occasion Parliamentary privileges were used as the means to secure a rather unsavoury end. Its singular occurrence raises the question as to why the Labour Party made no attempt to revamp the outmoded role of Parliament as a development from a kingly rather than a democratic base. One can only suggest that its unwillingness to do so reflected the conservative nature both of the persons who sought to gain and keep power and the conservatism

12. H.C. Deb. 443, cc. 1095/1159. See also H.C. 138, and the related case of Evelyn Walkden. H.C. 142.

13. H.C. Deb. 443, cc. 1159/1198.

14. See Note 2.

of the institution itself. If, as Laski and others contended, it was true that British Government was essentially a matter of consent and that the consent required to govern meant the willingness of the Parties not to adopt entrenched positions but to proceed pragmatically then the real way to secure change was to make only small changes. To secure the agreement of a substantially large proportion not only of the governing Party but of the Opposition too. Thus demands for the broadcasting of Parliament were resisted as firmly by Labour Governments as their Conservative predecessors.<sup>(15)</sup> Of course, there were occasions when one Party felt able to proceed, despite the opposition of its opponents, but usually in such cases where agreement has not been forthcoming the governing party has had the backing of the electorate. This was the case in 1945, although on the questions of procedure, personal security and the constitutional relationship between Parliament and the Executive the Labour Party followed rather than departed from established procedures, largely because of the personalities involved - Herbert Morrison and Hugh Dalton.

"This tribunal yet at all times... will reinforce (the power of... re-orientation of... ancient rituals... practical needs of our..."

15. See, for example, H.C. Deb. 413, cc. 444; H.C. Deb. 417, cc. 213/4.

Parliamentary Procedure

According to Hanson and Wiseman,

"whatever government might have been in power, it was inevitable that parliamentary procedure should receive an overhaul at the end of the Second World War. With a Labour Government in power, the need was all the greater, because the large-scale programme of social and economic change to which Labour was committed could not but impose new strains on an already overstrained parliamentary machine." (16)

Within the Labour Party itself there had been little reference to the subject of the reform of Parliamentary procedure during war-time.

While the Party leaders were generally silent, however, there were occasional references in academic and party publications to the desirability of reform. Emmanuel Shinwell, for example, argued in his book When the Men Come Home that,

"There must be a speeding up of the parliamentary machinery .... (because) the business of the genuine believer in parliamentary institutions is to create in the public mind a healthy respect for the supreme executive of the nation." (17)

The Daily Herald did advocate increases in the number of Standing Committees so as to expedite the detailed examination of Bills. (18) Its main response, however, was to the MacIntyre incident. (19)

"This trivial yet significant episode," it argued, "will reinforce (the people's) desire for a strict re-examination of Parliamentary procedure, so that ancient rituals which are out of date with the practical needs of our age may be set aside." (20)

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16. A.H. Hanson and H.V. Wiseman, Parliament at Work: A Case-Book of Parliamentary Procedure (London: Stevens, 1962), p.315.
  17. E. Shinwell, When the Men Come Home (London: Victor Gollancz, 1944), p.52.
  18. Daily Herald, 17 January 1944.
  19. See Note 3.
  20. Daily Herald, 18 April 1945.

In the House of Commons itself the question of procedure was raised but mainly by Conservatives who wished to set up a Committee of the House to investigate the internment of Members. In one short adjournment debate Earl Winterton (21) raised the question and gained some support from Aneurin Bevan, who argued for the rights of the House vis-a-vis the Executive. "Our difficulty is not that the Government cannot act. It is that we have not any means of making them act." (22) The loss of initiative was, therefore, not merely legislative, it was inherent in the institutional arrangements, developed from despotic government, which had not become as responsible as it might appear to be at first sight. In the same debate Ellis Smith called for a Select Committee to be set up in order to

"have a pooling of experience and ideas so that we can make our Parliamentary machinery as efficient as it can be made to meet post-war problems, while preserving the reasonable and democratic rights of Private Members." (23)

Tribune too defined the main problems as that of "(devising) rules which will speed the passage of numerous urgent Bills while preserving the right of the ordinary Members to criticise and amend them." (24)

Apparently, however, it was not until late into 1944 that the problems of parliamentary procedure were considered important enough for the War Cabinet to take action. In January 1945 the Whips, who had been asked to sound out Members about the possibility of the Appointment of a Select Committee on Parliamentary procedure, found that the Conservative and Liberal Parties while fairly evenly divided, were against the idea. "On the other hand," they said,

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21. H.C. Deb. 400, cc.1070 et.seq. 26 May 1944.

22. Ibid., cc. 1098,

23. Ibid., cc. 1077. Cf. Smith's question to the Prime Minister H.C. Deb. 398, cc. 2167/8. 6 April 1944.

24. Tribune, 2 June 1944.

"Labour Members were generally in favour of taking any steps which would lead to a speeding up of the Parliamentary machine and for this reason would support the proposal for a Select Committee." (25) Consequently, the war-time coalition deferred discussion of a document produced by a Committee of Ministers which had been set up to examine possible procedural reforms of the House of Commons which would ease the burdens of the period of reconstruction that would follow the cessation of hostilities. It was this document which was to form the basis of the Labour Governments reforms. (26)

There was, however, a second reason for the appointment of a Select Committee as Herbert Morrison pointed out in the debate on the motion to set up a Select Committee on Procedure, namely that it was fifteen years since the last Select Committee had been convened. (27) Morrison may, of course, have added that the Party had long since declared its intentions on the reform of procedure even if he had had to be reminded of the fact. At the 1945 Conference Sir Stafford Cripps, addressing the body for the first time since his readmission to the Party, made reference to "the need that there will be for expediting our Parliamentary arrangements," (28) an allusion which was taken up by Konni Zilliacus in a reference to the possibility of House of Lords obstruction. Morrison could not recall off-hand the details of Parliamentary Problems and Procedure, but he stated his own position clearly.

"It is perfectly obvious," he said, "that if we are to get what we want out of Parliament, there must be a modernisation of Parliamentary procedure, provided that it is consistent with the House of Commons having the essential control over finance, policy and the principles of legislation." (29)

25. CAB. 65/49: 7(45)10. 22 January 1945.
26. CAB. 66/53: WP (44)424. 1 August 1944.
27. H.C. Deb. 413, cc. 987. 24 August 1945.
28. L.P.A.C.R. 1945, p.95.
29. Ibid., p.132. The only other reference to the subject in the war-years appears to have been in the N.E.C. Policy Document "Labour's Home Policy." See L.P.A.C.R. 1940, pp.191/5. "The procedure of the House of Commons must be reformed to enable it to grapple with the problems of the positive State." (195)



It was for these reasons that a Select Committee was appointed shortly after Parliament met in August 1945, "to consider the Procedure in the Public Business of this House and to report what alterations, if any, are desirable for the efficient despatch of such business" and with instructions to "report as soon as possible upon any scheme for the acceleration of proceedings on Public Bills which may be submitted to them by His Majesty's Government." (30) This the Select Committee did, but in so doing they were used by the Government as a means of legitimising the Government's own proposals by discussion, even when negative, and that the major proportion of their deliberations in fact served to merely refine the Government's ideas. In addition, the personnel of the Labour Government acted as agents of the Executive first whilst Labour Members on the Select Committee conceived their role in terms of the interests of the legislature. Neither acted as agents of the Labour Party per se, although as will be seen, certain well-definable party positions were evident.

In order to facilitate a speedy response to the wishes of the House the Select Committee was permitted to meet during the Parliamentary recess; a freedom which it used to such good effect that it produced its first Report on 16 October 1945. (31) This Report dealt with proposals which had been originally drafted by the Coalition Cabinet Committee and which the Government had submitted to the Select Committee. The proposals were not, therefore, specifically those to which the Labour Party felt committed. In their preamble to the Memorandum the Government stated that,

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30. H.C. Deb. 413, cc. 1058.

31. First Report of the Select Committee on Procedure. H.C. 9. 91 (1945/6).

"the present Government, whilst not thinking it right to commit itself at this stage, feels that the scheme covers a number of proposals which are eminently worthy of consideration by the Select Committee and form a useful basis from which the Committee may commence its discussions." (32)

The proposals were not, therefore, Party proposals of the Executive and as such reflected the Executive's desire to ensure institutional change to facilitate the passage of increased legislation. The Government, for a variety of reasons, not the least of which seems to have been fear of an adverse Parliamentary reaction, recognised that any modification in Procedure would have to be made "on an experimental basis." The Select Committee responded by stating, in turn, that,

"it would follow that any alterations in the Orders governing the procedure of the House which the adoption of these proposals may require would take the form of Sessional Orders during the experimental period." (33)

The Government's most important proposals was "that substantially all Bills should be referred to Standing Committees and the passage of Bills in Standing Committees accelerated." (34) To achieve this object, which in Morrison's words, "involved no more than a more extensive application of the procedure already provided for in Standing Orders" (35) the scheme proposed to extend the sitting hours of Committees, to increase the number and reduce the size of Committees and to make amendments in the procedure and practice of the Debate in Committee. The overall purpose behind the scheme was to save Parliamentary time and increase its efficiency.

32. Ibid., (Appendix) p.x., para.2.

33. Ibid., p.ii. para.4. The wording of this paragraph was decided on the casting vote of the Chairman (Sir Robert Young) after an 8-8 vote along Party lines. The Labour Members' alternative wording would have been less emphatic in its claims. See Ibid., p.xvii.

34. H.C. Deb. Vol.415, cc.2346 (Morrison). Cf. H.C.9. Report, paras. 7 and 8.

35. Morrison, Government and Parliament, p.208. See Note 4.

The Committee's reaction was, in the main, favourable. They approved the proposals to refer all Bills to Standing Committees and to increase the number of Standing Committees from the existing maximum of five(36) to as many as were "necessary expeditiously to dispose of the Bills coming up from the House....."(37) Whilst pointing out some of the practical difficulties that such a change would involve as regards accommodation, staff recruitment, and the strain on the Law Officers, the Committee agreed, that, apart from the Scottish Committee the composition of which should remain unchanged, the size of each Committee should be reduced from 85 to 50 with a permanent nucleus of 20 (instead of 30-40). They also recommended that the number of Members added for each particular Bill should not total more than 30 (instead of 40-55) and that the quorum should be reduced from 20 to 15.

The Committee agreed, with a slight amendment to the particular hours involved, to the proposal that the Standing Committees should meet for  $2\frac{1}{2}$  per occasion, instead of two hours as previously, but viewed a proposal that the Committees should meet on three days a week with a common disfavour. It was felt by the Select Committee that such a procedure ought to "be regarded as an expedient to relieve congestion, rather than as a normal practice....."(38)

The Select Committee agreed with the Government that Standing Order 49A which had been repealed as obsolete in 1933 should be re-enacted to allow Standing Committees to sit concurrently with the House in the afternoon, but did so, after a division (39) and with the proviso "that there should be no further inroad into the already severely curtailed time available for Private Members

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36. Which included the Standing Committee on Scottish Bills.
37. H.C. 9-1, p.v. para.8.
38. Ibid., p.vi. para.14.
39. Ibid., p. xix/xx.



to raise matters."(40)

The Select Committee, however, disagreed with the Government over the latter's proposals for prescribing and enforcing a time-limit on the proceedings in Standing Committee.(41) The Memorandum had advocated a "special type of guillotine resolution," specifying the total time to be made available for the Committee stage of the Bill, and a Special Emergency Business Committee to subdivide the time available on the Committee Stage. Morrison later wrote that the Government had

"hoped that by removing control of the Guillotine within the overall time limit from the Government and placing it in the hands of a 'neutral' Committee, we would take part of the political edge off the Guillotine and make it less objectionable to Members."(42)

By contrast the Select Committee took the view that the guillotine should do no more than name the date by which the Bill should be reported and that the "detailed allocation of sittings to parts of the Bill" should be the responsibility of a sub-committee of the Standing Committee itself consisting of the Chairman and seven other members nominated by the Speaker.(43) The Government's scheme was rejected largely on the evidence of the permanent officials of the House whilst the Select Committee's view was accepted by the Government as an improvement on their own.(44)

The Select Committee also approved of the idea,

40. Ibid., p.vii. para.15.
41. Although, technically, this was not the Government's proposal their acceptance of the Select Committee's alternative proposal as "an improvement on the one which they put forward" (Morrison: H.C.Deb. 415, cc.2349), justifies the assertion.
42. Morrison, Government and Parliament, p.213.
43. H.C.9-1, p.vii/viii para. 16/18.
44. H.C.Deb. 415, cc.2349.

"that fuller use should be made of the procedure by which the Minister in charge of a Bill circulates to the Committee notes on any clauses which are not readily understood without explanation"(45)

and agreed, subject to the preservation of the right of any Member to object to the taking of both Stages on any one day, to the abandonment of the rule which prevented two stages of a financial resolution being taken on the same day. The Government accepted the reservation.

On the other hand the Select Committee rejected two further procedural changes suggested by the Government.(46) Firstly, that on the Report Stage of a Financial Resolution the Question should be put without amendment or debate. Secondly, that Committee Chairmen should be empowered to disallow debate on the motion, "that the Clause stand part of the Bill" if he was of the opinion that there had been adequate discussion about the Clause on Amendment before the Committee. The latter it rejected as neither desirable nor necessary and regarded the saving of time on the former as "negligible". Morrison on behalf of the Government announced that it was proposed "to ask the Select Committee to be good enough to look at these points again....."(47) and, as will be seen, had determined to insist on its way when the occasion arose.

Superficially the Government had profited by the Select Committee's report which it quickly translated into Sessional Orders.(48) The Committee's proceedings, however, revealed a somewhat different story. Although out of 24 Paragraphs only 5 were contested, those that were divided against were

45. H.C. 9-1, p.viii. para.20.

46. Ibid., p.viii, paras. 21/22.

47. H.C.Deb. 415, cc. 2350. See below footnote 68.

48. On 15 November 1945. H.C.Deb. 415, cc. 2344.et.seq.

opposed along party lines and represented some of the most important paragraphs of the Report, while some alternative paragraphs were highly critical of the Government's optimistic estimates of the time which would be saved. Given that the Government memorandum was only "a useful basis from which the Committee may commence its discussions" and was, as such, a moderate document the proceedings augured ill for the future. Moreover, the fact remains that the Government was roundly defeated on some issues upon which it felt strongly by an overt all-party opposition of legislators. This, too, was later to lead to conflict.

It should also be noted that there were specific exceptions made to the Bills to be referred to Standing Committees. In addition to Bills excepted under Standing Order 46 (Bills for imposing taxes, Consolidated Fund and Appropriation Bills, and Bills for the confirmation of Provisional Orders) the Government proposed to keep on the Floor of the House; 'one-clause' Bills not requiring detailed examination in Committee; Bills which it might be necessary to pass with great expedition and Bills of first-class constitutional importance. In the case of the latter Morrison made it perfectly clear that he meant "political" rather than economic measures. Moreover, the Government retained the right, subject to rules of convention, and accepted by the Select Committee to move that the Committee Stage of any important Bill should be taken on the Floor of the House. (49)

In the short run, however, the Government saw no reason to provoke controversy with the Select Committee, perhaps because the cry of "Gestapo" was still too close for comfort but more probably because the Select Committee was

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49. H.C. 9-1 p.iv, para. 6/7. For Morrison's definition of "first class constitutional important" See Ibid., Q. 195/201 and Government and Parliament, p.210.

still deliberating and could still change its mind.(50) Moreover, as such,

"the problem (of) how Parliament can function best, how it can do its work most effectively though consistently maintaining the essentials of control in its own hands,"(51)

remained the aim of both the Government and the Select Committee. It was only when the Select Committee had made its final Report that it became apparent that the two parties had different notions of "Parliamentary control".

However, before those differences became apparent the Select Committee had issued its Second Report.(52) This Report was devoted entirely to Questions and Divisions, and the Government's response was restricted closely to a very narrow point of procedure. The Government's case was contained in a Memorandum submitted by W. Glenvill Hall, Financial Secretary to the Treasury, in which it was suggested that the period of notice required for oral answers to Questions should be extended from 24 to 48 hours in order to "economise both time and effort in Departments and to increase the efficiency of the service for the individual Member."(53) This would apply particularly to cases where consultations between different Departments or widely separated branches of the same Department were involved. The Committee accepted the Government's argument but pointed out that part of the answer to the problem involved lay in the willingness of Members to restrict their activities in this field to essential matters. In order to encourage Members in this respect, they recommended that Questions not requiring oral answers should receive a reply within seven days

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50. Although Churchill's miscalculation during the election campaign had worked in the Labour Party's favour some Members of the Opposition lost no time in attributing to the Government some of the misrepresented implications of Sir Stafford Cripps' follies of the 'thirties. See, for example, the Speech of Quintin Hogg. H.C. Deb. 413, cc.1037/1048, 24 August 1945.
51. H.C. Deb. 413, cc.1057 (Morrison).
52. On 24 January 1945. Second Report from the Select Committee on Procedure, H.C. 58, 58-1.
53. Ibid., p.21. para.14.

of their appearance on the order paper and that Departments should be expected to reply to Members' letters within a fortnight. When implementing the Committee's suggestion on 22 March 1946 the Government, again preferring to use Sessional rather than Standing Orders so as to emphasise the experimental nature of the reforms, voiced their agreement with the Select Committee's point of view, recognising in particular that the system could only work with the "cordial co-operation of Hon. Members."

There is nothing to suggest that the Labour Government took or wanted to take a radical or distinctive Party stance on these particular issues, confining its suggestions, as we have noted, to a very narrow point of practice. Indeed the second part of the Report which dealt with and rejected a variety of proposals, including mechanical methods, designed to reduce the time involved in division merely echoed the conservative view of the Government chief Whip, Mr. William Whiteley. (54) Herbert Morrison later declared that, "moving through the Division Lobbies is a useful and pleasant social occasion" - an attitude quite representative of the Government's expressed views. (55) Moreover, the Government's presentation of its case to the Select Committee was basically that of the Executive. It was the Select Committee which forced the Government, without much effort admittedly, to consider the complimentary changes that were involved in the proposals which they advocated. In accepting the Select Committee's conclusions the Labour Government's Ministers were acting partly out of Executive self-interest with the consequences for Parliament as an offshoot of this. The procedure of the House of Commons was being reformed

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54. Ibid., pp. 1766/1804.

55. Morrison, Government and Parliament, p.215.



in the interests of the Government, in order to facilitate their legislative programme and to make Parliament a more willing instrument for Executive rule.

By contrast the Select Committee, including its Labour Members, emphasised the critical role of Parliament and sought to increase its power in this respect by ensuring that the responsibility of the Executive was tested as often and as quickly as possible. On one occasion, however, this view was severely tested when a move to reduce the number of questions to be asked per day from three to two on a temporary basis, until the volume of questions declined to normal, was defeated on a vote which split the Labour camp in two; three in favour, three against. Most Members apparently took the view that the initiative had to come from the Executive rather than the Legislature. Having taken that initiative it was up to the Executive, not the Legislature, to use it to the best advantage. However, the overall impression remains that Labour Party Members in Executive and Legislative roles adopted the primary attitude of those roles rather than the programme, insofar as one existed, of the Party as a whole. Nowhere was this more apparent than on the Select Committee's Third Report.

The Third Report of the Select Committee, which was issued on 31 October 1946, derived its general pattern from a Memorandum on procedure written by Sir Gilbert Campion, Clerk to the House at the Committee's invitation. (56) All the witnesses were asked to make comments on Sir Gilbert's views and the Select Committee questioned witnesses, including Herbert Morrison and Glenvil Hall for the Government, both on their reactions to the Memorandum and on any alternative suggestions they might have. Inevitably, therefore, the Select Committee acted as a tribunal for competing ideas whereas the Government appeared as the purveyor of one set of ideas. Inevitably, too, the Select Committee felt free to accept

56. H.C. 189 189-1. Sir Gilbert's Memorandum was issued as an Appendix to the Report itself, pp. xxi-lv.

or reject ideas from the point of view of the multi-functional working of the House while the Government stressed its active legislative role.

The Select Committee recognised that its task was to indicate "how to adapt procedure to the growing pressure of business" which was "fundamentally the same," though more acute, as that which had faced its predecessor in 1932. The background, however, was entirely different. In 1932 proposals were made which would have changed the character and functions of Parliament, which as an instrument of government, was under severe critical pressure from several quarters whereas in 1946 the country had emerged from a war-time situation, in which parliamentary activity was maintained and contributed a large measure to its successful prosecution. Consequently there is not at the present time any strong or widespread desire for changes in the essential character of the institution. Indeed, the prestige of Parliament has probably never been higher."(57)

Consequently, it did not consider proposals that would alter "the essential character of the House of Commons". The Select Committee further recognised that the danger to parliamentary government lay more in the burden which the growth of governmental activities placed upon it than any lack of confidence in it as such. Consequently, they concluded that "the problem....is how to adapt the procedure of the House to enable it to perform efficiently all its functions in relation to present and prospective governmental activity."(58)

The Government's attitude to the problem was set out in their Memorandum to the Select Committee.(59) "The Government," it began,

57. Ibid., p.iv/v para.3.

58. Ibid., p.v., para.5.

59. Ibid., pp.97/102.

"inevitably approach this matter from a point of view different from that of the Clerk of the House. He is concerned with 'the general improvements of the machinery and forms of the proceeding of the House so as to provide suitable instruments for the discharge of its various functions', the Government, on the other hand, must be constantly mindful of their legislative requirements, and proceed with the main objective of facilitating the passage through Parliament of legislation which the Government regard as necessary for the well-being of the nation." (60)

Although under questioning Morrison said he regarded this as a matter of emphasis (61) he made his own position perfectly clear.

"The Government is responsible to the House. On the other hand the Government has to try to lead the House." (62)

Moreover, Morrison, as we shall see later, took the view that Parliament, though ultimately sovereign, had no prescriptive right to irritate the work of the Executive.

Sir Gilbert Campion's most important proposal was to reorganise the Standing Committees by giving them responsibility for the Report as well as the Committee stage of Bills, a change which he justified on the grounds that it would speed up and streamline the legislative process. The Government, for their part, disagreed, for several reasons, but mainly because it introduced additional stages into the legislative procedure by making 6 stages instead of 4, which involved "a corresponding extra burden on Ministers;" the serious possibility that "bottlenecks" might develop and because

"the whole basis of the work of Standing Committee would be altered; if any Member had the right to attend and speak they would lose their corporate identity and their proceedings would almost certainly take longer than under the existing system." (63)

60. Ibid., p.97. Government Memorandum, para.1. (a)

61. Ibid., Q.3181. Q.3184/3186.

62. Ibid., Q.3259.

63. Ibid., p. 99. Government Memorandum, para. 8. (e).



Their alternative suggestion was that at the Report stage debate should be restricted to a) Government amendments, b) points left over from the Committee stage and c) new points arising after the completion of the Committee stage. (64) The Select Committee whilst it agreed with the Government that bottlenecks might arise rejected their scheme as well as that of Sir Gilbert (65) In particular it accepted the Speaker's view that it would involve "a drastic interference with the rights of Private Members." A further proposal to send all Scottish Bills, if the House wished, to the Scottish Standing Committee was also turned down. (66) Ironically, the Government, which had objected to the proposal on the same grounds as to the other changes, with the claim that it would be unpopular and be regarded as treating Scottish Bills as second class, were to pass measures very similar to this two years later, owing to pressure on legislative time. (67) Inquire into the matter. (71) The Government, Sir Gilbert Campion's Memorandum was especially critical of the existing procedure whereby the House control policy, especially on Supply, and he proposed that the time spent on Supplementary Estimates and in "moving the Speaker out of the Chair" should be included in Supply Days, of which there should be 28, spread evenly over the whole Session. He also suggested that there should be a fixed day each week for taking Supply. The Government disagreed with both suggestions. The latter it thought "inflexible" and the former too many, proposing 26 instead of 28 days. (68) Further recommendations advocating the relaxation of restrictions on the introduction

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64. Ibid., pp. 100/101. para. 15.

65. Ibid., p. vii, paras, 11/12.

66. Ibid., p. viii. para. 14.

67. Ibid., pp. 99/100. para. 9.

68. The two days' difference, however, can be found in the Government's rejection of the idea of a Public Expenditure Committee for which the Select Committee had set aside not more than 2 allotted days. Ibid., p. 98 para. 4 and p. xvi para. 44.

on Supply Days of the Motion "that Mr. Speaker do now leave the Chair" were treated cautiously by both the Government and the Select Committee.

The latter, however, agreed with Sir Gilbert over the number and distribution of Supply Days and with the Government on the inflexibility of having a fixed day each week for Supply purposes. (69)

A fundamental conflict arose, however, over the question of parliamentary supervision of administration. Sir Gilbert suggested that the terms of reference of the Select Committee on Statutory Instruments should be extended to enable it to question the efficiency of Orders so instruments of policy, as well as their legality. The Select Committee on Procedure, however, thought the question of delegated legislation was beyond its powers and recommended that a Select Committee or Joint Committee be set up to inquire into the whole matter. (70) The Government, however, took strong exception to the idea that Parliament should interfere in administrative details. (71) Parliament's role should be one of supervision and not initiative. "What is important is that the subordinate legislation should not go outside the authority given by Parliament. That is the great thing which has to be watched." (72) Moreover, Morrison disputed the wisdom of demanding that busy ministers should have to defend the policy contained in subordinate legislation before the Select Committee. (73) As he was to say elsewhere in evidence,

"I do not say that the House should not be a nuisance to Departments. One of the functions of Parliament is to be so; but nevertheless, Parliament has a duty to take account of the running of Departments." (74)

69. Ibid., p. ix. paras. 19/20.

70. Ibid., pp. xi/xii. paras. 29/30.

71. Ibid., p. 100. para. 12.

72. Ibid., Q. 3679. The Speaker was Morrison.

73. See, for example, Ibid., Q. 3678.

74. Ibid., Q. 3285.

This view of the role of Parliament and Government came out more fully in the proposal by Sir Gilbert Campion, which was accepted by the Select Committee, to create out of a merger between the Estimates and Public Accounts Committees one unified Public Expenditure Committee. (75) The Government strongly resisted the idea claiming that the existing Committees performed essentially different functions which could not be readily merged without some duplication of effort and loss of administrative efficiency which was at present avoided by overlapping membership and consultation between the Chairmen and Clerks. Moreover, it was not Parliament's job to interfere in administration. "Parliament's business" said Morrison,

"is to check the Government, throw it out if it wants to .... but Parliament is not a body which is organised for current administration - not in this country." (76)

Quoting the Coalition's experience with the investigatory powers of the Select Committee on National Expenditure and asserting the deterrent effect of the Public Accounts Committee, Morrison declared that amalgamation would be "disturbing, highly inconvenient and will weaken the efficiency of Whitehall administration." (77) Moreover, it would "place a very heavy burden on senior officers and inevitably hamper the efficiency of executive action by importing delays and cramping initiative." (78) Recalling the Coalition's experience he said, "the Government had no power to order the Select Committee about - quite rightly. It was a committee responsible to Parliament .... only Parliament can pull a Select Committee up. Of course the Government can ask Parliament to do so." (79)

75. Ibid., p. xvi para.44.

76. Ibid., Q. 3260.

77. Ibid., Q. 3345. For Morrison's opposition to the resurrection of the Select Committee on National Expenditure, see Q. 3229 and 3269/70.

78. Ibid., p.98. Government Memorandum, para. 3 (c).

79. Ibid., Q.3230.

Needless to say, Morrison did not point out that for the Government to ask Parliament to restrict the power of one of its investigatory Committees was politically dangerous. Yet the truth of the matter was that Morrison and the Government had attained the Ministerial taste for a quiet life, it was power rather than responsibility they were interested in. Morrison said as much when in answer to one question he said,

"It is the business of the Government to spend the money. It is the business of the House of Commons to stop them spending the money or to catch them out if they are held to be wasteful in public expenditure." (80)

Of course, if by Parliamentary control was meant to be exercised after administrative errors had been perpetrated there was always the possibility that the Minister concerned would have moved on. To be fair to Morrison he did point out that Parliament had itself given up control over Expenditure in favour of debating policy and supply, while he never denied Parliament's ultimate sovereignty. (81)

Yet the difference of opinion between the Labour Members on the Select Committee and those in the Government are directly attributable to their conception and practice of their roles as Members of the Executive and of the Legislature. Rather than reforming the mechanics of the system by which the relation between Government and Parliament were established, within a hierarchical framework derived from historical struggles, between the Crown and the Commons, they were, in fact, acting according to traditional patterns which by their very nature had a conforming effect. In other words in the post-war House of Commons there was not a unified Labour Party view on how the House

80. Ibid., Q. 3226.

81. Ibid., Q. 3189/80: 3254.

should be reformed but a multiplicity of views which, though initially diverse, were completely divided as a direct consequence of the structure of the political system.

The Government's determination to ease the procedural road for the passage of its legislation was attested on other questions too. They proposed for example, to formalise the Report Stage of the Budget

Resolutions, a proposal which the Select Committee rejected on the casting vote of the Chairman, stressing the rights of Private Members as they did so. (82) On the other hand the Government's attitude on Private Members' time was to treat the subject as an academic one owing to the Government's absorption of all such time at present, while Morrison made no secret of his contempt for the legislative role of Private Members. (83) By contrast the Select Committee advocated the speedy restoration of Private Members' time and chose to retain the Ballot. A lone attempt by a Labour Member,

Maurice Webb, to have the ballot replaced by a Committee which would give Bills precedence on merit was heavily defeated. (84) A comprehensive scheme for the incidence of Private Members' time after reintroduction, which Campion had prepared, was accepted by the Select Committee. (85)

On the question of Adjournment Motions under Standing Order No. 8 a number of suggestions were heard, amended and adopted but, from our point of view, the most illuminating statement was made by the Government in paragraph 7 of their Memorandum. They said that they saw,

82. Ibid., p.101 para. 16. for the Government's proposals, p.xii/xiii, para. 34/35 for the Select Committee's Report and p.xiii for proceedings on the divisions.

83. Ibid., p. 100 para. 11. Government Memorandum. Q. 3562 for Morrison's attitude.

84. Ibid., p. xiv. 9 votes to 1.

85. Ibid., p. xvii para. 51.



"no reason to alter the present procedure or to take any steps which would have the effect of making such motions more frequent. In particular, they would not feel it right to accept the proposal that the urgency and public importance of such motions should be decided by the Member raising the matter and his supporters. The Government are unable to agree that their time-table should be at the mercy of any forty Members who have thought of a motion which could go forward solely on the ground that it was sufficiently definite to be accepted by the Speaker." (86)

Once again the House of Commons was simply regarded as the instrument for the legitimisation of Government policy while the Executive remained the initiator and provider of all legislative wisdom. The Select Committee, yet again playing its legislative role without deference to parties, recommended that any time spent on Standing Orders should not be taken out of suspended time. (87) It continued to play this role when it once again rejected the two Government proposals which it had rejected in its first Report. (88)

The Government's attitude towards the Select Committee's report was one of thinly-disguised contempt. Instead of dealing promptly with the Report as they had done with its two predecessors, the Labour Government made no reference to it until 17 March 1947 - almost five months after the Report itself had been issued, and it was not until the following November that Debating time was made available. Obviously, it must be recognised that the Government was extremely busy and that it needed time to draw up the necessary amendments to Standing Orders that would be required. Yet the Government made it perfectly clear that it had no intention of allowing the House to discuss the merits of the Select Committee's proposals by choosing to restrict its discussion to proposals

86. *Ibid.*, p. 99. Italics mine.

87. *Ibid.*, p. xviii, para. 56.

88. *Ibid.*, p. xix. para. 60. See footnote 46 above.

which the Government had decided to implement, whether or not the Select Committee had accepted or rejected such proposals. Thus when the Question "that the Third Report of the Select Committee on Procedure be now considered"

was introduced, Morrison on behalf of the Government moved,

"that this House approves the proposals contained in the statement made by the Lord Privy Seal on 17 March 1947, arising out of the recommendations of the Select Committee on Procedure."(89)

This tactic caused Sir Robert Young to say that instead of reading "arising out of the recommendations of the Select Committee on Procedure" the motion should have read "arising out of the Government's proposals to the Select Committee on Procedure."(90) Notwithstanding, the fact the Government had accepted the rejection of certain relatively unimportant proposals it had made to the Select Committee it persisted in those which it asked the Select Committee, in Morrison's words, "to be good enough to look at....again."(91) The Select Committee having looked at the question of the establishment of an emergency Business Committee had rejected it on the grounds that it was substantially the same as one which they rejected in their first Report. The Government took the view that the proposal was essential in order to deal with the allocation of time orders, which it did not wish to write into the Guillotine resolutions which dealt with the Committee Stages of Bills kept on the Floor of the House and Report stages of any Bill, neither of which had been covered by the new arrangement whereby a sub-committee of each Standing Committee divided up the Bills with which they dealt.(92) The Government also insisted that the

89. H.C. Deb. 443, cc.1547 4 November 1947. The Lord Privy Seal was Arthur Greenwood. His statement is to be found in H.C. Deb. 435, cc.29/32.

90. H.C. Deb. 443, cc.1574.

91. See footnote 47 above.

92. H.C. Deb. 443, cc. 1559/60.

Chairman of Committees: be permitted to disallow debate on the Question "that the Clause stand part," if he was of the opinion that the principle of the clause and all matters arising out of it had already been adequately discussed. Unlike the Select Committee the Government did not think that this placed too much onus on the occupant of the Chair as the matters were ones of fact.(93)

On other points the Government broadly adopted those proposals which it had submitted to the Select Committee. The number of "allotted days" were to be 26 not 28. The formalising of the Report Stage of the Budget Resolutions i.e., that the resolutions were to be taken without amendment or debate, was to be submitted for "the judgement and decision of the House,"(94) though the divisions lists showed the predominance of party ties. Even on points which the Government accepted they asserted the primacy of the legislative programme. Thus whilst they were prepared to allow a wider use of the motion "that Mr. Speaker do leave the chair" they made the proviso that the motion must be moved by a Minister of the Crown after arrangements through the usual channels. This proviso was essential since

"The Government (felt) that they must in this way retain control of the number of these debates since otherwise there may be too many of them and not enough time given to the actual Estimates themselves."(95)

On the question of delegated legislation the Government effectively opposed the establishment of an inquiry into delegated legislation, not as a matter of principle (though Morrison's evidence to the Select Committee raises doubts about this) but on the grounds of the extraordinary nature of the

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93. H.C. Deb. 443, cc.1560/61. Cf. Sir Robert Young cc.1576 and Chuter Ede cc.1605.
94. H.C. Deb. 443, cc.1557. The right to challenge divisions was preserved, any points of detail which Members wished to raise would be left over for the Committee Stage of the Finance Bill.
95. H.C. Deb. 443, cc.1554.



existing situation, that the present machinery was an improvement upon the situation which had existed at the time of the Donoughmore Committee on Ministers Powers; that there was adequate safeguard in the working of the Select Committees on Statutory Rules and Orders and that it would be better to wait until the Statutory Instruments Act (1946), due to come into force on 1 January 1948, had been in operation before making such an inquiry. (96) To these reasonable arguments might well have been added Herbert Morrison's antipathy to possible changes in control of current administration in favour of Parliament.

It would be unfair not to point out that the Government did accept the proposal for making up time spent on Adjournment Motions under Standing Order No. 8 and agreed to adopt the Select Committee's scheme for dealing with the allocation of Private Members' time whenever it was to be restored (which was not until 1949). Yet their general approach to the Select Committee's Report was from the sectional point of view of the Executive. Sir Robert Young, Chairman of the Select Committee, made the point very forcibly when he said that

"we (the Select Committee) approached these matters as Members of the House of Commons seeking to come to decisions that would be in the interests of the business of the House of Commons, and for the convenience not only of the Government but of Hon. Members themselves." (97)

The institutional roles of the Government and the Members were, therefore, influential. This was illustrated by the speech of Sydney Silverman, another Member of the Select Committee, in the November debate. "The Government," he said,

96. H.C. Deb. 443, cc. 1555.

97. H.C. Deb. 443, cc. 1574. See Note 5.

"did not delegate their powers to the Select Committee on Procedure. They asked the Select Committee to consider evidence and to make recommendations, but they were not delegating the duty of legislating to the Select Committee on Procedure. That is reserved to the House on the Motion of the Government or on the Motion of other Hon. Members." (98)

From such a view Morrison would not have dissented and technically the House was taking a free vote but the issues, like the discussions on the Select Committee, had in fact become party issues, only Sir Robert Young from the Labour side joined the dissenting minority when the Government's motion was passed 279-118. Other Labour Members who joined in the Debate preferred to argue, sometimes between themselves, about such topics as the opportunities, or lack of them, available to Private Members. (99)

The general debate opening the Motion was followed by the introduction of new Standing Orders and amendments to existing ones, so as to give effect to the proposed procedural changes. Some of the Orders involved no more than the permanent incorporation in Standing Orders of procedure already operating, by authority of the Sessional Orders first introduced, on a temporary basis, by the Government on 15 November 1945 and renewed each year. The division which took place on the New Orders generally, though not always rigidly, followed party lines though significantly, Sir Robert Young excepted, no Labour Members voted for any of the Amendments, all of which were moved by Opposition Members who continued to muster supporters until 4 a.m. the following day.

98. H.C. Deb. 443, cc. 1592. Hence Morrison's characteristically smug comment, "The changes made in parliamentary procedure were not drastic for it was generally agreed that a change in the basic character of Parliament was neither desirable nor necessary." Morrison, Government and Parliament, p. 207 Italics mine.

99. See, for example, H.C. Deb. 443, cc. 1583/6, Dr. Morgan cc. 1594/5, Silverman and Morgan, and cc. 1618/9 Austin.

The changes in Standing Orders were so substantial that the Government had decided to set up a technical committee to examine Standing Orders from the point of view of drafting - a fact to which Morrison referred in his speech of 4 November 1947. (100) Following the precedent of 1933 it was suggested that the committee should be informal and unofficial and should report in the first instance to the Government. The Speaker had agreed to preside over such a committee - a fact which seems to have muted all criticism. The activities of this committee remain a mystery but a Departmental one consisting of Sir Gilbert Campion and seven or eight senior officers of the House drew up a list of suggestions which it laid before the Select Committee on Standing Orders (Revision) which was appointed on 5th July 1948, produced its report on 21 July and had its recommendations approved by the House on 28th July, in a matter of 25 minutes. (101)

Earlier in the year the Government had proposed new Standing Orders for Scottish business as part of their general policy for dealing with Scottish affairs. (102) The Standing Orders were amended, "to enable the House to decide, on the motion of a Minister of the Crown and in the absence of opposition by ten or more Members, to refer a Scottish Bill to the Standing Committee on Scottish Bills for consideration in principle." (103)

On its return the House would decide, without debate, and by a division if necessary, to give or not to give the Bill a Second Reading. Among the type of Bills to be remitted were technical Bills which were not controversial in a

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100. H.C. Deb. 443, cc. 1561.
101. H.C. Deb. 454, cc. 1344/52 for approval of changes. H.C. Deb. 453, cc. 167/70 for the setting up of the Select Committee and H.C. 192, (1947/48. IX, 603), for its Report.
102. "Scottish Affairs: A Memorandum on Government Proposals." Cmd. 7308., Debate 28 April 1948. H.C. Deb. 450, cc. 400/458. An examination of the changes made by the Labour Government and their subsequent operation is to be found in J.H. Burns "The Scottish Committees of the House of Commons 1948-1959." Political Studies, Vol. VIII, No. 3. (1960), 272-296.
103. Cmd. 7308, para. 5.

Party sense, and Bills primarily of Scottish interest. The Government also accepted Conservative proposals

"to refer to the Standing Committee on Scottish Bills for consideration on specified days the whole or part of the Estimates for which the Secretary of State for Scotland is responsible."(104)

This discussion of Scottish Estimates would be limited to 6 days (in fact, mornings) in addition to the days normally given to the discussion of Scottish Estimates in the Committee of Supply.

The passage of the new Standing Orders through the House was relatively smooth, although a squabble developed between some Labour Members who were in favour and others who were against devolution.(105) The Government, which like the Select Committee had previously rejected the idea of transferring the Second Reading of Scottish Bills to Standing Committee, in view of its alleged unpopularity with all Members, had been influenced both by pressure from its Scottish supporters and the extreme congestion in the Parliamentary timetable.

"The proposed new Standing Orders," the White Paper stated,

"would give more time for the discussion of Scottish affairs by Scottish Members, while preserving the control of the House over both legislation and Estimates; and they are sufficiently flexible to enable the arrangements to be varied according to the importance of the legislation and the state of the timetable in the House of Commons itself."(106)

In one respect, the right of ten Members to prevent a Bill being referred to the Scottish Standing Committee in the first place, the Government had guarded against the possibility of engendering feelings of inferiority, although only at the cost

104. Ibid., p.6. See also H.C. Deb. 443, cc. 1091/1092.

105. See, for example, the speech of William Ross. H.C. Deb. 450, cc. 437/9. Cf. David Kirkwood cc. 447/8.

106. Cmd. 7308, para.7.



of alienating its more vocal advocates of devolution. The Government, whilst it was "anxious to do everything possible within the framework of the British Constitution and the existing Parliamentary system to meet Scottish demands...." rejected the demand for a general inquiry into devolution and other issues. (107) The Economist which had welcomed the changes in Scottish Procedure as "a sensible minor improvement of Parliamentary machinery" although the Government's attitude towards the possibility of an inquiry into devolution was curious. "The attempt to close an issue before it has been properly ventilated will do the Government nothing but harm." (108) By contrast the New Statesman was complacent, "those who want Customs posts along the Border, a Scottish Secretary for External Affairs and so on will not be satisfied," it declared, "but the plan goes a considerable way to meet most reasonable aspirations." (109)

All in all the changes in procedure that were made in the years 1945/50 were designed to facilitate the passage of Government legislation by the removal of obstructive and archaic devices. Significantly, these changes involved time-saving rather than changes in practice. As late as 1960 Hanson and Wiseman noted the fact that there had up to that time been no adjournment of the House at the commencement of public business to enable Standing Committees to meet simultaneously in the afternoon, while the procedure, enabling debate on an amendment to the motion "That Mr. Speaker do now leave the chair" on any Supply day (provided that the motion is moved by a Minister) had been used rarely. (110)

The conclusion that seems to spring to mind is that rules of the political game, the notion that the Government governs and Parliament criticises but rarely

107. Ibid., para. 2 and 15.

108. Economist, 7 February 1948 and 27 March 1948, (218) and (484).  
See Note 6.

109. New Statesman, 7 February 1948.

110. Hanson and Wiseman, p.326.

obstructs, seems to have been accepted by all sides. Yet the fact remains that it was the Labour Government not the Labour Party that was responsible for the changes that took place. Writing after the event Morrison said,

"The value of (the Select Committee's) work is shown by the fact that Parliament carried a heavy post-war legislative burden without resorting to any drastic schemes involving a basic change in its procedure and a departure from its tradition of gradual development." (111)

The impression thus remains that the lack of substantial change signified the victory of the political system, its values and the reinforcement of its hierarchical structure over a Labour Party which by 1945 had become reconciled to a policy of adaptation rather than one of structural reconstruction.

The question which arises is why did the Party which had been disposed, if not well-disposed in the inter-war years, towards changes in Parliamentary procedure fail to adopt more radical measures such as Departmental Committees and devolution. The basic answer is power. In the period 1919-1939 the Labour Party was a third party struggling to be accepted as a respectable alternative Government. In 1945 that respectability was accepted by the electorate. It is easier for a Party out of power to advocate changes designed to restrict the activities of their opponents in Government. Once in Government, however, its attitude to such changes is seen from a different viewpoint. In addition, the hierarchical structure of British Government tends to reinforce the latter viewpoint that the Government governs and Parliament criticises but does not govern. Individuals and ideas outside the Cabinet would hardly succeed without support from within the Cabinet.

For most Labour M.P.'s the really necessary reforms were those involving

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111. Morrison, Government and Parliament, p.220.

economic rather than political structures. In short, Parliamentary reform beyond certain minimum requirements could best be left to those conversant with the details. Meanwhile, the intellectual and academic Left found their ideas had atrophied with the tremendous social changes that had taken place. Thus Laski's suggestions for reform including age restrictions on candidates and prerequisite service of three years' local authority or equivalent experience was no longer relevant to post-war society. (112) Most importantly, perhaps, was the fact that it was a Labour Government which held the reins of power during the transition from war to peace. As a consequence the criticisms tended to be muted in a sense that the criticisms made by members of the rather ineffective, unaccepted inter-war Party had not been accepted. Perhaps the extent of Labour's victory, the relative ease with which socialising legislation was enacted dampened the extremists fire. The victory of democracy abroad unlike 1918 was going to be followed by the victory of democratic forces at home. Whether it actually did so was besides the point, the argument was not direct action -v- Parliamentary democracy but the guidance of a social democratic government along the right lines.

"repeal of the Government of Wales Act 1927, and the clarification and re-enactment of the statute law relating to offices of profit in Wales."  
 desirable but urgent." (110)

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112. H.J. Laski "Choosing the Planners" writes in G.D.H. Cole, et.al. Plan for Britain (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1943), pp. 101/127 (110). Cf. H. Dalton, Practical Socialism for Britain p. 41.

Miscellaneous Matters (Constitutional Relationships and Personal Security)(a) The Executive and Legislative Relationship.

The Labour Government of 1945-1951 never fully solved the questions which were posed by the war-time "MacDonald" Act which had been allowed to lapse in 1944. On a number of occasions the Government found it necessary to create a post-electoral precedent by passing indemnifying legislation to relieve some of its own supporters of penalties incurred in holding minor offices of profit under the Crown. It was a situation which necessarily arose out of the war-time Government's failure to legislate on the matter and indeed shortly after the Select Committee's Report had been turned down in 1941 a Bill was passed indemnifying Arthur Jenkins to the tune of £2.10s.0d. in respect of fees he had never received. (113)

The instances during 1945-1951 were equally as trivial demanding the valuable time and energy of the Select Committee on Elections and of the House itself. (114) In none of the cases was there any suggestion of deliberate avoidance of the law and it was accepted that the persons concerned were financially worse off from holding the offices of "profit" under the Crown. The Select Committees both agreed that

"repeal of the Succession to the Crown Act 1707, and the clarification and re-enacting of the statute law relating to offices of profit is not only desirable but urgent." (115)

113. H.C. Deb. 376, cc. 1408/12.

114. The Coatbridge and Springburn Elections (Validation) Act 1945. 9 + 10 Geo.6. Ch.3. The Camberwell, Bristol and Nottingham Elections (Validation) Act, 1946, 9 + 10 Geo.6. Ch. 43. Reports of Select Committee on Elections, H.C. 3-1, H.C. 71-1, (1945/6).

115. First Report from the Select Committee on Elections, H.C. 71-1, (February 1946) Para. 11. Cf. H.C. 3-1, Para.12.



It was suggested by the second Select Committee,

"that a provision might be included in the proposed new statute, requiring a parliamentary candidate to sign on nomination a general declaration relinquishing and resigning from, any office of profit under the Crown which he may then hold."(116)

The declaration could, if necessary, be conditional upon election. In the cases concerned the Select Committee recommended legislation validating the elections and indemnifying the Members concerned. The Government was sympathetic to the demand for reform - the more so since the Attorney-General, Sir Hartley Shawcross, was himself almost caught by the intricacies of the 1707 Act.(117) The Conservatives too indicated that they would support a measure of reform.(118) On the occasion of the Second Bill the Government promised that they would ensure that legislation would be presented to the House before the next General Election.(119) The Government, however, never got around to dealing with the situation and in 1949 were obliged to introduce an indemnification Bill because of the continued observing of the Succession to Crown Act.(120) On that occasion the Attorney-General argued that while the effort alone had to deal with the

"the law is obscure and confused but its amendment, in the form of a restatement or clarification is by no means any easy matter. It would....probably have to be the subject of study by a commission, legal committee or body of that kind....Previous Governments....have felt that it was perhaps better to leave matters as they were until an obviously better formula had been found to take the place of the existing law. We have hitherto taken the same view about this matter, but I can add that we are giving the whole subject attention and considering whether there is any more comprehensive way in which the matter can be dealt with."(121)

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116. H.C. 71-1., para.12.
117. H.C. Deb. 414, cc. 566.
118. Ibid., cc.569 and H.C. Deb. 420, cc. 1896.
119. See H.C. Deb. 420, cc. 1889. Cf. cc.1920. Cf. H.C. Deb. 414, cc. 566.
120. The House of Commons (Indemnification of Certain Members Act) 1949, 12, 13 and 14 Geo.6. Ch.46.
121. H.C. Deb. 467, cc. 290. 12 July 1949.

The matter must have still been under consideration twelve months later when the case arose of the Reverend James MacManaway who had been elected for an Ulster constituency whilst an ordained member of the Church of Ireland. The question of his eligibility for membership of the House was referred to a Select Committee which found itself unable to come to any conclusion about the legalities of the matter and recommended that immediate legislative action be taken to clarify the law. (122) The Government responded by referring the matter to the Judicial Committee of Privy Council, saying that they would indemnify MacManaway if the Committee decided against him. (123) In fact, the Committee did decide that a clergyman of the Church of Ireland was disqualified under an Act of 1801 which they admitted was originally passed to exclude from the House the Radical Member, Horne Tooke. The position was, of course, anomalous as it did not apply to clergymen in Wales and England in certain circumstances. The Party had supported steps to remove such disqualifications during the twenties but had made little effort since that time to deal with the questions which had been referred to by the Select Committee on Offices of Profit under the Crown in 1941. (124)

The Labour Government gently urged the House to respect the Judicial Committee's decision, (125) and on 19 October 1950 they introduced a motion to exclude MacManaway, to which the Conservatives moved an amendment accepting the exclusion but urging "that a Royal Commission be set to deal with the state of the law as disclosed in the Report ...." (126) The amendment was

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122. Special Report and Proceedings from the Select Committee on the Election of a Member (Clergyman of the Church of Ireland). H.C. 68, 68-1 (1950) para. 16. p.vi.
123. H.C. Deb. 476, cc. 2467/84 - 29 June 1950.
124. H.C. 120, para. 59/61 (pp. xxxiv/xxxv).
125. H.C. Deb. 478, cc. 1882/90 17 October 1950.
126. Ibid., cc. 2243/76 (2254).

withdrawn when the Government promised to consult with the Conservatives on the question. Although the Labour Government had been officially neutral on the matter backbenchers, notably Geoffrey Bing, had been active in using the opportunity to rail against the protestant domination in Ireland.(127) The hurt tone of the Conservative replies claiming that this was turning a non-partisan question into a Party controversy was met with reminders of their unsympathetic attitude towards the indemnifying legislation of recent years.

The only ready-made explanation that can be attributed to the Government's failure to deal with the question was the pressure of important legislative measures that demanded its attention between 1945-1951. Yet this does not provide sufficient excuse for their failure to introduce legislation on the subject. Not only were there a number of occasions when the issue arose but a Select Committee of the House of Commons had provided a thorough examination of the subject and there was clearly an opportunity to secure some amending legislation through the favourable attitude of the Conservatives. It might be thought that the Government was either lazy or apathetic on the subject. Obviously they had more important legislation to deal with especially in view of the Conservative opposition to the Parliament Bill which necessitated an extra-short Parliamentary session in 1948. Yet they never really attempted to tackle the question. Significantly when the matter was eventually dealt with in the late 'fifties the Bill was long and detailed, perhaps too long and detailed, for the harrassed Labour Government of 1945-1951 to place before Parliament for consideration.

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127. Bing had earlier pointed out the anomalous position concerning the Irish Clergy, on the Second Reading of the House of Commons (Indemnification of Certain Members) Bill. H.C. Deb. 467, cc. 298. 12 July 1949.

b. Personal Security.

It was not entirely unexpected that the Attlee administration should take early steps to deal with the question of personal security for Members of Parliament, particularly in the field of salaries and pensions. The war-time coalition had recognised the need for change and indeed Mr. Osbert Peake, replying to Tom Driberg during a debate on adjournment which Driberg had used to raise the question of Members being accorded free frankage of mail, accepted the need for changes in the remuneration of Members of Parliament but took the normal Conservative view that it should be left to a future Parliament to settle the details.(128) Questions about the appointment of a Select Committee met with negative answers.(129)

The General Election of 1945 brought a great number of new Members into the House who found its amenities less than adequate. There were early complaints made about accommodation,(130) and the Government responded quickly to existing conditions by moving a motion for the appointment of a Select Committee with wide terms of reference to enable it to consider all important points including those of allowances, postages, free travel for members on official duties and secretarial assistance.(131) Nine days earlier on 6 November the Government had made its own position clear with its announcement that Members sending letters on official matters to a Government Department would be allowed free postage and its extension of the right of free railway travel between Westminster and Members' constituencies

128. H.C. Deb. 410, cc. 2849/68. 18 May 1945. It was the first time since 1921 that the proposal that Members should get free postage had been specifically raised as a discussion. H.C. Deb. 409, cc. 1317/8, Questions.

129. For example, H.C. Deb. 407, 1928 and H.C. Deb. 409, cc. 629 + 1317.

130. H.C. Deb. 414, cc. 181/94.

131. The terms of reference were "to consider the expenses incurred in connection with their parliamentary and official duties by Members of this House, including Members whose salary is less than £5,000 per annum; their remuneration and their conditions of work." H.C. Deb. 415, cc. 2465 et. seq.

to include Members' homes and Westminster and homes and constituencies and to cover scheduled air services as well as travel by rail.(132)

The Select Committee's Report (133) not surprisingly advocated a number of important changes in the salary arrangements of Members of Parliament, including an increase in the salary of Members from £600 (£100 of which was freed from income tax for expenses)(134) to £1,000 (of which £500 was to be allowed free of tax as an expense allowance.) The Committee also proposed to extend the £500 allowance to Ministers with salaries of less than £5,000 per annum and to the Chairmen of Ways and Means and Deputy Chairmen whose salaries should be reviewed.(135) Among the other recommendations made by the Committee was one to set up a small informal Committee to assist the Speaker in matters affecting the payment and concession for free travel to Members, the recommendations of which would be accepted by Members and by the Treasury.(136) The Select Committee, on which the Labour Party had a majority, rejected claims, which came mainly from various groups of Labour Members for extension of the privilege of free travel, allowance for the use of a motor car and the grant of free postage, telegrams and telephone calls.(137) Most of the evidence submitted from the Labour groups appeared to be more concerned with the convenience of Members rather than the privileges of the institution.

The Government accepted the majority of the Select Committee's proposals on 30 April 1946(138) and a motion to that effect was introduced into the House

132. Ibid., cc. 1085/6. The motion approving the expenditure involved was taken immediately after that for the appointment of the Select Committee on 15 November. cc.2477/86.

133. Report from the Select Committee on Members' Expenses. H.C. 93, 6 March 1946.

134. Ibid., para.7.

135. Ibid., para.11.

136. Ibid., para.12.

137. Ibid., paras. 8 and 9. See also Appendices VI, IX, X (2) and (3).

138. H.C. Deb. 422, cc. 38/42.



on 29 May. (139) A separate Bill to deal with changes in Ministerial Salaries, slightly different from those proposed by the Select Committee, was also dealt with on the latter date. (140) The changes made by the Government in the Ministerial Salaries Bill did not allow the £500 tax free allowance, a concession also denied the Private Member. These changes were made, "not only on the merits as we see them, but also in the light of what we consider to be the general opinion of Hon. Members in a number of different parts of the House." (141) There was little dissent; of the 26 dissidents from the motion none came from the P.L.P. The only real point of substance worth noticing was Tom Smith's statement that the unanimity of the Report reflected a compromise and that the rejection of suggestion for free postage, secretarial assistance were rejected "because we knew that in practice (they) would be open to abuse." (142) Exactly which Honourable Members would abuse them was not made clear, but in view of the later scandals investigated by the Lynskey Tribunal perhaps Smith's view was the correct one. However, one suspects that the argument was that of the seasoned conservative-minded Parliamentarian rather than the prophet of doom in the age of austerity.

The other item of relevance to the personal security of Members of Parliament was the House of Commons Members' Fund Act (143) which was introduced following the Report of a Select Committee of the House (144) which recommended that the Act of 1931 (should be amended in order to extend its scope and provide for increased payments and altered contributions." (145) Since its inception the

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139. H.C. Deb. 423, cc. 1231 et seq.
140. Ibid., cc. 1300 et seq.
141. Ibid., 1235 Hugh Dalton.
142. Ibid., cc. 1257/60 (1259). On the need for compromise see Mr. Leslie's speech, cc. 1268/71 (1269).
143. Enacted as 11 + 12 Geo. 6. Ch. 36.
144. Report from the Select Committee on the House of Commons Members' Fund, H.C. 110 (Parliamentary Papers 1946/7, Vol. 9. 145.)
145. Debate on the Select Committee's Report, H.C. Deb. 445, cc. 1787 et seq. 17 December 1947. (Motion by S.P. Viant, cc. 1788).

Fund had managed to secure a balance of some £50,000 and it was hoped by the Select Committee that the maximum yearly sums payable to qualified ex-Members would be increased from £150 to £250, provided that the total income of the person concerned did not exceed £325 as opposed to £225 previously. The maximum payment to widows should be doubled from £75 to £150 with a total income limit of £225 instead of £125; and that the contributions should be reduced from £12 to £9 per annum. (146) The Government, however, quarrelled with the figures, presented slightly different figures and allowed the Financial Secretary to the Treasury to argue that although it was a matter for the House the Government in effect did "not agree with the Select Committee's recommendations to lower the contribution and to raise pretty steeply the amount of benefit paid." (147) When the Bill came before the House, however, the Government included an escalative clause to vary the contribution and rates of benefit (to obviate the need for amending legislation) and left the contribution at £12 per annum. (148) The Government steered the Bill shakily through Committee with some difficulty, winning one division by only 2 votes, but secured victory in the end. (149)

In these two instances, salaries and pensions, the Labour Party had shown itself to be keenly interested in the removal of financial insecurity on the part of Members. However, its attitude was not a simple matter of preordained ideas rigidly applied, but rather the combination and reconciliation of differing and opposing interests and views. Consequently, the Labour Government hardly acted

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146. H.C. 110, paras. 18/24; 27/9.

147. H.C. Deb. 445, cc. 1795/1804 (1804). Glenvil Hall.

148. H.C. Deb. 450, cc. 1393 et. seq. 5 May 1948 Second Reading.

149. Ibid., cc. 1897 et. seq. 10 May 1948 Committee Stage.

differently from their Conservative predecessors. Members of the P.L.P., whether in Select Committees, or as Members of the Government, acted out the traditional compromising roles accorded them. If they were not deserting the class who elected them they were certainly moving in step with the party that opposed them.

1. In 1926 the House of Commons passed a resolution which was intended to be a declaration of principle. It was a declaration of principle which was intended to be a declaration of principle. It was a declaration of principle which was intended to be a declaration of principle.

2. In 1926 the House of Commons passed a resolution which was intended to be a declaration of principle. It was a declaration of principle which was intended to be a declaration of principle. It was a declaration of principle which was intended to be a declaration of principle.

3. MacIntyre was elected as Secretary of the Labour Party for Scotland against the official (Conservative) candidate and had refused, when presented to the House, to accept appointment. He had refused to be accepted without a guarantee that the House was by Cardinal and with the support of many of his Parliamentary colleagues from the Labour Party refused by 273 votes to 100 to accept him. MacIntyre took his seat with applause, and stated that, *See H.C. Deb., 1927, cc. 31/32, 17 April 1927, cc. 322.*

4. As Horne pointed out the relevant "order" (H.C. Deb., 1927) had been in operation since 1917, but it had been the practice of previous Governments to retain on the floor of the House "the great measure of the Session," as well as certain select bills and bills urgently required" (H.C. Deb., 1927). "The practice of past Governments in keeping contentious resolutions on the floor of the House had been based mainly on considerations of expediency. They felt it was safer to keep contentious bills on the floor of the House because they had greater control over their own majority lines." (H.C. Deb., p. 33).

5. The document wrote: "The traditional method of parliamentary procedure to be speeded up and made more efficient, so that more and more legislation could be passed through the House. The Select Committee was mainly concerned with the rights of the private member. It, and its spokesmen, were less interested in the House of Commons as a legislative assembly than in its duty to criticize the Executive on behalf of the people. It is an old old issue that is of the very essence of Parliament." (15 November 1927).



CHAPTER EIGHT - NOTES

1. Allighan did not help his own cause by lying to the Committee. The Clerk to the House, Sir Gilbert Campion, argued that Allighan was not guilty of a breach of privilege but the Committee found that Allighan's charges were "... wholly unfounded and constituted grave contempt. In the case of Mr. Allighan his contempt was aggravated by the fact that he was seeking to cast suspicion on others in respect of the very matter of which he knew himself to be guilty and that he persistently misled the Committee." Paras 22/3. This appears to have been the crux of the matter.
2. In 1926 Dr. Salter, Labour Member for West Brompton had accused Members of being drunk in the House. The Conservatives moved a motion describing the action as a "gross libel on Members" and constituting "a gross breach" of the privileges of the House but Salter refused to apologise and no further action was taken. H.C. Deb. 199, cc. 561:709. In 1930, however, Mr. Sandham, Member for Kirkdale, accused his fellow Labour Members of accepting bribes and being drunk in the House. The matter was referred to the Committee of Privileges which found the charges unsubstantiated. Subsequently despite the seriousness of the charges and the almost total absence of support within the House Sandham got away with mere admonishment from the Speaker. H.C. Deb. 242 cc. 42/6, 309/330, cc. 741/769.
3. MacIntyre was elected as Scottish Nationalist Member for Motherwell against the official Government candidate and had refused, when presented to the House, to accept sponsors. The I.L.P. proposed that he be accepted without sponsors but the House led by Churchill and with the support of many of his Governmental colleagues from the Labour Party refused by 273 votes to 74 to accept him. Next day he took his seat with sponsors, and under protest. See H.C. Deb. 410, cc. 34/48, 17 April 1945, cc. 222.
4. As Morrison pointed out the relevant "order (S.O. No. 462) had been in operation since 1907, but it had been the practice of previous Governments to retain on the floor of the house" the great measures of the Session," as well as certain short Bills and Bills urgently required" Ibid., 208/209. "The practice of past Governments in keeping contentious measures on the Floor of the House had been based mainly on considerations of expediency. They felt it was safer to keep contentious Bills on the Floor of the House because they had greater control over their own majority there." Ibid., p.209.
5. The Economist wrote, "Mr. Morrison wanted parliamentary procedure to be speeded up and made more efficient, so that more and more legislation could be passed through the Commons. The Select Committee was mainly concerned with the rights of the private member. It, and its spokesmen .... were less interested in the House of Commons as a legislative machine than in its duty to criticise the Executive on behalf of the people. It is an old old issue that is of the very essence of Parliament." 15 November 1947.

6. The Economist's support for the measure was part of its protest against over-centralisation. "As state control over economic affairs extends and widens the executive becomes more irresponsible and Parliamentary supervision gets harder and less effective." 27 March 1948. The Executive Committee of the Scottish Council had pressed for an independent Committee "to enquire into the administration of Scotland to make recommendations as to whether and to what extent legislative devolution on Scottish Affairs is necessary, practical and advisable to improve the legislative procedure whilst retaining the integrity of the United Kingdom." N.E.C. Minutes, Vol. 94, Policy Committee Minutes (8) 24 March 1947.



Ultimately it was the impact of war and the electoral success that followed it that accounted for the defeat of anti-Parliamentarism within the Labour Party. Whereas in 1919 the Government of the day had exploited the euphoria of victory to secure the return of a Parliament generally unrepresentative of public opinion in the years that followed, an attempt to repeat the process in 1945 failed completely. Churchill was unable to play the Gestapo card with the same success as Lloyd George had played its Bolshevik predecessor. There were, of course, many reasons for this not the least of which was Labour's massive contribution to the war effort and the increasing political awareness of the nation that the stark realities of Conservatism or Bolshevism were merely the untenable postulates of party propaganda. Throughout the war the vascillation of the Conservative Party towards social and economic reform contrasted sharply with the Labour Party's demands that there should be no return to the social inequalities of the inter-war period. Thus in 1945 the electorate was provided with a clear choice between two parties of equal stature in a way which was not evident before the outbreak of hostilities with Germany. Moreover, whereas during the First World War the Labour Party had been badly divided on its morality and open to the jingoistic charge of aiding the enemy by opposing hostilities (a charge which brought about the defeat of MacDonald, Snowden and others in 1918) throughout the war against Hitler it was the Conservatives who had to live in the shadow of appeasement and its consequences. Consequences which were frequently regurgitated by the Left in inexpensive books such as Your M.P. (1) which were widely circulated.

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1. J. C. Gracchus, Your M.P. (London: Victor Gollancz, 1944).

Thus the result of the 1945 election greatly strengthened the advocates of Parliamentarism and had the effect of reinforcing Parliamentary institutions, by changing the area of conflict in two ways. When the Trade Unions had challenged the Lloyd George Government after the First World War on the principle that it did not represent the people they were, by implication, challenging the basic assumptions of Parliamentary democracy. The theory of direct-action by its very looseness gave a credence to this challenge which was only destroyed by the events of 1926, which proved the case for the separateness of political and industrial action. Yet the events of 1926 only confirmed the trend to specialisation within the Labour Movement that was already apparent. Whereas it was not unusual as late as 1922 for the Trades Union Congress to pass resolutions on the reform of Parliamentary procedure or electoral reform, by 1926 such questions were left to the Labour Party while the Trade Unions concentrated on those questions which directly affected their members and which demanded political solutions.

The trend was a natural one but the General Strike provided an opportunity to give it formal expression. Thus Arthur Pugh was merely restating the empirically recognised position, not admitting the revolutionary implications of the nine-day strike, when he told the 1926 Conference during his Presidential Speech,

"The British working people have set themselves to achieve their aims by the method of democracy, which means politics in the parliamentary system, and in economic life a system of collective Trade Union effort, that has been pursued as a manifestation of the commonsense and practical spirit of our people."(2)

The second way in which the area of conflict was changed by the result of the 1945 General Election was that it effectually internalised the conflict

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2. T.U.C. Report 1926, p.74.

between the Government and its allies both in the Party and in the Trade Union Movement. Whatever difficulties might arise with the factions over specific policies the bulk of the Labour Movement stood solidly behind a Government which in their eyes faithfully pursued its electoral mandate, including the early repeal of the much-hated Trade Disputes and Trade Unions Act. In such circumstances it was not surprising that the Trade Union Movement fully supported the Government even to the unprecedented extent of agreeing to wage restraint. Such support directly strengthened the foundations of Parliamentarism within the Labour Movement by accepting the limitations and restrictions of Government control.

The specialisation which had been evident in the 'twenties was just as evident in the 'thirties when the Parliamentary idea had been attacked by the intellectual Left. In those intra-party struggles it was the T.U.C. which dealt with the fundamental question of the philosophy of dictatorship and the Labour Party which dealt with its political implications. This is readily understood when it is remembered that it was the Trade Union Movement which had suffered so dramatically under dictatorship and which had experienced the impact of Communist tactics in the International Trade Union Movement. Clearly on such important questions there was some degree of overlap but that was largely because of the widespread attacks by the Left. The affiliation of the Communist Party, the Popular Front both arose from the fundamental question of democracy and dictatorship and on that issue it was the Trade Union view, reinforced by their possession of positions of power, that prevailed. In part this was a reaction against the politicians who had in the trade unionist's eyes forgotten and even despised the origins of the Party. This is what Ernest Bevin referred to at the 1935 Party Conference when he said,

"Every one of us on the General Council of the T.U.C. feel that we have been let down. We have had enough of it during the last ten or twelve years as Trade Union leaders - a very stiff time. I want to say to our friends who have joined us in this political Movement, that our predecessors formed this Party. It was not Keir Hardie who formed it, it grew out of the bowels of the Trades Union Congress. It was a struggle for equality, for Labour representation leading ultimately to power." (3)

It was the war which conferred that power and played a major part in securing a dramatic change in the status of trade unions and the Labour Party. Alan Bullock describes the situation in the following terms,

"After the General Strike Bevin and Citrine had both worked to convert the T.U.C. from revolutionary dreams of overthrowing capitalism or the piecemeal extraction of concessions to a policy of demanding a voice in the formation of industrial, economic and social policy. The war gave them the chance to achieve their objective and they made the most of it. Between them they secured an influence for the trade union movement on the formation of government policy which it has never lost since whatever the party in power." (4)

It was, so Bullock asserts, this accession to economic power that laid the basis for

"a major shift .... in the relationship between classes in Britain, as a result of which the working-class majority of the nation has begun to exercise in the political system a power much more commensurate with its numbers." (5)

Samuel Beer came to the same basic conclusion when he argued that,

"The population is the vulnerable core of the corporate society and the chief collection of the individual. It gives shape to the structure and defines the status of the individual."

3. L.P.A.C.R. 1935, p.180. Italics mine.
4. Bullock, The Life and Times of Ernest Bevin, II. Minister of Labour 1940-1945. (London: Heinemann, 1967), p.136.
5. Ibid., p. 137.

"in a limited but important sense, the syndicalist thesis was vindicated. For it was initially not by their votes but by their control over instrumentalities necessary to carrying out vital national purposes that the organised working-class raised themselves from their old position of exclusion and inferiority. The Labour victory of 1945....(was a) later phase of this general process...."(6)

The validity of this interpretation at a general level is compelling, though perhaps it does not attribute enough weight to the pace of social change generated by the war itself, but the supreme irony of it is that in securing this change Bevin returned to his stance of 1918/22, a stance which de-emphasised the role of Parliament in the decision-making process. Despite his many qualities of loyalty to colleagues Bevin tended to see opposition as wilful disobedience to obvious truth. Constant opposition tended to irritate him and accounts to some extent for his decision in 1944 to introduce a Regulation (1AA) outlawing unofficial strikes. Having persuaded the Cabinet and the T.U.C. to accept his view that such a regulation was necessary Bevin proceeded to have it implemented by Order-in-Council. On 28 April 1944, Aneurin Bevan moved a prayer against the regulation. He accused the Government of "going behind the back of Parliament, and reaching understandings with outside bodies, and then presenting Parliament with a fait accompli."(7)

The very strength of the Trade Union Movement was apparently dependent upon the continuing weakness of Parliament. This is what Bevan meant when he declared,

"this Regulation is the enfranchisement of the corporate society and the disenfranchisement of the individual. It gives status to the organised body, and destroys the status of the individual citizens."(8)

6. Beer, op.cit., p.215.

7. H.C.Deb. 399, cc. 1061.

8. Ibid., cc. 1072. Further discussion of the debate and its context can be found in Bullock, Bevin 2, op.cit., pp. 298/309 and Foot op.cit., pp.440/63.



Thus there was a conflict between the view of Parliament held by Bevin and that owned by Bevan. Bevin was happy for Parliament to remain the grand inquest of the nation as long as the Parliamentary body could be effectively killed by executive action. Bevan wanted Parliament to influence executive action in a positive sense. In a famous speech describing his fruitless search for power he said,

"We were convinced by our institutions and representative democracy that the House of Commons itself was that instrument, and that seat of power; but these Debates.....(have) convinced me that the House of Commons is becoming irrelevant."(9)

What Bevin and Bevan represented between them were the dual themes of strong government and representative government, that were integral parts of the broad Labour view of Government and of Parliament.

The fact that the leaders of the Labour Party were involved in the prosecution of the war did not prevent the Party from expressing its views on the future role of Parliament. Labour's Home Policy, for example, asserted

"we are confident that the historic forms of Parliamentary democracy provide a highroad along which the nation can pass peacefully from an acquisitive to a Socialist society."(10)

As for the Electoral Truce, the N.E.C. claimed that "the Party (remains) perfectly free to carry on its normal functions as the official Opposition in Parliament and its political activities in the country....."(11) In practice, of course, the Labour Party played a rather muted role in asserting the rights of opposition, more often than not accepting the views of the executive. It was, in fact, the

9. H.C. Deb. 395, cc. 1617 15 December 1943.

10. L.P.A.C.R. 1940, p.191.

11. Ibid., p.19.

Left who continually asserted the rights of Parliament against the needs of the Executive. David Kirkwood gave early notice of this attitude when in protest against the decision of the 1940 Conference to curtail discussion on whether the Party should accept office under Churchill he told the Chairman (Barbara Gould), "Madam Chairman, you have denied us a hearing here. We will get it on the floor of the House of Commons." (12) Aneurin Bevan asserting the need to end the Electoral Truce insisted,

"our system here consists of Parliamentary institutions on a democratic basis; it consists of the right of the populace to send the people it wants to the House of Commons." (13)

The failure of the Party to accept this view in the short-run weakened the tenets of Parliamentary democracy but by producing a significant gap between a progressive public opinion and increasingly unrepresentative Parliament, it strengthened the belief of the Left in the possibility of electoral victory in 1945 and so helped reduce still further any notions that Parliamentarism was doomed to failure.

Nevertheless, the Party did recognise the importance of responding to a changing public opinion. Whilst rejecting the application of the Communist Party for affiliation in 1943 on the grounds that

"it is common knowledge that the philosophy and methods of the two parties are incompatible. The Labour Party has developed.... under the influence of the British tradition of democratic consent. Its belief in Parliamentary Government is fundamental to its conception of orderly social change." (14)

the Party did assert its own policy.

12. L.P.A.C.R. 1940, p.131.

13. L.P.A.C.R. 1942, p.148.

14. L.P.A.C.R. 1943, p.19. See pp.9/19 and pp. 227/31 for full treatment of the application and the Labour Party's attitude to it. Italics are mine.

"There must be great strides towards a new Social Democracy and as the National Executive Committee calls on the Movement to reject the Communist Party affiliation it also calls to renew its faith in the Labour Party and to revitalise energies, activities, and devotions by which the Party has been built and by which alone its great purposes can be accomplished."(15)

The Party refused affiliation both in 1943 and then again in 1946 when Harold Laski wrote The Secret Battalion (16) on behalf of the N.E.C. to help refute the Communist plea for "unity of the workers."

The relative closeness of the vote indicated that there was still a significant element of the Labour Party who were not convinced of the efficacy of the Parliamentary method and it is possible that had the Labour Party failed to win the general election of 1945 the Communist Party may have succeeded in its plea for affiliation. In the event, however, the debate immediately swung away from being that of socialist method to one of policy difference. Had the Labour Party lost the election it is probable that it would have been prey to all the internal divisions which weakened it in the inter-war period and notwithstanding the success of the Trade Union Movement in raising its status much of the newly found strength would have gradually been dissipated in faction fighting. As it was rebellions against the Party leadership were anti-Government not anti-Parliamentary rebellions.

Within Parliament itself the traditional roles adopted by the individual Member quickly reasserted itself against the Government's insistence on taking all available Parliamentary time. Morrison, of course, had no time for Private Members' Time but, as John Parker recorded,

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15. Ibid., p.228.

16. H.J. Laski, The Secret Battalion (London: Labour Party, 1946), passim.

"discontent built up and finally exploded at Parliamentary Labour Party meetings which forced Morrison to agree to restore time for Private Member's Bills in 1948/9." (17)

Members were not satisfied to act as lobby fodder for Ministers and consequently there was a continuation of the campaign on behalf of Private Members and their rights. In a Fabian Lecture in 1948 Geoffrey Bing concluded, "that we should strive consciously to secure again something of the freedom and looseness of debate which existed in the eighteenth century." As with all parties the Labour Members of Parliament were insistent upon fulfilling their traditional role rather than adopting some new revolutionary stance based upon passive support for a Labour Government.

Although the Labour Government managed to introduce many economic and social changes there were those who saw the period of office as a missed opportunity. Left-wing critics argued that the administration had succumbed to the influences of the Establishment as surely as the earlier MacDonald administrations. Miliband wrote that the Civil Service managed to sabotage bold socialist plans by apathetic opposition.

"This did not involve the kind of administrative sabotage which the Left had feared likely in the 'thirties. What it entailed was the active discouragement of bold experiments. Of course, Ministers usually had the last word. But the last word was likely to be greatly influenced by the cautious words that had gone before." (18)

Less ideologically committed observers took the view that the Left-wing interpretation of society had been fundamentally at fault. (19)

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17. Memorandum by Parker to the Select Committee on Procedure: Second Report from the Select Committee on Procedure 1970/1., H.C. 538, Appendix 2.
  18. Miliband, Parliamentary Socialism, p.294.
  19. R.T. MacKenzie, "Laski and the Social Bases of the Constitution," British Journal of Sociology (Vol.3. 1952) pp. 260/3.

The Labour Government of 1945/51 was far more aware of the fact that there were sources, rather than a single source, of power in society. The six years of Labour Government proved to the bulk of the Labour Party that Parliamentarism worked; that Parliament was capable of meeting all the demands made upon it. If Socialism had not been fully implemented it was because Socialist demands had not been made upon the Parliamentary system. Indeed, changes in representation, changes in procedure to balance the needs of the Executive and the rights of Members had, in Labour Party eyes, brought Parliament up-to-date.

Of course, there were times when Labour Ministers were over-zealous in their desire to hear the opposite case, as on Members' salaries for example, but this was merely reflecting the fact that the Labour Party was a traditionalist party with traditionalist views on the role of Parliament. The Labour Party was a Parliamentary party because its history had made it thus. When it left office in 1951 it did so confirmed in its belief in the Parliamentary method. Perhaps in Marxist or even Socialist terms they had failed to achieve radical social change but, to the Labour Party, they had achieved Socialism: The British Way. (20) The aims, the values, the very existence of the Labour Party was fashioned around the Parliamentary system and it was the Party's determination to preserve the tenets of Parliamentary Government that contributed to the maintenance of Parliamentary Government in the inter-war period. In the final analysis the Labour Party helped to preserve Parliament by reforming Parliament and they reformed it to make it amenable to their social, economic and political demands. In short they used Parliament for no better reason than that it was there.

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20. See Morrison's Foreword to D. Munro (ed.) Socialism: The British Way, (London: Essential Books, 1948).

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