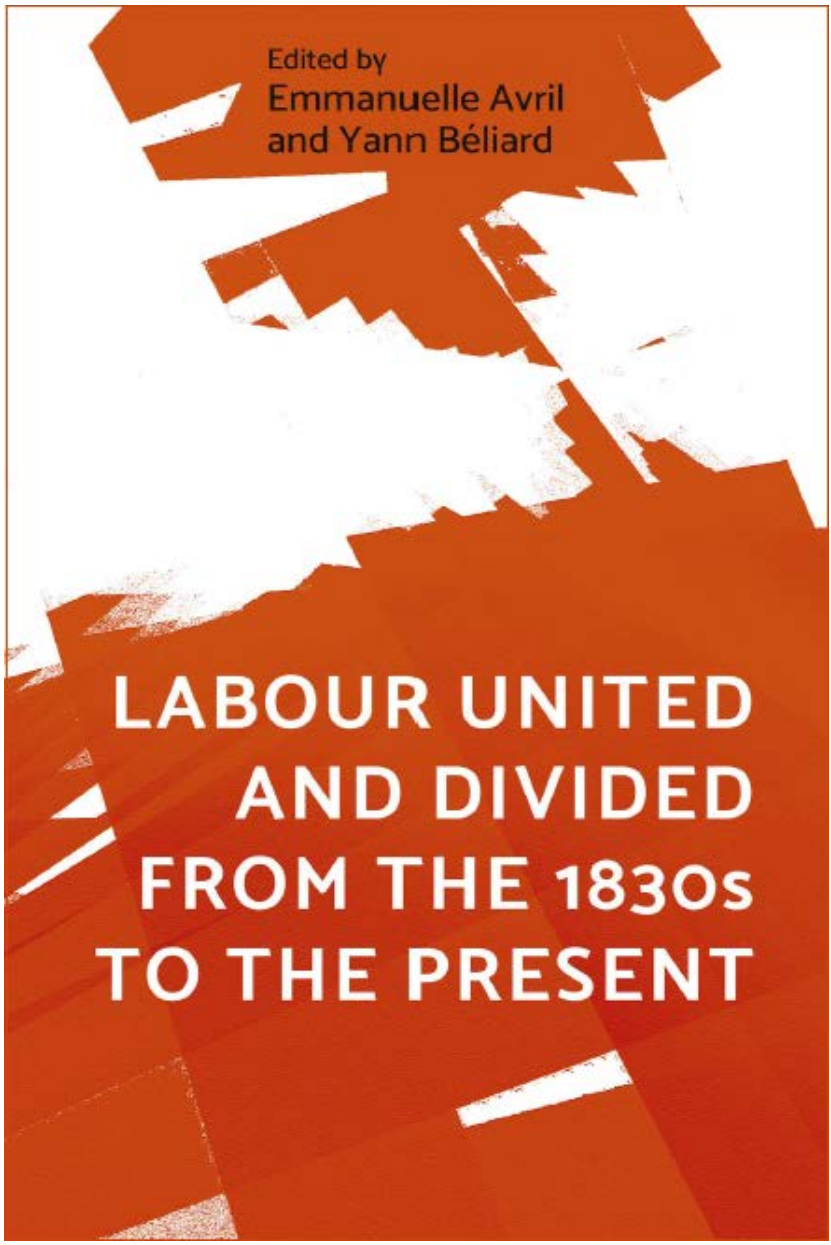
Labour united and divided from the 1830s to the present

Edited by Emmanuelle Avril and Yann Béliard



Manchester University Press

2018

Contents

Part II: Convergences, divergences and realignments on the left

Part III: The Labour Party today: fragmentation or mutation?

List of figures and tables

Figures

Tables

Notes on contributors

Emmanuelle Avril is Professor of Contemporary British Politics and Society at the Sorbonne Nouvelle University, France. Her specialist subject is intra-party democracy, organisational change and mobilisation within the British Labour Party, which has come to include a study of the impact of new technologies on party membership, activism and political participation in general. Other aspects of her research are political leadership, ideology and the rhetoric of political images. Her latest publications include *New Technologies, Organizational Change and Governance* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2013, co-edited with C. Zumello); *Les partis politiques en Grande Bretagne* (Armand Colin, 2013, co-written with A. Alexandre-Collier) and *Democracy, Participation and Contestation: Civil Society, Governance and the Future of Liberal Democracy* (Routledge, 2016, co-edited with J. Neem).

Anne Beauvallet is a Senior Lecturer in British Studies at Toulouse-Jean Jaurès University, France. She received a PhD on the perception of the welfare state by the English public from 1960 to 2001. As a member of the research group Cultures Anglo-Saxonnes, she has published several papers on British education policies in French academic journals such as *LISA/LISA e-journal, Observatoire de la société britannique* and *Revue Française de Civilisation Britannique*. She has also published a chapter on 'Truancy and Anti-social Behaviour in England in the late Victorian Era and under New Labour', in *Anti-social Behaviour in Britain: Victorian and Contemporary Perspectives*, edited by Sarah Pickard (Palgrave, 2014).

Yann Béliard is a Senior Lecturer in British Studies at the Sorbonne Nouvelle University, France. His PhD, completed in 2007 under the supervision of the

late François Poirier, dealt with class relations in Hull from 1894 to 1910. Since then he has directed a special issue of the *Labour History Review* (April 2014) revisiting 'The Great Labour Unrest, 1911–1914'. His research focuses on British labour in the age of empire, with particular emphasis on workplace struggles, transnational activism and race. Recently he has explored more particularly Sylvia Pankhurst's *Workers' Dreadnought* years and produced a series of notices for the *Dictionary of Labour Biography*. He is currently working on the edition of a collective volume on British labour and decolonisation.

Anastasia Chartomatsidi is a Modern Greek History PhD candidate at the University of Athens, Greece. Her thesis, entitled 'The Memory of the 1940s during 2010–2015: Readings of a "Critical Decade" in a Period of Crisis', focuses on Modern Greek History through the prism of Memory Studies and Public History. She received her Master's degree from the Department of International History of the London School of Economics and she holds a BA in History and Archaeology. She has also focused on Modern European and Balkan history.

Anna Clark is Professor of History at the University of Minnesota, USA. Her publications include *Women's Silence, Men's Violence: Sexual Assault in Britain, 1780–1845* (Pandora, 1987); *The Struggle for the Breeches: Gender and the Making of the British Working Class* (University of California Press, 1995); *Scandal: The Sexual Politics of the British Constitution* (Princeton University Press, 2003); *Desire: A History of European Sexuality* (Routledge, 2008) and *Alternative Histories of the Self* (Bloomsbury Publishing, 2017), as well as articles on sexuality, working-class history and human rights. She is a former editor of the *Journal of British Studies*. Her new project is 'Rage against the Machine: Rethinking Individualism and Biopolitics in the British Empire'.

David Evans is a doctoral student based at the University of Strathclyde, UK. He has a BSc (Econ.) Honours Degree in Industrial Relations and Sociology from Cardiff University and an MA degree in Industrial Relations from the University of Warwick. An active trade unionist for most of his working life, he has been elected to numerous lay positions in different unions, and was presented in 1987 with the National Young Member Award by the former National Union of Railwaymen for his services to that union. He is a member of the British Universities Industrial Relations Association, the British Sociological Association and the Scottish Oral History Society. He has presented widely on the subject of breakaway trade unions.

Lewis H. Mates is a Teaching Fellow in the School of Government and International Affairs at Durham University, UK. He has published widely on twentieth-century British political history on subjects such as post-war

Conservatism and the Popular Front, and a monograph, *The Spanish Civil War and the British Left* (I. B. Tauris, 2007). His most recent monograph, *The Great Labour Unrest: Rank-and-File Movements and Political Change in the Durham Coalfield*, was published by Manchester University Press in 2016. He is currently writing a book on Edwardian anarchism and working on a research project on the teaching of local mining history in post-industrial communities.

Steven Parfitt is a Teaching Fellow at Loughborough University, UK, and his research concerns British and American social and labour history. His first book, *Knights Across the Atlantic: The Knights of Labor in Britain and Ireland*, was published by Liverpool University Press in 2017. He has written articles on British, American, French, Australian and global history in scholarly journals including the *International Review of Social History*, *Journal of American Studies* and *Labour History Review*, and in newspapers and magazines including *The Guardian* and *Jacobin*.

Nick Randall is a Senior Lecturer in British Politics at Newcastle University, UK. His research on the Labour Party forms part of a wider interest in British political parties which includes their ideologies, internal organisation and divisions. He has published his research in a variety of books and journals, including the *British Journal of Politics and International Relations*, *Parliamentary Affairs*, *British Politics* and *Political Quarterly*. He is currently researching political leadership in the UK with colleagues at the Universities of Exeter and Leeds, and the communication of 'fear appeals' in contemporary UK politics.

Eric Shaw is Honorary Research Fellow in the Division of History and Politics Department, University of Stirling, UK. He is a leading expert on the Labour Party, about which he has written extensively. His main publications include: *Discipline and Discord in the Labour Party* (Manchester University Press, 1988); *The Labour Party Since 1979: Conflict and Transformation* (Routledge, 1994); *The Labour Party since 1945* (Blackwell, 1996); *Losing Labour's Soul? New Labour and the Blair Government 1997–2007* (Routledge, 2007); and *The Strange Death of Labour Scotland* (with Gerry Hassan) (Edinburgh University Press, 2012).

Ophélie Siméon is a Senior Lecturer in British History at the Sorbonne Nouvelle University, France. Her main research interests lie in the social history of early socialism in Britain, with a special focus on everyday life, labour and leisure in Owenite organisations such as unions, intentional communities and co-operatives. Her first monograph, *Robert Owen's Experiment at New Lanark: From Paternalism to Socialism*, was published by Palgrave Macmillan in 2017.

Fiona Simpkins is a Senior Lecturer in British Contemporary History and Politics at the University Lumière of Lyon, France. Her main areas of research are devolution, Scottish politics and the constitutional debate in Scotland. She has published widely, notably in the journals *Revue Française de Civilisation Britannique*, *Observatoire de la Société Britannique*, *Etudes Ecossaises* and *Civilisations*.

David Stewart is a Senior Lecturer in History at the University of Central Lancashire, Preston, UK. His research has concentrated on the Labour Party's alliances with the trade-union movement and the co-operative movement. His publications include: *The Path to Devolution and Change: A Political History of Scotland under Margaret Thatcher, 1979–1990* (I. B. Tauris, 2009) and *The Hidden Alternative: Co-operative Values, Past, Present and Future* (United Nations University Press, 2012).

Jeremy Tranmer is a Senior Lecturer at the Nancy site of the University of Lorraine, France, where he teaches Contemporary British History, Politics and Society. He wrote his PhD about the Communist Party of Great Britain and the impact on its strategies and activities of its changing analyses of the Thatcher governments. He has published numerous articles about the history, ideologies and strategies of the British radical left since the 1960s. He has also carried out research into the left's attempts to engage with popular music in the 1970s and 1980s, publishing articles and book chapters about Rock Against Racism, attempts by musicians to support the miners' strike and Red Wedge.

Acknowledgements

This book originated in an international conference held on 4 April 2016 at the People's History Museum in Manchester – a conference organised under the auspices of our university, the Sorbonne Nouvelle, and of our research team, the Centre for Research on the English-Speaking World (CREW). CREW's support from the moment we suggested organising this event away from home was a true blessing, for which we are very grateful.

We also wish to thank two prestigious British associations which agreed to sponsor the conference: the Society for the Study of Labour History (SSLH) and the Labour Movements Group of the Political Studies Association. The financial and moral support we received, the advice and encouragement proffered by Charlotte Alston for the SSLH executive and Mark Wickham-Jones for the Labour Movements Group, were all the more appreciated as they illustrate exactly the kind of convergence between historical and contemporary perspectives that we were hoping to achieve.

We would also like to express our gratitude to the staff at the People's History Museum, particularly Sarah Vince, Lauren Hibbert and Catherine O'Donnell, for helping to create the ideal environment in which to hold such an event. We could not have wished for a nicer and more aptly named room than the Coal Store to present and debate our papers.

We are greatly indebted to Manchester University Press, to our editor, Tony Mason, who supported the project from the very beginning, as well as to Robert Byron, Deborah Smith and Claudette Johnson, who all contributed to making this book project a reality. We are very grateful to the anonymous reviewers who reported on early drafts: we followed their suggestions scrupulously, trying to make the most of their constructive criticism,

so that a large part of the credit for this final version of the volume must go to them.

Our warmest thanks go to the members of our conference scientific committee – Fabrice Bensimon, Peter Gurney, Marc Lenormand, Steven Parfitt, Eric Shaw, Jeremy Tranmer and Mark Wickham-Jones – for their feedback early on, as well as to Neville Kirk and to all the authors for their enthusiasm and cooperation throughout the project. Their comments on and corrections to the first drafts of our introduction and conclusion were most welcome, as was their careful reading of some individual chapters.

Our greatest debt of gratitude, as always, goes to our families and friends.

We dedicate this volume to two colleagues and friends who each had a significant bearing on this project.

I (Emmanuelle) dedicate this book to Lewis Minkin, undoubtedly the Labour Party's most accomplished scholar and our guest of honour at the Manchester conference. In the course of my study of the Labour Party from the early 1990s to the present day, Lewis has been a constant source of inspiration as well as a kind and reliable friend. Although his unrivalled knowledge of the rich texture of Labour life and history and his uncompromising concern for scientific rigour are impossible to match, I very much hope that he enjoys reading this book so that it can be the springboard to many more stimulating, good humoured intellectual exchanges.

I (Yann) dedicate this book to the memory of Sam Davies, who very sadly passed away in the summer of 2016. His knowledge of working-class history was incomparable, his skills as a researcher and his ability to share his findings and enthusiasm with students and the general public impressive. In his discreet and gentle way, Sam embodied a mixture of sympathy for the cause of labouring people and scientific excellence that could only inspire respect. May those who knew and loved him accept the pages that follow as a tribute to and continuation of his work.

Abbreviations

AAM	Association of Assistant Mistresses
AFL	American Federation of Labor
AMA	Assistant Masters' Association
ASE	Amalgamated Society of Engineers
ATL	Association of Teachers and Lecturers
AWL	Alliance for Workers' Liberty
BRS	*British Road to Socialism*
BSP	British Socialist Party
CIC	Co-operative Independent Commission
CLP	Constituency Labour Party
CLPD	Campaign for Labour Party Democracy
CPB	Communist Party of Britain
CPGB	Communist Party of Great Britain
CTU	Conservative Trade Unionists
CUCEC	Co-operative Union Central Executive Committee
CUPC	Co-operative Union Parliamentary Committee
CWS	Co-operative Wholesale Society
DFM	Durham Forward Movement
DL	Democratic Left
DMA	Durham Miners' Association
DURM	Durham unofficial reform movement
DWRGLU	Dock, Wharf, Riverside and General Labourers' Union
EAM	National Liberation Front (Greece)
EC	Executive Committee
EETPU	Electrical Engineering, Telecommunications and Plumbing Union

ELAS	Greek People's Liberation Army
FPRS	Federation of Professional Railway Staff
GNCTU	Grand National Consolidated Trades' Union
HSU	Hull Seamen's Union
ILP	Independent Labour Party
IWMA	International Workingmen's Association
JPC	Joint Parliamentary Committee
KKE	Communist Party of Greece
LA300	Local Assembly 300
LANAC	Local Associations National Action Campaign
LHA	Labour History Archive and Study Centre, Manchester
LRC	Labour Representation Committee
MABYS	Metropolitan Association for the Befriending of Young Servants
MCTF	Midland Counties Trades Federation
MFGB	Miners' Federation of Great Britain
MRC	Modern Records Centre, Coventry
NA	National Archives, London
NASUWT	National Association of Schoolmasters Union of Women Teachers
NCA	National Co-operative Archives, Manchester
NCL	National Council of Labour
NEC	National Executive Committee
NFER	National Foundation for Educational Research
NIGFTLU	National and International General Federation of Trade and Labour Unions
NPC	National Policy Committee
NPF	National Policy Forum
NSFU	National Seamen and Firemen's Union
NUDL	National Union of Dock Labourers
NUM	National Union of Mineworkers
NUT	National Union of Teachers
OBU	'One Big Union'
OMOV	One Member One Vote
PAT	Professional Association of Teachers
PCI	Italian Communist Party
PLP	Parliamentary Labour Party
PMB	Private Members' Bill
PSU	Prison Service Union
RACS	Royal Arsenal Co-op Society
RCP	Revolutionary Communist Party
RPM	Resale Price Maintenance
SCWS	Scottish Co-operative Wholesale Society

SDF	Social Democratic Federation
SDP	Social Democratic Party
SEA	Socialist Educational Association
SEC	Scottish Executive Committee
SLP	Socialist Labour Party
SNP	Scottish National Party
SPD	Sozialistisches Partei Deutschland
TUC	Trades Union Congress
TULO	Trade Union and Labour Party Liaison Organisation
UDM	Union of Democratic Mineworkers
USDAW	Union of Shop, Distributive and Allied Workers
WCG	Women's Co-op Guild
WEWNC	War Emergency: Workers' National Committee
WLL	Women's Labour League

Introduction: the British labour movement between unity and division

Emmanuelle Avril and Yann Béliard

The current troubles inside the Labour Party – which followed Jeremy Corbyn's election as party leader in September 2015 and were accelerated by the 23 June 2016 Brexit referendum – have made a number of concerns that seemed outmoded topical again, and rekindled the interest of both academics and practitioners in organisational matters. A party built just over a century ago by the joint efforts of most trade-union and socialist organisations, a party that had grown to become the second 'government party' in the British political system and seemed there to stay has often appeared, since Corbyn became leader, on the verge of implosion – a situation that has left scholars and the general public struggling to find satisfactory explanations, and to foresee the possible outcomes. The Labour Party's surprisingly satisfying results in the 8 June 2017 snap election, although they have led a number of Corbyn critics to qualify their scepticism, will probably not put an end to the crisis. An essential purpose of this book is therefore to put this disconcerting moment into historical perspective, to show that the present disunities are nothing new and are far from capturing every source of disagreement within the British labour movement.

The British labour movement, from its inception, was never a homogeneous entity, not even in those rare phases when unity seemed to prevail over fracture and factionalism. Some moments appeared, at the time, as triumphs of class solidarity: 1906 and the formation of the Parliamentary Labour Party (PLP); 1926 and the Trades Union Congress's (TUC)'s call for a general strike; 1945 and the landslide victory of the Labour Party in the general election. Yet the seeds of internal strife were always there. The 1906 breakthrough was followed, only five years later, by a wave of strikes in which disappointment

towards the newly formed Labour Party played no minor part (Béliard, 2014). The year 1926 is not simply recalled as the only general strike in British history, but also as one which was interrupted after nine days because of the TUC's decision to back down and let the miners continue their struggle alone. As for the Attlee years, they saw the Labour Party embrace the cause of the British Empire and of anti-communism in ways that were bound to create a gulf between the party and colonial workers on the one hand, and left-wing trade unionists on the other. These three examples, which all belong to the first half of the twentieth century, point in the same direction, and can help us think about the origins of the movement's segmentation, as well as about current quarrels. What they remind us of is that the roots of the British labour movement are so diverse that bringing its heterogeneous components under a single roof was – and still is – a highly challenging task.

At the same time there has been recognition that dissensus is constitutive of any organisation – as illustrated by the case of the Labour Party. The tension between its two – right and left – wings has been seen as its main weakness, but it has also functioned as a system of checks and balances which has traditionally helped maintain the party in the mainstream (Fielding, 2002), while providing a secure platform for the expression of political debate (Minkin, 2014). The New Labour ascendancy and controversial legacy, based on the ability of the modernisers, through ideological as well as organisational reforms – both to align the party members with the leadership (Avril, 2013) and to make a mainly docile PLP stay 'on message' – would seem to illustrate the dangers of the faith placed in the appearance of consensus and in the necessity of presenting a united front to the outside world. In fact, dissensions can also be seen as barometers, revealing inner tendencies and external pressures. The efforts deployed by the Blair leadership to institute consensus eventually led to systemic failure (Avril, 2016a, 2016b; Shaw, 2016) and to the severe disconnection of the party from what had once been its 'heartlands', leading to denunciations of 'tepid consensus', or 'consensus of the graveyard' (Seyd and Whiteley, 2002: 207, 174). If unity imposed from above can lead to disarray and decline, then the lesson may be that internal conflict should be rehabilitated, as a means for organisations to move forward.

Paradoxically, the debate over unity and division is so omnipresent in the literature devoted to the British labour movement that few books have attempted to study it *per se*, as if, being virtually everywhere, the question could not be examined easily. The consensus–dissension dialectic is nonetheless a familiar topic for all those involved or interested in the British labour movement, be they activists, historians, political scientists or industrial relations scholars. Indeed, labour history as a sub-discipline developed at first as a history of working-class associations, in particular trade unions, so that its practitioners had no choice but to examine their incessant centripetal and centrifugal movements, the successive or simultaneous processes of growth,

split and amalgamation (among countless narratives, see Cole, 1949; Davis, 2009; Fraser, 1999; Morton and Tate, 1956; Pelling, 1992). More generally, labour history has always explored the nature and evolution over time of the roots of working-class unity, difference and division (Campbell and McIlroy, 2010). Much the same can be said of those academics or journalists – often but not always the same people – who have chosen the Labour Party as their field of expertise (Cole, 1949; Pelling and Reid, 2005; Thorpe, 2008). It cannot be understood without serious consideration of its inner tensions, of 'the balance between democracy, diversity and tolerance on the one hand and unity, firm leadership and a capacity for coordinated collective effort on the other' (Shaw, in this volume). As for specialists of employment relations, they have to deal with similar phenomena of fragmentation, in particular when studying the uneasy relationship between trade-union officialdom and the rank-and-file (Hyman, 1989; Zeitlin, 1989).

Though disunity is a familiar theme for all those interested in labour matters, some divisions were long overlooked, in particular the divisions of the British working class along gender and race lines. The essential place occupied in the economy first by female workers and later by workers from the Commonwealth did not lead easily to their integration within the ranks of the existing labour movement, so that studies of working-class organisations have repeatedly ignored those workers and the diverse forms of exploitation and oppression they had to face from employers and the State. That neglect of sexual and ethnic minorities by labour historians – and the obliteration of the discrimination at times imposed by the trade unions themselves – was no coincidence. It reflected, to a certain extent, the very composition of the British working class in its formative years: women workers until the First World War were indeed assigned to very specific areas of industrial production (Clark, 1995), and colonial workers, though present in the British Isles long before the arrival of the Windrush, suffered from similar confinement and were even less 'visible' (Belchem, 2014; Tabili, 1994).

But such academic neglect can also be seen as reproducing and even consolidating the kinds of domination and exclusion experienced in everyday life. As the British proletariat became more feminine and multicultural, so did – arguably too slowly – the scope of labour history and studies. It took the efforts of female historians who were both feminists and socialists to start giving women workers their rightful place in British social and political history (Rowbotham, 1973), as it took the efforts of non-white historians with radical leanings to do the same for colonial workers (Ramdin, 1987). Since then, attempts to produce histories of the labour movement attentive to both gendered and racial tensions have been few and far between (Davis, 2009). And this volume itself, though almost half its chapters are by female authors, does not escape that distortion – for the understandable but nonetheless regrettable reasons stated above. With only one chapter focusing on the gender issue, and

none on race as such, the editors agree that some essential forms of disunity within the British labour movement are only touched upon and that further research into those alleys is needed. New inquiries into the 1976–1977 Grunwick dispute and the 2005 Gate Gourmet strike, for example, could illuminate many of the other fragmentations analysed in this volume.

Disunity: a constant feature with ancient roots

In the days of the Industrial Revolution, when a unified working class was still in the making, the first form of self-defence against capitalist exploitation – the Luddite rebellions set aside – was the building of craft unions, especially after 1824, when the Anti-Combination Act was removed. But at the same time the fight for workers' rights took two additional directions: a struggle for the suffrage (at first in collaboration with middle-class radicals) on the one hand, a struggle for economic independence (via the founding of Owenite communities or co-operatives) on the other. Though motivated by a common rejection of the established order, those three strands had little in common and were, in many ways, intellectually incompatible. The fact that the same individuals could jump from one cause to the other does not invalidate that observation. For about a decade the Chartist movement was able to merge all those separate initiatives into a single powerful movement. Yet even Chartism suffered from inner conflicts regarding both means ('moral' versus 'physical' force) and aims (universal suffrage, land reform or Red Republicanism).

In the period that followed, divisive factors were once again more visible than unifying ones – all the more so as the most serious source of division inside the working class, the exclusion of women from the embryonic labour movement, had only been very partially and temporarily overcome by the Chartists. The failure of the mass movement in favour of the People's Charter led to its dissolution, and to a rebirth and mutation of the distinctive currents it had momentarily tied together. Between 1848 (when the third and last petition for the Charter was rejected) and 1914, the labour movement did take giant steps towards unity – a forward march symbolised by the progress from Independent Labour Party (ILP), founded in 1893, to Labour Representation Committee (LRC), founded in 1900, and then Parliamentary Labour Party (PLP), founded in 1906. But even though the Edwardian proletariat was numerically much stronger and sociologically more cemented than the early Victorian one, the labour movement in its most impressive phase of growth remained divided both industrially and politically. Industrially, the formation of local Trades Councils in the 1860s and the foundation of the TUC as a national forum in 1868 could be interpreted as a crucial overcoming of sectional barriers. But those steps forward towards united class action left on the side of the road the majority of the working class, that is, most women workers and the bulk of 'unskilled' workers. It took the 1889 upsurge, and another

one between 1910 and 1914, for the dockers, the seamen and other 'general labourers' to be seen by the leaders of the New Model Unions as allies and not pariahs. Politically, the creation of the Labour Party did not lead to ideological unification. Although it was supported by the socialist ILP, the party refused to adopt a socialist programme, and the oldest of the socialist parties in Britain, the Social Democratic Federation (SDF), founded in 1884, declined to take part in the adventure. There was, in fact, little agreement over the kind of new order that should be built, and over how it should be achieved, the path imagined depending on whether one was inspired primarily by Marx, Jesus Christ or Gladstone. 'Labourism' as a doctrine was always elusive, as so many authors have underlined (Poirier, 1996; Saville, 1973; Shaw, 2004). Naturally, the possible articulation between the industrial and the political branches of the labour movement was another potential source of divergence. The Fabian Society intellectuals were happy to provide the Labour Party with expert studies and schemes, but wary of initiatives from the grassroots that might shake their 'high politics'.

With the First World War and the Bolshevik Revolution, the old oppositions gave way to new ones, which were not unrelated. Should the labour movement speak for 'the exploited' only or for 'the people' in general? Should it attempt to unite all labourers against the capitalist class, including on the international front, or should it aim at uniting all ranks of society, in view of defending national interests first? Those ancient dilemmas took on new shapes, which the foundation of the Communist Party of Great Britain (CPGB) in 1920 crystallised (Ward, 1998). The formation of the first Labour governments, in 1924 and in 1929, might have appeared as the symbol of a triumph of reform over revolution, of British moderation over continental follies. But the disillusions produced by each of those experiences, far from making the British labour movement the unified whole of which so many dreamt, engendered renewed tensions (Howell, 2002; Riddell, 1999). In the troubled interwar years, the professional politicians of the Labour Party and the TUC headquarters remained challenged by the communists, and more generally by the section of the working class that took militant steps without waiting for orders from above. The fact that the ILP, once the core of the Labour Party, chose to leave the party in 1932 says a lot about the turmoil that the labour movement was then going through (Cohen, 2007).

While the Second World War and the Attlee era appear as a time when divergences within the labour movement were relatively muted, every decade since then has produced its own version of disunity (Cronin, 2004). A bird's eye view reveals a recurring pattern: a tendency to unite around common goals when the Labour Party is in opposition; a tendency to diverge when it is in office. Some of the most spectacular phases of labour unrest after 1945 took place under Harold Wilson and James Callaghan, as a large number of their (waged and unionised) voters felt that Labour was not fulfilling its

promises. Since then, Tony Blair and Gordon Brown's management of the Labour Party (their choice to govern in Margaret Thatcher's footsteps in terms of economic policy, to loosen the historical link binding the party to the unions, and to address the City and 'Middle England' rather than the party's traditional working-class supporters) has almost led to a divorce between the party and the class it was originally set up to represent – with a series of consequences affecting the organisations still identifying themselves as part of 'the labour movement' (McIlroy and Daniels, 2009).

Apparently contradicting the 'law of history' presented above, the Corbyn episode is there to remind us that, even in opposition, the Labour Party can be divided – essentially over what is the best road for regeneration and what the 'new kind of politics', a phrase used by both Blair and Corbyn, is supposed to look like (Pemberton and Wickham-Jones, 2015). Can the party be led by a man with minority support among Labour MPs, who may enjoy majority support among the new activists gathered inside Momentum, but whose pro-immigration stance risks alienating some traditional Labour voters even more, thus making the Labour Party unelectable? Or should the party instead trust leaders who supported the war against Iraq? That alternative seems risky now that the Chilcot Inquiry has confirmed that Tony Blair's decision was motivated more by his special relationship with George W. Bush than by the feelings of British people. One of the questions that needs to be asked is whether the Corbyn moment is just a repetition of past battles, or whether it is a desperate and possibly final attempt to bridge the gap between the party and the ideal of socialism on the one hand, and between the party and the working class on the other. What is certain is that the long-forgotten queries (who is 'us' and who is 'them'? who is entitled to wear the 'labour' label?) are re-remerging, thereby justifying a re-examination of the past in the light of current preoccupations, and of course a scrutiny of the present antagonisms themselves.

Against fragmentation, imagined unities

As described above, the British labour movement was formed of different groups trying to achieve different things. This does not imply that those different components did not seek to achieve some form of unity. For practical reasons, it was often felt that divergences over long-term objectives should not be an obstacle to united action around short-term goals. Besides, each group having a certain vision of how to improve the lot of the workers, the question raised was not only that of temporary alliances, but also at times that of winning over the other branches to one's conceptions – which was done more or less explicitly.

Chartism constituted a practical answer to the problem of united working-class action at a time when the question had hardly been asked in theoretical

terms. In a period when waged industrial workers were only just beginning to think of themselves as a class with specific interests, it was through the movement that the working class 'made itself', that the 'labouring classes' lost their plural. Chartism brought together labour activists who until then had followed different itineraries, for example anti-Poor Law campaigners and Ten Hour Day fighters, the suffrage appearing for a miraculous moment as the single political tool through which social problems could be solved. But the unity thus achieved was fragile, and some historians have contested its very existence, arguing that Chartist demands were formulated in the class-blind language of populism (Stedman Jones, 1983).

The need for a common roof was nonetheless too vital to be eclipsed for long. It was the bitter strikes led by the New Model Unions of the 1850s and 1860s that produced the flourishing of Trades Councils, as it was felt that a local carpenters' strike should be able to rely on support from other skilled workers (see Béliard in this volume). The same necessity to present employers with a united front led to contacts and connections across the seas, and to the foundation in London, in 1864, of the International Workingmen's Association (IWMA). It illustrated the fact that the question of class unity suffered no borders, though the British labour movement would soon become plagued with insularity. For a couple of years, the same men who led the London Trades Council sat on the board of the IWMA, embodying the possibility of solid alliances in spite of ideological divergences between the disciples of Proudhon and those of Mazzini, between Methodists and atheists, and so on.

The experience of the Paris Commune in 1871 drove most labour leaders in Britain away from the revolutionary kind of socialism around which the international labour movement would reunite itself in 1889. Confined within national borders, a narrower form of unity developed in the shape of the TUC. A united entity it was, but only to a limited extent. It had no real authority over the huge federations under its umbrella, federations that were themselves becoming so rigid as to lose touch with their grassroots. Moreover, the TUC acted as a lobby more than as an army, and its ties with the middle classes seemed stronger than with the 'wretched of the earth' – as exemplified by the enduring loyalty of the miners' leaders to the Liberal Party. As a result, its capacity to represent the working class as a whole, and to lead it to victory, was contested, in particular during the 'employer backlash' of the 1890s, when its impotence was made blatant. Reinvesting the political front, the hope of the activists who founded the ILP in 1893 was to rally the bulk of their fellow workers and undo the chains still attaching them to their betters via the Liberal and Conservative electoral machines – with little success at first. In the late 1890s, Robert Blatchford's socialist newspaper *The Clarion* promoted an alternative to both the ILP and the TUC, in the shape of a National and International General Federation of Trade and Labour Unions (NIGFTLU). That

unprecedentedly ambitious project, which aimed to unite the English, Welsh, Scottish and Irish workers both industrially and politically, was countered by the TUC's plan for a General Federation of Trade Unions, which achieved little outside the elimination of the NIGFTLU (Barrow and Bullock, 1996).

The Taff Vale decision, in 1901, drove most TUC leaders to back the idea of independent labour representation in Parliament, so that when the PLP was proclaimed in 1906, it seemed the British labour movement had reached the greatest ever degree of unity, relegating nefarious divisions to the past. But the PLP, in many ways, reproduced the TUC's shortcomings: cosy relationships with the Liberals and a 'staircase and corridors' policy which proved hardly adequate to protect the workers from material hardship and exploitation in the workplace. Clearly the PLP's raison d'être was not to offer guidance for collective action. The workers active inside the SDF had their own vision of proletarian unity, inspired by the success of their SPD comrades in Germany: a labour movement based on the socialist doctrine and where the political element would be the guide, not the trade unions. But because the SDF remained a rather marginal chapel, their imagined unity failed to materialise (Crick, 1994).

Other workers on the left of the PLP, however, had plans for a regenerated labour movement, united on more combative foundations. In Britain, that syndicalist current was characterised by its intention to transform the trade-union machinery from the inside, rather than start revolutionary unions from scratch. Their tactic, theorised as 'boring from within', stemmed from the idea that the huge and powerful organisations built by the workers were worth keeping, but that they could only be made to serve the rank-and-file by overthrowing the corrupt 'fakirs' at their head. They would then become tools for the class struggle, make parliamentary politics redundant and become the cells of the Co-operative Commonwealth (Béliard, 2010). Though the 'One Big Union' (OBU) that they had in mind corresponded to a widespread aspiration to unity, it did not replace the existing union structures, except in Ireland (O'Connor, 1988). The Triple Alliance of miners, railwaymen and transport workers that the established union leaders offered as a substitute for the OBU in 1914 was interrupted by the outbreak of war before it had time to prove its (in)efficiency.

The First World War saw the main labour leaders place national unity above international class unity (Winter, 1974). This led, in 1920, to the formation of the CPGB, a party that, although far from organising as many workers as the Labour Party, was hoping it could convince a majority of them to gather under its flag. Because of the Labour Party's influence over the masses, an influence largely mediated through the trade-union apparatus, Lenin advised the British Bolsheviks to pursue their cause inside the unions, and even, if possible, inside the Labour Party, rather than from the outside. This was 'boring from within' all over again, in other words entryism as a way for a

minority group to conquer a majority. The Labour Party never accepted the CPGB's applications, but the unions were less timid, and for decades the communists were active inside the movement (Hinton and Hyman, 1975; Samuel, 2006).

Because from the 1920s onwards the hold of the Labour Party over working-class opinion was confirmed, and because the trade unions, however bureaucratic, proved capable of organising millions and, at times or in certain sectors, a majority of workers, the revolutionary groups that hoped the working class could one day play a revolutionary role often resorted to the same tactics, the most famous case in post-war Britain being the Trotskyist group Militant Tendency, which was eventually expelled from the Labour Party in the mid-1980s (Crick, 1986). Neil Kinnock's strike against Militant infuriated the hard left but brought the party's right and soft left closer together. Thus, in discarding those rebel groups, the Labour Party could claim that it was preserving the party's unity and purging it from the poison of division. However, this demonstration of 'social-democratic centralism' also manifested that, as a democratic and pluralist answer to the issue of unity, it could also be found wanting (Shaw, 2002).

Since 1945, competing conceptions of what foundations labour unity should be built on and what objectives the working class should give itself have therefore mostly been expressed within the framework of the Labour Party and/or the trade unions. The party's predominantly pragmatic approach, coupled with its ideological flexibility, has allowed it to harbour many minority strands over time and to avoid fatal breakaways (Foote, 1985). Until Labour became New Labour, the doctrinal vagueness of 'Labourism' did not preclude internal political unity, nor did it mean that it was not ideologically separated from neighbouring parties. However, the capacity of the Labour Party and of its trade-union partners to constitute suitable forums and provide the appropriate answers has been repeatedly questioned, in particular from workers on the left, who have often hesitated between abandoning a disappointing Labour Party (with the risk of leaving a mass organisation for a sect and of fracturing the labour movement) and staying on board (with the danger of betraying one's ideals and of safeguarding a purposeless unity).

From that point of view, the Corbyn phenomenon is of great interest, in that it is fostered by grassroots activists who all claim to share a concern for the future of working people, but who are divided as to the way to go forward (on the heterogeneity of Momentum members, see Avril in this volume), especially in the context of the post-Brexit vote chaos. Are the current throes marking the end of the 'labourist' alliance? Is the Labour Party still the most adequate vehicle of working-class interests – if ever it was – or should Corbyn take the risk of looking beyond his party to help bring about a superior form of unity? Is the ongoing realignment to the left, which is testing the party's ideological flexibility to breaking point, doing nothing more than dividing

the party in the face of its political enemies? Or will the party, buoyed by the unexpectedly good results of June 2017, regroup around the Corbyn agenda? Is the current Labour leadership, after almost three decades of neoliberal consensus, managing to shift the centre ground of British politics to the left? These are some of the questions that have yet to be resolved.

The convergence–divergence dialectic: historiographical landmarks

Ubiquitous yet understudied, the unity–disunity theme has had its own ups and downs – with the Zeitgeist and the authors' political preferences as the main parameters (Callaghan, Fielding and Ludlam, 2003: 1–2). In the choice to praise or denigrate dissensus, in the choice to celebrate or minimise consensus, the spirit of the times has played a role that cannot be neglected. The growth of class consciousness and the search for unity were privileged objects of research in the phase when the labour movement seemed engaged in a never-ending 'march forward', whereas passivity and fragmentation have come to the fore mostly since the downward spiral of the 1980s. Similarly, politically and socially apathetic decades such as the 1950s or the 1990s have generally produced studies highlighting consensus (Clegg, 1964; Pelling, 1992), while troubled and restless ones, such as the 1970s, have as a rule shifted the focus towards rebels and dissenters (Holton, 1976; Lane, 1974).

Because specialists of the British labour movement have always been more or less directly involved in the political struggles of their time, they have tended to embrace visions of the problem that fitted with their engagements. As Eric Hobsbawm observed, '"History," said one of the men who founded the modern teaching of the subject at our universities, "is past politics." He might have gone further and said that much academic history is present politics dressed up in period costume' (Hobsbawm, 1955: 14). The observation could apply just as well to both political science and the study of industrial relations. Robert George Gammage, the first historian of Chartism, being a moderate Chartist, was fiercely critical of leader Feargus O'Connor, and blamed his authoritarianism and extremism for the movement's fallout with the middle classes and its eventual disintegration (Gammage, 1894, 1983). The history of the Transport and General Workers' Union produced in the 1990s by Ken Coates and Tony Topham, two historians firmly on the left of Labour, who both campaigned for 'workers' control' in the 1970s, is as sympathetic towards the syndicalist 'troublemakers' of the 1910s as it is critical of the TUC's 'realism' and 'pragmatism' (Coates and Topham, 1991). Unsurprisingly perhaps, the celebration of unity is more common among moderates such as Henry Pelling and Hugh Clegg, as they tend to see splits and brutal mutations as potentially dangerous steps into the unknown (Clegg, 1964; Pelling, 1992), while breaking the consensus is usually appreciated by those with admittedly more radical sympathies (Hinton, 1983).

As for the authors of this book, refusing the comforting myth of an inexorable 'forward march' (Jacques and Mulhern, 1981), be it in the liberal-radical, social-democratic or Stalinist mould, refusing the parallel teleology of fragmentation and disappearance so prevalent in the 1980s and early 1990s, they have attempted to build upon previous explorations of the contradictory tendencies inside the British labour movement. The book revisits moments of crisis that were also moments of truth, up until the immediate past, re-examining labour bodies at times when they stood at the crossroads, when certainties were shaken and activists found themselves sitting awkwardly 'in between'. In doing so it seeks to identify more clearly and under new perspectives long-term convergences and divergences in terms of both organisational structures and decision-making processes.

Structure of the book

To make sense of present-day disagreements, it is vital to look at the disparate nature of the British labour movement in a long-term perspective. The problems faced by the British labour movement since Corbyn's election at the head of Labour are strikingly different from those with which it was confronted in the days of the Grand National Consolidated Trades' Union (GNCTU). British capitalism has changed immensely, so that its place in the world-system and the physiognomy of British society in the twenty-first century are not what they were at the dawn of the Victorian age. Working-class organisations, as a consequence, have also changed, sometimes to the point of being unrecognisable. The book therefore follows a diachronic approach, from the 1830s to the present day, progressively zooming in on the dilemmas experienced by the contemporary Labour Party.

The first section ('Labour's first century: disputed solidarities'), which comprises five chapters, covers the long nineteenth century, an era spanning from the Industrial Revolution to the First World War and which one might call the infancy and teenage years of the modern working class, when labour organisations were still struggling to be recognised by employers and the State (for historiographical overviews, see Allen and Chase, 2010; MacRaild and Martin, 2000). The period was also characterised by the fact that most workers were still excluded from the realm of parliamentary politics: in those days before the Labour Party replaced the Liberal Party as the other big party of government, the idea that a Labour Party might one day be in office seemed hard to imagine (McKibbin, 1974, 1990; Tanner, 1990).

In chapter 1, Ophélie Siméon takes the case of Robert Owen's GNCTU, the first working-class association ever in Britain to try to unite all trades in the country to secure workers' control of their labour, and the biggest one so far. She argues that dissension was not a sign of failure and that this locus of creative tension was 'a cradle of debate and political experimentation for the radical nebula'. In chapter 2, Steven Parfitt takes us into the post-Chartist era

by attaching himself to the British branch of the American Knights of Labor, a much smaller but more long-lasting organisation, undone by rivalry with old and new unions as well as by its inability to relate to the 1889 upheaval. Here again he argues that this may not be deemed so much a failure as a missing link between the old and the new unions. In chapters 3 and 4 Lewis H. Mates and Yann Béliard offer case studies that mirror each other in more ways than one. Exploring the internal tensions that erupted during the Edwardian years and above all in the years of the Great Labour Unrest, they demonstrate that, be it in the mining town of Durham or in the port city of Hull, the same liberal, socialist and syndicalist currents competed for influence over the local working class. The ideological factions were also statutory and generational ones, and the divergences were made all the plainer when the 1910–1914 wave of spontaneous industrial action unfurled, confronting each group with very concrete choices that strikingly revealed what kind of unity (social or national) they most valued. Finally, in chapter 5, Anna Clark analyses the attempts made by domestic servants to form trade unions of their own, thus shedding light on the most segregated, atomised and yet numerous section of the British working class. Her study presents the ways a number of female servants, overcoming upper- and middle-class maternalism, tried to convince the mainstream of the (male) trade-union movement no longer to despise and exclude them. The portrait that emerges is one of a group that was less deferent and different than usually imagined, and acutely class conscious.

The second section ('Convergences, divergences and realignments on the left'), which comprises the next five chapters, looks at unity and disunity in the wider left, from the decades that saw the transformation of the Labour Party into a party of government – a phenomenon greeted by some as a positive coming of age but castigated by others as the epitome of integration into the status quo – through to the New Labour era and the present day. The chapters show that although the years between 1945 and 1979 are mostly perceived as the 'high tide of labour', that is, the moment when British workers were able to exert the greatest control over their own lives and enjoy the greatest weight over public policies, consensus was all the same a rare thing (Campbell, Fishman and McIlroy, 2007; McIlroy, Fishman and Campbell, 2007). In particular, on the occasions when Labour was in office (as confirmed by studies of the Blair years) tensions developed between the Labour Party leadership and its grassroots or allies, as great expectations were frustrated by the exercise of power.

In chapter 6, David Stewart focuses on the Co-operative movement, one of the oldest components of the labour movement, which formed a national network a long time before a Labour Party was created. Taking as his object the Resale Price Maintenance, a minimum retail price that manufacturers were able to enforce between 1917 and 1964, he explores the contrasting ways in which co-operators and Labour politicians related to it. Unearthing

the internal divisions on each side of the debate, he underlines how the official alliance between the Co-operative Union and the Labour Party implied neither a shared definition of socialism, nor a common vision of how social progress was to be achieved. In chapter 7, Anastasia Chartomatsidi questions inter-organisational divisions from the angle of foreign affairs, for divisions were not solely about domestic policies but also about international questions. The divergences, in the 1944–1947 period, between the Labour Party (then in office) and the much smaller CPGB (still supportive of the 'democratic empires' against the 'fascist regimes') on the one hand, and the even smaller Trotskyist Revolutionary Communist Party on the other, as regards world politics, are no revelation. But the comparison of their visions of the British military intervention in Greece in 1944–1945 offers a very telling prism to rediscover that chasm. Jeremy Tranmer's chapter 8 then examines the splintering of British Communism in the 1980s. Using the concept of 'revolutionary pragmatism' which Nina Fishman (1995) saw as the cement of the CPGB in the 1930s and 1940s (i.e. a specific combination of trade-union loyalism, rank-and-filism, 'united front' policy, and the belief that a revolutionary situation would somehow appear in the future), he contends that the crumbling of that shared creed accelerated the party's disintegration, in the unfavourable context of the decline of the labour movement, the fall of the USSR and the advent of Thatcherism. When consensus over what factors made the leaders legitimate disappeared, the structure could no longer hold. In chapter 9, David Evans examines the theme of breakaway trade unions, with a focus on the era of neoliberalism. Beginning with the observation that breakaway trade unions are not an anomaly but have been a feature of labour (dis)organisation since the dawn of the labour movement, he underlines their complex and heterogeneous nature, rooting their birth firmly in structural location and historical context. Finally, Anne Beauvallet's chapter 10 studies the English teachers' unions, their relations with each other and with the Labour Party over time, with particular emphasis on the 2010–2015 period. Her inquiry shows that, in spite of an enviable rate of membership (close to one hundred per cent of the profession), they have lost the influence over public policies that they had acquired in the immediate post-war years, and were not treated with particular indulgence by the New Labour governments. Blair and Brown's adaptation to the neoliberal order inherited from Thatcher is analysed as the main cause behind the growing mistrust of the teachers' unions towards Labour, especially at a moment when teachers were returning to more radical tools of intervention.

The third section ('The Labour Party today: fragmentation or mutation?') comprises the four remaining chapters and zooms in on the Labour Party, with particular focus on the post-New Labour years. The overall trajectory of the party is one characterised by the loosening of ties between the Labour Party and its trade-union sponsors, the weakening of the bonds between

Labour and the class it long claimed to represent, and the possible disintegration of the party itself under Corbyn's leadership – which may or may not have been reversed by the unexpected turnaround in the June 2017 snap election. For the architects of the Third Way and those who sympathised with that so-called 'modernisation' of labourism, the Corbyn experiment can only end in electoral failure, although Labour's recent move to the left has also generated a certain degree of enthusiasm about the potential of a Corbyn-led party to redraw the British political landscape. The chapters in this section all point to such levels of uncertainty that there is every reason to be extremely cautious about future developments.

In chapter 11, Nick Randall provides a sweeping account of the PLP's post-war divisions and its contested position among the institutions of the Labour Party, demonstrating that while division has proven a constant feature of the PLP's politics, the scale, character and organisation of those divisions have varied considerably over this period, so that these divisions are best understood in terms of broader sequences within the party's post-war history. The chapter also shows that at moments of heightened intra-party regime vulnerability, such as in the late 1970s–early 1980s and following the collapse of New Labour, the legitimacy of the PLP itself has been threatened. In chapter 12, Eric Shaw takes a look at the crisis of party management under Jeremy Corbyn. The two fundamental components of that leadership function – ideological integration and governance legitimacy – seem to have suffered greatly since Corbyn's election, putting party cohesion in danger – the gap between the people who voted for him and the Labour Party MPs being the most visible aspect of that centrifugal movement. The author argues that Corbyn's original use of majoritarian centralist and pluralist techniques has led Labour into what might be termed a 'managerial impasse'. Fiona Simpkins, in chapter 13, examines the current soul-searching crisis experienced by Scottish Labour through an analysis of the party's experience of devolution in light of the two contradictory forces exerted by a traditionally centralised party in a unitary polity on the one hand and an overarching constitutional debate in a devolved environment on the other hand. Her study demonstrates that Scottish Labour's plummeting electoral scores are a clear indication that the partisan electoral strategies of the UK Labour Party are no longer suitable for a Scottish Labour Party having to survive in a political landscape marked by a constitutional divide. In chapter 14, Emmanuelle Avril tries to anticipate the future of Labour organising by looking at successive attempts to 'movementise' the Labour Party, the most recent of which is seen in the Corbyn-supporting Momentum. Taking several recent trends into consideration – such as the rise of new technology tools, of community organising and the opening up of party structures – she examines the deep transformation that the Labour Party is currently undergoing, a mutation that is making the frontiers between the party and the wider community increasingly porous. Will these changes succeed in

galvanising support both inside and outside the party and help reconnect the party with the wider electorate, thus creating a mass social movement ready for government? Or will they alienate the party further from the interests of the voters and turn it into a marginalised protest group?

This book does not claim to be comprehensive. It leaves certain periods uncovered and numerous dimensions that would have been worthy of attention in the shadows. Nonetheless, we believe it can play a useful role, in different and complementary ways. Indeed its main objective is not only to record instances of division, but also the ways the builders of the British labour movement envisioned a possible overcoming of disunity. The rediscovery of such endeavours, we hope, will allow past answers to inform present initiatives, and present controversies to help revisit past experiences in a new light.

References

Allen, J. and Chase, M. (2010) 'Britain: 1750–1900', in Allen, J., Campbell, A. and McIlroy, J. (eds) *Histories of Labour: National and International Perspectives*, Pontypool: Merlin, pp. 64–98.

Avril, E. (2013) 'The Evolution of Decision-Making in the British Labour Party: From Grassroots to Netroots?', in Avril, E. and Zumello, C. (eds) *New Technologies, Organizational Change and Governance*, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 102–16.

Avril, E. (2016a) 'The (Unintended) Consequences of New Labour: Party Leadership vs Party Management in the British Labour Party', New Approaches to Political Leadership (special issue edited by Mark Bennister), *Politics and Governance*, 4:16. Available at: https://www.cogitatiopress.com/politicsandgovernance/article/view/534. Accessed 5 December 2017.

Avril, E. (2016b) '"Wilful Blindness": Effects and Perceptions of New Labour's Party Management', Symposium on Lewis Minkin's *The Blair Supremacy*, *Political Studies Review*, 14:2, pp. 163–74.

Barrow, L. and Bullock, I. (1996) *Democratic Ideas in the British Labour Movement, 1880–1914*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Belchem, J. (2014) *Before the Windrush: Race Relations in Twentieth-Century Liverpool*, Liverpool: Liverpool University Press.

Béliard, Y. (2010) 'From Gustav Schmidt to Gus Smith: A Tale of Labour Integration (Hull, 1878–1913)', in Bantman, C. and Berry, D. (eds) *The Individual, the National and the Transnational: New Perspectives on Anarchism, Labour and Syndicalism*, Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, pp. 44–60.

Béliard, Y. (2014) 'Revisiting the Great Labour Unrest, 1911–1914', in 'The Great Labour Unrest, 1911–1914', *Labour History Review* (special issue edited by Yann Béliard), 79:1, April, pp. 1–17.

Callaghan, J., Fielding, S. and Ludlam, S. (eds) (2003) *Interpreting the Labour Party: Approaches to Labour Politics and History*, Manchester: Manchester University Press.

Campbell, A. and McIlroy, J. (2010) 'Britain: The Twentieth Century', in Allen, J., Campbell, A. and McIlroy, J. (eds) *Histories of Labour: National and International Perspectives*, Pontypool: Merlin, pp. 99–136.

Campbell, A., Fishman, N. and McIlroy, J. (eds) (2007; 1st ed.: 1999) *The Post-War Compromise: British Trade Unions and Industrial Politics, 1945–64*, Monmouth: Merlin.

Clark, A. (1995) *The Struggle for the Breeches: Gender and the Making of the British Working Class*, London: Rivers Oram.
Clegg, H. (1964) *History of British Trade Unions since 1889: 1889–1910*, Vol. 1, Oxford: Clarendon Press.
Coates, K. and Topham, T. (1991) *The History of the Transport and General Workers' Union*, Oxford: Basil Blackwell.
Cohen, G. (2007) *The Failure of a Dream: The Independent Labour Party from Disaffiliation to World War II*, London: I. B. Tauris.
Cole, G. D. H. (1949; 1st ed.: 1938) *The Common People, 1746–1946*, London: Methuen.
Crick, M. (1986) *The March of Militant*, London: Faber.
Crick, M. (1994) *The History of the Social-Democratic Federation*, Keele: Ryburn.
Cronin, J. E. (2004) *New Labour's Pasts: The Labour Party and its Discontents*, Harlow and New York: Pearson/Longman.
Davies, S. (1996) *Liverpool Labour: Social and Political Influences on the Development of the Labour Party in Liverpool, 1900–1939*, Keele: Keele University Press.
Davis, M. (2009; 1st ed.: 1993), *Comrade or Brother? A History of the British Labour Movement*, London: Pluto Press.
Fielding, S. (2002) *The Labour Party: Continuity and Change in the Making of 'New' Labour*, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
Fishman, N. (1995) *The British Communist Party and the Trade Unions, 1933–45*, Aldershot: Scholar Press.
Foote, G. (1985) *The Labour Party's Political Thought: A History*, London: Croom Helm.
Fraser, H. W. (1999) *A History of British Trade Unionism, 1700–1998*, Basingstoke: Macmillan.
Gammage, R. G. (1894; 1st ed.: 1854) *History of the Chartist Movement, 1837–1854*, Newcastle-on-Tyne: Browne & Browne.
Gammage, R. G. (1983) *Reminiscences of a Chartist*, Manchester: Society for the Study of Labour History.
Hinton, J. (1983) *Labour and Socialism: A History of the British Labour Movement, 1867–1974*, Brighton: Wheatsheaf Books.
Hinton, J. and Hyman, R. (1975) *Trade Unions and Revolution: The Industrial Politics of the Early British Communist Party*, London: Pluto Press.
Hobsbawm, E. J. (1955) 'Where are British Historians Going?', *Marxist Quarterly*, 2:1, pp. 14–26.
Holton, B. (1976) *British Syndicalism, 1900–14: Myths and Realities*, London: Pluto Press.
Howell, D. (2002) *MacDonald's Party: Labour Identities and Crisis, 1922–1931*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
Hyman, R. (1989) 'The Sound of One Hand Clapping: A Comment on the "Rank and Filism" Debate', *International Review of Social History*, 34, pp. 309–26.
Jacques, M. and Mulhern, F. (eds) (1981) *The Forward March of Labour Halted?* London: NLB in association with Marxism Today.
Lane, T. (1974) *The Union Makes Us Strong: The British Working Class, Its Trade Unionism and Politics*, London: Arrow Books.
MacRaild, D. and Martin, D. (2000) 'Bibliographical Essay', in MacRaild, D. and Martin, D. (eds), *Labour in British Society, 1830–1914*, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 197–204.
McIlroy, J. and Daniels, G. (eds) (2009) *Trade Unions in a Neoliberal World: British Trade Unions under New Labour*, London: Routledge.
McIlroy, J., Fishman, N. and Campbell, A. (eds) (2007; 1st ed.: 1999) *The High Tide of British Trade Unionism: Trade Unions and Industrial Politics, 1964–79*, Monmouth: Merlin.

McKibbin, R. (1974) *The Evolution of the Labour Party, 1910–1924*, London and New York: Oxford University Press.
McKibbin, R. (1990) *The Ideologies of Class: Social Relations in Britain, 1880–1950*, Oxford: Clarendon.
Minkin, L. (2014) *The Blair Supremacy: A Study in the Politics of Labour's Party Management*, Manchester: Manchester University Press.
Morton, A. L. and Tate, G. K. (1956) *A History of the British Labour Movement, 1770–1920,* London: Lawrence & Wishart.
O'Connor, E. (1988) *Syndicalism in Ireland, 1917–1923*, Cork: Cork University Press.
Pelling, H. (1992) *A History of British Trade Unionism*, London: Penguin.
Pelling, H. and Reid, A. J. (2005) *A Short History of the Labour Party*, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
Pemberton, H. and Wickham-Jones, M. (2015) 'Factionalism in the Parliamentary Labour Party and the 2015 Leadership Contest', *Renewal*, 23, pp. 5–21.
Poirier, F. (1996) 'Le Parti travailliste britannique: grandeur et décadence', in *La Gauche en Europe depuis 1945, invariants et mutations du socialisme européen*, Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, pp. 55–89.
Ramdin, R. (1987) *The Making of the Black Working Class in Britain*, Aldershot: Gower.
Riddell, N. (1999) *Labour in Crisis: The Second Labour Government, 1929–1931*, Manchester: Manchester University Press.
Rowbotham, S. (1973) *Hidden from History: 300 Years of Women's Oppression and the Fight Against It*, London: Pluto Press.
Samuel, R. (2006) *The Lost World of British Communism*, London: Verso.
Saville, J. (1973) 'The Ideology of Labourism', in Benewick, R., Berki, R. N. and Parekh, B. (eds) *Knowledge and Belief in Politics: The Problem of Ideology*, London: Allen & Unwin, p. 215.
Seyd, P. and Whiteley, P. (2002) *New Labour's Grassroots: The Transformation of the Labour Party Membership*, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
Shaw, E. (2002) 'New Labour in Britain: New Democratic Centralism?', *West European Politics*, 25:3, pp. 147–70.
Shaw, E. (2004) 'Labourism', in Beech, M., Hickson, K. and Plant, R. (eds) *The Struggle for Labour's Soul*, London: Routledge, pp. 187–205.
Shaw, E. (2016) 'Understanding Labour Party Management under Tony Blair', Symposium on Lewis Minkin's *The Blair Supremacy*, *Political Studies Review*, 14:2, pp. 153–62.
Stedman Jones, G. (1983) *Languages of Class: Studies in English Working-Class History, 1832–1982*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
Tabili, L. (1994) *We Ask for British Justice: Workers and Racial Difference in Late Imperial Britain*, Ithaca, New York and London: Cornell University Press.
Tanner, D. (1990) *Political Change and the Labour Party, 1900–1918*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
Thorpe, A. (2008) *A History of the British Labour Party*, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
Ward, P. (1998) *Red Flag and Union Jack: Englishness, Patriotism and the British Left, 1881–1924*, Woodbridge: Boydell.
Winter, J. M. (1974) *Socialism and the Challenge of War: Ideas and Politics in Britain, 1912–1918*, London and Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul.
Zeitlin, J. (1989) 'From Labour History to the History of Industrial Relations', *Economic History Review*, 15, pp. 159–84.

PART I

Labour's first century: disputed solidarities

1

The Grand National Consolidated Trades' Union, 1833–1834: class and conflict in the early British labour movement

Ophélie Siméon

Introduction

The Grand National Consolidated Trades' Union (or GNCTU for short) is a relatively little-known organisation in the history of the British labour movement. For less than a year, in 1833–1834, it aimed to unite all trades in the country and secure fair wages, access to equitable markets and workers' control over production processes. From April 1833 until its demise, the Union increasingly came under Robert Owen's chairmanship. In the early 1800s, he had gained international fame as an enlightened cotton master, experimenting with a vast range of social reforms at his mill of New Lanark, Scotland (Donnachie and Hewitt, 1993). After leaving the factory in 1825, he became a full-time theoretician and activist, advocating the complete reorganisation of society along co-operative and communitarian lines. By the 1830s, he was in the process of federating the first socialist movement in Britain – or Owenism – to which the GNCTU was closely affiliated. Building on growing claims for national union among the British working classes, the GNCTU attracted strong popular support from the spring of 1834, yet it disbanded over the course of a few months.

In view of this meteoric rise and fall, historians have seen the GNCTU at best as a missed opportunity for trade unionism, at worst as a diversion of labour's alleged true goals through the collusion with Owen's 'utopian' socialism (Cole, 2001; Oliver, 1964). In other words, it is perceived as an anomaly, a locus of internal strife at odds with the idealised unity of the later British labour movement. Yet far from being a pre-scientific eccentricity, the so-called 'utopian' varieties of socialism should be studied in their own terms, and in

their own time (Claeys, 1987; Stedman Jones, 2016). Rather than dismissing the GNCTU in view of its ultimate demise, it is necessary to re-examine the movement's emergence, internal organisation and historical significance precisely through a look at its divisions. As barometers of social relations, they reveal the nature, structure and purposes of political movements, and as such they are a powerful tool to move beyond the teleological assumptions that have too long plagued the study of pre-Marxian socialism (Stedman Jones, 2016). As the introduction to this book points at, analyses of dissension within the British labour movement can offer powerful insights into its complexity and variety. In this respect, the GNCTU appears as a case in point. The quick succession of success and failure seemingly indicates that in its early stages at least, interest in the budding British labour movement was proportional to its propensity for internal conflict. Supporters were a motley group, where class and occupation formed significant faultlines. The GNCTU did not fail solely due to a government-led backlash against trade unions. It imploded in the wake of internal rivalry between radical, working-class members and moderate, usually middle-class Owenites.

Despite its short existence, the GNCTU produced a wide variety of primary sources. Its official statements, proceedings and minutes were published in several radical newspapers, like *The Pioneer*, *The Poor Man's Guardian* and *The Crisis*, of which Owen was a shareholder. The Union's constitution and rules especially were printed as two anonymous pamphlets in early 1834. Numerous references to the GNCTU also appear in Owen's correspondence, as the Union's officers were in close contact with him, providing valuable information on branch life at both national and local level. Finally, one of the main sources of information on the GNCTU is police reports sent to the Home Office by two undercover agents between February and August 1834 (Parssinen and Prothero, 1977). These remind us that, far from being an epiphenomenon, the GNCTU was on the contrary firmly entrenched in the union enthusiasm of its day, and in the power struggles between the government and the radical circles that encapsulated it.

'A different state of things': founding the GNCTU

The association between socialism and trade unionism was originally not of Owen's making. It was rather a spontaneous, grassroots-led joining of forces borne out of the frustration which permeated working-class radicals after the Great Reform Act of 1832 (Musson, 1972: chapter 4; Oliver, 1964: 80). When their strategic alliance with the Whigs collapsed, corporate and guild traditions of self-help coalesced into a renewed interest in trade unionism. More specifically, there was widespread discussion of general union at a national level. In the years 1829–1834, leading workers' organisations, like the National Association for the Protection of Labour and the Operative Builders' Union,

were attempting to federate all workers within their trades and to ally with others. Despite the repeal of the Combination Acts in 1824, working-class organisations were still frowned upon by Whigs and Tories alike. Following on the slump in trade of the year 1830 and the French Revolution of 1830, machine-breaking movements in the south of England (better known as the 'Swing Revolt') and riots in the Welsh mining communities of Merthyr were heavily repressed in 1830 and 1831. Two years later, Parliament rejected the Ten Hour Bill. In addition to the Great Reform Act of 1832, these precedents reinforced the feeling among radical activists that Parliament and government were oblivious to the plight of the lower classes, hence the need for ordinary workers to carve out their own, separate platform upon which to advance their interests (Chase, 2017: chapter 5). A general union, drawing on pooled financial and human resources, and indebted to centuries-old traditions of mutual help, seemed like the perfect instrument. As Malcolm Chase argues, the enthusiasm for general union in the years 1829–1834 marked the beginning of political syndicalism: 'workers' associations, from being essentially reactive responses to economic circumstances, were becoming increasingly pro-active in the pursuit of a creative role in the shaping of those circumstances' (Chase, 2017: 139).

In this context, trade unionism found increasing support among co-operators, who themselves had been strong followers of Owen since the mid-1820s. The idea of general union chimed in with their emphasis on mutual help, both in the economic and political realms. Owen's meeting hall, the 'Institution of the Industrious Classes' on Charlotte Street, London, was open for use by trade unions, and his Sunday lectures were attended by co-operators and trade unionists alike, thus increasingly blurring the boundaries between these groups (Home Office, 1834d; Parssinen and Prothero, 1977: 73, 76).

Likewise, unionists like the London Tailors, Staffordshire Potters and the aforementioned Builders' Union had been reaching out towards Owen for support and guidance, following the latter's nationwide tour in the summer of 1833 to propagate his views.[1] In Yorkshire and Lancashire, trade unions were particularly interested in Owenite co-operative stores, known as Labour Exchanges, where labourers could sell their production directly to the public, thus bypassing middlemen (Marshall, 1833). Indeed, most popular among working-class activists at the time was Owen's labour theory of value, first voiced in his 1820 pamphlet *Report to the County of Lanark* (Owen, 1993). It argued that only workers should be able to control the means and fruits of their labour. In a fair economic system, wages should no longer be based on the laws of an individualistic market, but on the time spent working. This principle also had powerful political implications, as the working day itself should be short enough to accommodate for ample education and leisure, thus ensuring the progress of nations. In short, Owen advocated an ideal of economic cooperation and universal harmony, designed to put an end to the

exploitation of workers. Accordingly, he approved the idea of union within and between all trades. In October 1833, during the sixth annual Co-operative Congress held in London, he announced the creation of a National Moral Union of the Productive Classes (*The Crisis*, 12 October 1833). The project never came to fruition, but it set the stage for the founding of the GNCTU a few months later, in February 1834. Several union delegates attended the Congress, and Owen's public advocacy of general union had given further legitimacy to the cause. In November 1833, the Derby Lockout provided another catalyst (Parssinen and Prothero, 1977: 71). The strike failed despite nationwide support among radical circles, and this spurred the need for general union even further.

The GNCTU was founded during a week-long meeting of trade unionists held in London in February 1834. The London tailors were particularly instrumental in the movement's inception, thus confirming the presence of strong Owenite ties from the outset (Parssinen and Prothero, 1977: 71). Since the early 1830s, many tailors' lodges had been active in the Labour Exchange movement (Oliver, 1958: 355–67; Parssinen and Prothero, 1977: 72). At that time, under the probable influence of Owen's co-operative teachings, the union had been reorganised to include lower-skilled tailors (Oliver, 1964: 80). Later on, a delegation of London tailors had attended the October 1833 Congress, and in February 1834 they organised the meeting from which the GNCTU emerged. A tailor, John Browne, was appointed grand secretary (Browne, 1834; Parssinen and Prothero, 1977: 71; *The Pioneer*, 22 February 1834). As Browne was corresponding with Owen as early as March 1834, the latter closely knew and approved of the Union's existence and workings from the very beginning, even though he did not formally join until April of the same year (*New Moral World*, 15 October 1835; Oliver, 1964: 72).

Earlier studies of the GNCTU have argued that before Owen's takeover, the Union was an early example of 'Orthodox co-operative socialism – Owenism stripped of its utopian and communitarian aims' (Oliver, 1964: 84). This antagonistic reading overlooks the complexity of the Owenite idea of community, which was much more fluid and multidimensional than today's vision of the alternative, counter-culture commune – often dismissed as a mere curiosity and as such doomed to failure (Langdon, 2000: 2). Along with many of his followers, Owen believed for most of the 1830s that the advent of the communitarian system could only come through a slow, gradual process of conversion which would naturally supersede all present political and economic institutions.[2] As a consequence, the whole network of Owenite institutions, whether co-operative stores, lecture halls or GNCTU lodges, were in many respects intended as halfway houses on the path to community life. As re-education was both the means and the end of social reform, experiencing Owenite principles from the inside through a day-to-day involvement in the movement's various ventures was a highly powerful teaching method. As a

consequence, even though the building of brick-and-mortar communities remained a somewhat distant prospect, the GNCTU was to a great extent imbued with Owen's communitarian principles.

The Union's constitution, or 'Proceedings', written during the February 1834 meeting, shows that its purpose and intended scope of action were far more universal than those of standard trade unionism. Its immediate aim was to provide relief in times of strike, slack trade, illness and old age through levies, sick funds and superannuation payments. But ultimately, these acts of mutual support would help labourers to establish their own co-operative workshops and stores, thus reaffirming Owen's core principle that workers alone should control production and trading processes. Finally, in line with Owen's communitarian ideals, these new co-operatives should be established on the land, 'the source of the first necessaries in life' (GNCTU, 1834b: 6). These arrangements would not only ensure the end of capitalistic exploitation, but also provide a permanent answer to the social question, thus paving the way for the ultimate regeneration of humanity. The Union's rules could not be clearer – the aim was to bring about 'A DIFFERENT STATE OF THINGS' (GNCTU, 1834a: art. XLVI). On one account only did the GNCTU veer away from orthodox Owenism. Its advocacy of strikes as a pressure point to advance its cause put it firmly at odds with Owen's ideals of political moderation.

Internal organisation: centralisation *and* local autonomy

In terms of institutional framework, the GNCTU borrowed from both existing trade unions and from the Owenite movement itself, with a special emphasis on community spirit. Local branches were known as 'lodges', and everyone was free to join, including women (Browne, 1834). These lodges were usually pre-existing associations, whether union branches, co-operatives or friendly societies, whose affiliation to the GNCTU was an additional activity. This universal character was further enhanced by the fact that Auxiliary Lodges were to be created to welcome non-unionist supporters. The Union as a whole had a federal structure, probably modelled on the Operative Builders' and the London Tailors' associations. All the local lodges in a given area were supervised by a Central District Committee, to which they sent elected delegates. At national level, the GNCTU was controlled by two assemblies: the Delegate Council, where the various District Committee members met every six months, and a full-time Executive Council (Oliver, 1964: 81). However, unlike previous trade unions, members of the Executive were elected by the Delegate Council, not merely appointed. This form of representative democracy, both at branch and national level, was a way to practice community politics, and was directly derived from Owen's plans for social regeneration.

Similarly, branch life was intended as a preparation for future communitarian experiments, and collective modes of sociability were therefore given pride of place. Following Owen's recommendations laid out in his *Report to the County of Lanark*, all lodges were to have a sick fund, a co-operative workshop and store, as well as extensive arrangements for 'mental improvements'. Owen and his followers put great emphasis on education and 'rational amusement' as a means of individual and collective betterment. All ventures linked to the movement featured schools, lecture halls, libraries and reading rooms, with a strong focus on temperance (GNCTU, 1834b: art. XXXVII; 1834a: art. 6; Yeo, 1971: 84–114). Community bonds within and between branches were further renewed through the Owenite press and a group of Executive-appointed missionaries, who toured the country, lecturing at local lodges and tasked with founding new ones. Thanks to the missionaries' action, membership grew rapidly after February. Indeed, they travelled to regions with long-established unionism traditions, where they were most likely to find a sympathetic ear. Branches were created in London mostly, but also in Glasgow and the North of England (Haynes, 1977: 73–93).

The GNCTU's only surviving balance statement, leaked to the Home Office by its undercover agents in the London Tailors' Union, provides the sole information on registered members (Home Office, 1834d). Most of them were London-based, and tailors were unsurprisingly dominant, with around 4,000 affiliated unionists out of around 16,000 fee-paying members in total. A host of other craftsmen and -women joined in the first half of 1834, including a Female Lodge of Miscellaneous Operatives. Like the majority of Owenites, GNCTU members were drawn from the educated, upper working class, who could afford the registration fee of 3d per head a week, as well as various levies demanded by the Executive, usually for strike relief (Oliver, 1964: 81). Both in London and in provincial lodges, tailors were joined by cordwainers and silk-weavers mostly. The Staffordshire potters also made a valuable contribution to the GNCTU. Aside from this 16,000-strong group, the Union attracted several thousands of non-registered sympathisers. These probably could not afford the 3d weekly fee, or did not wish to officially associate themselves with the organisation. Good evidence of the GNCTU's broad appeal is the London Copenhagen Fields demonstration of April 1834. Organised by the Consolidated Union and led by Owen himself in support of the Dorchester Six, it attracted more than 40,000 protesters (Home Office, 1834c; Place, 1834; *Morning Star*, 22 April 1834).[3]

A 'mortal wound': tensions and demise

The GNCTU was rife with internal tension from the day it was founded. The very legitimacy of strikes as an agent of social change was the main bone of contention, especially as it heightened a host of social divisions at play within

the broader Owenite movement. Radical, working-class activists tended to support strikes, while more moderate, generally middle-class members followed Owen's rejection of political conflict as a mode of action. Moreover, many Owenites extended their leader's ideal of economic fairness into the political realm and supported universal male suffrage. This was not the case with Owen. While he favoured the eight-hour day, he thought that the working classes were not politically mature enough to be granted an extended franchise. His idea of social change as education was inseparable from a paternalistic outlook, inherited from his New Lanark years. Before true voting rights were to be achieved, the working classes had to be taught about the virtues of community by their social betters and men of knowledge, primarily himself.

As a consequence, Owen came to the conclusion that it was in his best interest to take control of this grassroots enthusiasm for trade unionism – to tame its most radical elements and to keep them in line with his own, broader purposes. This became all the more urgent after the Dorchester Six were sentenced to transportation. The Tolpuddle Martyrs had been affiliated to the GNCTU and Owen deplored their unfair trial. However, support for their cause translated into massive strikes and an influx of new, more radical Union members, two developments which he feared could lead to chaos. In April 1834, Owen founded a Grand Miscellaneous Lodge at his London headquarters, the Charlotte Street Institution of the Industrious Classes. As it was not linked to any specific trade, this branch enabled non-working-class sympathisers to join the GNCTU. Soon after, he was elected a member of the Delegate Council. By May, it had agreed to Owen's wishes and come up with a new Union constitution (Cole, 1939).

Back in February, the founding members' 'Proceedings' had advocated general strike as the most powerful means of social change. The new rules now officially dismissed industrial action, general or otherwise, in favour of a wholly pacific stance.[4] Cooperation and community-building were reaffirmed. The Union was now meant to encompass all occupations and all classes, in order to fulfil the shared interests of both workers and employers. This was meant to provide an antidote against all forms of conflict, whether riots or strikes – in other words, to create a nationwide economic and political community. To this effect, the Union's individual subscription of three shillings a week would now be used to buy land and machinery, thus hastening the advent of brick-and-mortar Owenite communities (*The Pioneer*, 7 June 1834).

Contrary to Cole and Oliver's interpretations, this move towards a staunchly anti-political outlook was not a coup on Owen's part, as it was backed by both the GNCTU's Executive and representative District Committee. More generally, recent research has shown that many Union members favoured Owen's involvement, confident that his public status and

reputation would help further their cause. As a whole, the Consolidated Union respected Owen despite his somewhat condescending attitude towards working-class activism. In the eyes of many, he remained the champion of the Factory Acts and the defender of the Dorchester Six (Parssinen and Prothero, 1977: 73). Moreover, according to undercover agent G. M. Ball, the Executive welcomed the official ban on strikes, out of fear that the Dorchester sentences might jeopardise the GNCTU as a whole (Home Office, 1834d).

This move towards a more classically Owenite approach to trade unionism nevertheless heightened pre-existing internal tensions. The variety of responses to the Tolpuddle Martyrs' case provides a good illustration of the power play at work within the GNCTU. Owen and the Executive favoured negotiation with employers and the government, as well as holding pacific demonstrations (*The Crisis*, 19 April 1834). Meanwhile, the rank-and-file massively preferred strikes. This was both a means to show their support for their Dorchester brethren and, by extension, to campaign for the improvement of the condition of the working classes. Therefore, the change of constitution in May 1834 was partly a warning to the London Tailors' Union. Despite being the GNCTU's driving force, they had disobeyed the Executive's orders and gone on strike earlier that same month, campaigning for fair wages and the eight-hour day (*The Poor Man's Guardian*, 3 May 1834; *The Pioneer*, 3 May 1834). However, GNCTU members were themselves divided over the issue. Prominent figures like James Morrison and J. E. Smith, editors of *The Pioneer* and *The Crisis* respectively, favoured general strikes as the only means to bring down capitalism. They consequently dismissed the London tailors' action as a selfish attempt to better their lot, without any regard for their fellow labourers (Parssinen and Prothero, 1977: 75; *The Crisis*, 3 May 1834; *The Pioneer*, 3 May 1834). Indeed, the strike put a hefty financial pressure on the Union. In addition to solidarity payments made to the Derby lock-out and the Dorchester campaign, GNCTU members were asked to pay a levy of more than one shilling per head to help the tailors (*The Pioneer*, 10 May 1834). The latter, like most ordinary Consolidated Union members, saw Morrison and Smith's argument as gross misinformation. To them, the Union was first and foremost a means to advance economic and political reform while providing an immediate solution to their needs (Claeys, 2002: 197). Due to their limited voting rights and meagre financial resources, individual strikes were their weapons of choice, better adapted to their condition through their reliance on a specifically working-class culture of mutual help. General industrial action and the founding of communities on the land were not dismissed entirely, but firmly set aside in a distant future.

These various faultlines were mirrored and reinforced by strong institutional dysfunctions. The Executive was never the most active body in the

GNCTU, and the London District Committee became *de facto* autonomous. With sixty-three delegates from twenty-one trades, it was the Union's dominant force (Parssinen and Prothero, 1977: 72). Levying most of the Union's subscription payments, it also had the means to organise its most emblematic gatherings, like the Copenhagen Fields demonstration. The London branches' power was further reinforced by the fact that, due to chronic underfunding, only one additional District Committee was founded, in Birmingham, despite the Union's ambitions to become a nationwide movement. As a consequence, ordinary members enjoyed ample latitude in their day-to-day activism, and were able to bypass Owen's directives when they did not suit their needs.

These internal difficulties played a prominent part in the GNCTU's demise, which occurred over the summer months. Even though the Union had been very quick to gather support and momentum, the multiplication of strikes was a heavy toll on its resources. The London cordwainers soon followed the tailors' example and embarked on a protest movement of their own. By June, both campaigns had failed, while the Derby turnouts were also forced back to work. The London tailors bitterly seceded from the Union they had been so instrumental in founding, thus administering it its 'mortal wound' (Parssinen and Prothero, 1977: 80; *The Crisis*, 12 July 1834). By August, membership had plummeted to about 7,000 members, and Owen officially dissolved the GNCTU in the winter of 1834.

However, external pressure was also a key factor in its downfall. The GNCTU always attracted a high degree of hostility outside radical circles. Even though the ban on trade unions had been lifted in 1824 with the repeal of the Combination Acts, strikes and picketing were still illegal. With its grassroots support for industrial action, the Consolidated Union was primarily seen as a hotbed of sedition. In March 1834, *The Times* had welcomed the GNCTU's founding with fear, asking for a return to the Combination Acts (*The Times*, 14 March 1834). Lord Grey's Cabinet shared these concerns, hence the decision to put the Union under police surveillance. In addition to the two undercover agents, G. M. Ball and Abel Hall, the Home Office also hired several informants, who attended GNCTU meetings, documented missionary activities and even – according to London tailor William Neal – plotted to take Owen's life (Neal, 1834; for police and spy reports respectively, see Home Office 1834a and Home Office 1834b). Whether this was true remains uncertain. Even if it was only an empty threat, it nevertheless showed that the establishment was keen on stifling union activity. The Dorchester Six case provided a good opportunity to do just that (Thompson, 2002: 284–5). The harsh transportation verdict was meant as a warning sign, and so was the government's attitude to the 1834 spring and summer strike movements, all of them heavily repressed. Along with internal strife, this inevitably discouraged union action, and hastened the GNCTU's demise.

Conclusion: reassessing the GNCTU's historical significance

The years 1832–1834 are a unique case in the history of the British labour movement, when trade unionists, co-operators, radical reformers and Owenites allied. These groups were not exclusive by any means, but at that time they 'intermingled and discussed common strategies to a greater degree than they would ever – before or throughout the rest of the nineteenth century' (Claeys, 2002: 194). Owen most certainly was a paternalistic leader, and yet the GNCTU's collegial and representative organisation created a platform for debate where dissenting opinions would be freely expressed. Owen disliked criticism, but he was never willing or able to suppress it altogether. This goes contrary to the established interpretation that Owen's influence on the GNCTU stifled the development of class consciousness until it was reborn with Chartism and the late nineteenth-century labour movement. In terms of historical relevance, the GNCTU posited a key idea of syndicalism – workers' control of the means of production. It was in many ways an experiment in alternative forms of democracy – not through the exertion of voting rights, but through the propagation of community ideals in the political and economic realms. This is probably the most significant aspect of the GNCTU for the history of socialism (Claeys, 2002: 206; *The Pioneer*, 11 January 1834).

The divisions which shaped the Consolidated Trades' Union – and which mirrored those within and without the Owenite movement at large – should be viewed in terms of creative tension rather than a mere war of factions. At a time when the working classes were still largely excluded from parliamentary politics, Owenism was a cradle of debate and political experimentation for the radical nebula. Co-operatives, labour exchanges, alternative communities and trade unions like the GNCTU were some of the institutions that emerged from this locus. Despite ongoing tensions over the necessity of political reform and the possibility of working-class agency, the more radical members – including the future Chartists – never ceased to see themselves as co-operative socialists, using those elements of Owenism which suited them best. This broad appeal, and the fluidity of radical allegiances, help explain the GNCTU's paradoxical nature as Britain's most short-lived mass trade-union movement.

Notes

1 See the following letters in the Robert Owen Collection, NCA: Joseph Hansom to Robert Owen, 23 August 1833, ROC/8/17/2; James Carr and Robert Laverick to the Operative Builders Union of London, 30 August 1833 ROC/3/17/1; Samuel Austin to Robert Owen, 16 September 1833, ROC/1/53/2; Henry L. Pratt to Robert Owen, 12 November 1833, ROC/16/56/1.

2 'This strategy changed precisely with the GNCTU's demise, when Owen started advocating a quicker pace of social reform. Conversion should now occur through

the example of model communities, and the Owenite village of cooperation at Queenwood (or Harmony Hall, Hampshire) was established from 1839 to 1845 with that educational purpose' (Royle, 1998: 75).

3 The Dorchester Six or 'Tolpuddle Martyrs' were a group of farmers from the eponymous town in Dorset, who had founded a Friendly Society of Agricultural Labourers in 1833 to protest against low wages. The Society was affiliated to the GNCTU. While the Combination Acts were repealed in 1824, thus ending the ban on trade unions, the swearing of secret oaths – a common initiation ritual among friendly societies – was still illegal under the Unlawful Oaths Act 1797. The Dorchester Six were tried on such grounds in 1834, in a bid to put an end to the nationwide trade-union agitation. Despite extensive popular support, they were transported to Australia, before eventually receiving pardon for good conduct in March 1836.

4 Workers were advised to keep their occupations 'until such terms [could] be made by the Consolidated Union with the non-producers of wealth and knowledge as shall liberate all the producing classes from the slavery and degradation in which they have hitherto been and now are' (*The Crisis*, 24 May 1834, quoted in Oliver, 1964: 84).

References

Browne, John (1834) Letter to Robert Owen, 5 March, ROC/2/74/1, Robert Owen Collection, National Co-operative Archives, Manchester (NCA).

Chase, M. (ed.) (2017; 1st ed.: 2000) *Early Trade Unionism: Fraternity, Skill and the Politics of Labour*, London: Routledge.

Claeys, G. (1987) *Machinery, Money and the Millennium: From Moral Economy to Socialism, 1815–1860*, Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Claeys, G. (2002) *Citizens and Saints*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Cole, G. D. H. (2001; 1st ed.: 1939) *Attempts at General Union*, London: Routledge.

Donnachie, I. and Hewitt, G. (1993) *Historic New Lanark: The Dale and Owen Industrial Community since 1785*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.

GNCTU (1834a) 'Rules and Regulations of the Grand National Consolidated Trades' Union of Great Britain and Ireland: Instituted for the Purpose of More Effectually Enabling the Working Classes to Secure, Protect, and Establish the Rights of Industry', London.

GNCTU (1834b) 'To Unionists. Abstract of the proceedings of a special meeting of trades' union delegates, held in London, 1834. To which are added the preliminary articles of the Grand National Consolidated Trades' Union', London: Harjett and Saville.

Haynes, M. J. (1977) 'Class and Class Conflict in the Early Nineteenth Century: Northampton Shoemakers and the Grand National Consolidated Trades' Union', *Literature and History*, 5, pp. 73–93.

Home Office Papers (1834a) 40/32, National Archives, London (NA).

Home Office Papers (1834b) 52/24–25, NA.

Home Office Papers (1834c) HO 52/54, NA.

Home Office Papers (1834d) HO 64/15, NA.

Langdon, J. C. (2000) 'Pocket Editions of the New Jerusalem: Owenite Communitarianism in Britain 1825–1855', PhD dissertation, University of York.

Marshall, George (1833) Letter to Robert Owen, 11 August, ROC/13/30/2, Robert Owen Collection, NCA.

Musson, A. E. (1972) *British Trade Unions, 1800–1875*, London: Macmillan.

Neal, William (1834) Letter to Robert Owen, 18 April, ROC 14/3/1, Robert Owen Collection, NCA.

Oliver, W. H. (1958) 'The Labour Exchange Phase of the Co-operative Movement', *Oxford Economic Papers*, X, pp. 355–67.

Oliver, W. H. (1964) 'The Consolidated Trades' Union of 1834', *Economic History Review*, 17:1, pp. 77–95.

Owen, R. (1993; 1st ed.: 1820) 'Report to the County of Lanark', in Claeys, G. (ed.) *Robert Owen: A New View of Society and Other Writings*, London: Penguin Classics, pp. 250–308.

Parssinen, T. M. and Prothero, I. (1977) 'The London Tailors' Strike and the Collapse of the Grand National Consolidated Trades' Union: A Police Spy's Report', *International Review of Social History*, 22:1, pp. 65–107.

Place, Francis Papers (1834) 'Paper on the proposed Manchester meeting and the case of the Dorchester labourers', MS 35154 (ff. 241/f. 195), British Library, London.

Royle, E. (1998) *Owen and the Commencement of the Millennium: A Study of the Harmony Community*, Manchester: Manchester University Press.

Stedman Jones, G. (2016; 1st ed.: 1981) 'Utopian Socialism Reconsidered', in Samuel, R. (ed.) *People's History and Socialist Theory*, London: Routledge Revivals, pp. 138–45.

Thompson, E. P. (2002; 1st ed.: 1963) *The Making of the English Working Class*, London: Penguin Classics.

Yeo, E. (1971) 'Robert Owen and Radical Culture', in Pollard, S. and Salt, J. (eds) *Robert Owen, Prophet of the Poor: Essays in Honour of the Two Hundredth Anniversary of his Birth*, Lewisburgh, PA: Bucknell University Press, pp. 84–114.

2

The Knights of Labor and the British trade unions, 1880–1900

Steven Parfitt

Introduction

We saw in the introduction that in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the British labour movement began to assume something like its current shape. Membership extended further beyond male skilled workers. Local unions combined into national ones, and national unions developed more complex bureaucratic structures to meet the demands of collective bargaining. The early growth of the Labour Party further defined the division of labour between the industrial wing of the movement, represented by the unions and co-operative societies, and the political wing, which this new party represented. These changes did not mean that British labour substituted a rational structure, easily captured in a flow chart, for messy chaos. Traditions of local autonomy, Lib-Lab politics or craft unionism do not die out so easily as that. Nor was the old order so incoherent. But things had irrevocably changed, and changed to something that we can still recognise when we look around at the labour movement of the twenty-first century.

At this hinge point in British labour history, an American working-class movement called the Knights of Labor established its assemblies (branches) in Britain and Ireland. The Knights were the first truly national organisation of American workers, as well as the first global working-class movement based in the United States (Parfitt, 2015; Weir, 2009). Created in 1869, they grew to nearly a million American members in 1886, and established other assemblies across Europe, Australasia and (South) Africa in the 1880s and 1890s. Between 1883 and 1900 they opened around fifty assemblies in Britain and Ireland. Those assemblies represented somewhere between 10,000 and 15,000

members, and were based especially in the glass industry and the industrial areas around Birmingham, Sheffield, Liverpool, Belfast, Derry and Glasgow.

Conflict between the Knights and rival trade unions formed an important part of their American history. From 1886, when those rival unions came together under the heading of the American Federation of Labor (AFL), Knights and trade unionists fought an on-again, off-again war for the sympathy of American wage earners. The AFL won, the Knights lost, and historians generally consider the outcome of that struggle as a key reason why the Knights of Labor disappeared from the historical scene. A similar conflict between the Knights and the unions broke out not long after the first assemblies opened in Britain and Ireland. Between 1886 and 1889, the Knights encountered three large unions of male craft workers in the course of their own growth: the Amalgamated Society of Engineers (ASE), the Midland Counties Trades Federation (MCTF) and the Associated Ironworkers. At first relations were cordial, even close, but conflict soon replaced cooperation and in each case the Knights were beaten.

The beginning of the 'new unionism' in the late 1880s opened up new possibilities for the Knights. Scores of assemblies appeared across Britain and Northern Ireland. New possibilities, however, also brought new rival unions along with them. The Gasworkers, the Dock Labourers, and even a union created by Knights in Rotherham, the National Union of Stove Grate Workers, soon competed with the Knights for members, and in each case the Order lost. First the crafts, then the unskilled or semi-skilled: this is, in brief, the story of the conflict between the Knights and the unions. That same story, which is the subject of this chapter, also intersected with the great structural changes taking place within the British labour movement. The Knights contributed to those changes. But, as we shall see with their battles with rival trade unions, they were a victim of those changes as well. Their defeat in several battles with British unions led in time to the end of the Knights of Labor in Britain and Ireland. Yet, even after the British Knights disappeared, their example continued to influence the direction of the British labour movement for years to come.

The early years of the British Knights: 1883–1886

The first British assembly of the Knights of Labor opened in Cardiff in 1883. The guiding spirit behind that assembly was one of the Order's American organisers, Robert Hughes, who got together the twelve charter members needed to form a new assembly while visiting relatives in Wales. The Cardiff assembly disappeared, however, not long after Hughes sailed back across the Atlantic. The Knights established a more durable presence in Britain in 1884, thanks to the glassworkers of Local Assembly 300 (LA300), Window Glass Workers of America. LA300 had become a powerful union which, despite its name, represented virtually all skilled glassworkers across the United States.

It came to Europe to organise its fellow craftsmen and place them in dialogue with each other. The motives of its leaders were not entirely altruistic. The assembly's members ran a nationwide closed shop at home, with unusually high wages, even by the standards of skilled workers, and had only recently won a series of strikes against their employers. The main threat to this position lay in the migration of thousands of unemployed European glassworkers to America, who employers might use to win strikes and break the closed shop. If LA300 could organise its European counterparts, it could regulate the flow of labour from one side of the Atlantic to the other so that this would not happen – and by assisting European glassworkers in their struggles at home it might even remove the reasons that forced them to move abroad in the first place (Fones-Wolf, 2002: 64–7).

The Knights of Labor thus arrived in Britain as the friends and not the enemies of the British unions. After a year of work in Britain, France and Belgium, Isaac Cline and Andrew Burtt – the president and secretary respectively of LA300 – turned their idea of international cooperation into the Universal Federation of Window-Glass Workers, which met for its first Congress at St Helens in 1884 (Skrabek, 2006: 38–9). As soon as Cline and Burtt returned to the United States they were replaced by another representative of the assembly, A. G. Denny. He set about organising the English glassworkers, whose union collapsed in the 1870s, into an assembly of the Knights of Labor. The result, Local Assembly 3504, was based in Sunderland but also had preceptories, or sub-sections, at major glassworks in St Helens and West Bromwich. Denny's work was praised in public by trade unionists of the stature of Thomas Burt, the Lib-Lab MP and leader of the Durham Miners' Association, and Henry Broadhurst, the secretary of the Trades Union Congress (TUC) Parliamentary Committee. The reason for their praise was simple. The Knights had restored organisation to an industry where organisation had broken down. Far from a potential rival, the Order appeared instead as a saviour (Pelling, 1956: 315).

The creation of the glassworkers' assembly did not immediately lead to any others. In 1886, however, glassworkers from West Bromwich began to organise among the many trades of the Black Country. They were aided by the rapid growth of the American Knights, whose victory over the Southwestern rail system in 1885, and the thousands of strikes, boycotts and political campaigns that followed in the US over the next two years, gave the Order enormous news coverage in the British press and led many British workers to see American labour as providing potential answers to their problems. The British labour movement of the mid-1880s, still the largest in the world, remained very far from representing more than a small fraction of the working population – between 4 and 5 per cent in 1880. This gave the Knights great scope to grow, perhaps without even arousing the hostility of other unions, and especially in the Black Country where the labour movement remained small and fragmented. T. R. Threlfall, a past president of the TUC, alluded to this

fact in a short post-mortem of the British Knights in 1894. 'It is a significant fact,' he wrote, 'that the society seemed to flourish best in those portions of the Black Country where trades unionism is weak' (*Manchester Times*, 26 January 1894).

The Knights were well placed to fill a vacuum. Their first assembly of non-glassworkers, Local Assembly 7952 of West Bromwich, opened on 12 June 1886. By July 1887 eight more assemblies had appeared in the Black Country, with a total membership of 800, and by the end of that year 2,000 Knights inhabited the region's eighteen assemblies (*Journal of United Labor*, 13 August and 10 December 1887). Knights had also arrived at a propitious time in the history of trade unionism in the Black Country. Meetings of local craftsmen, including chainmakers, vicemakers, bitmakers and other similar trades, were held over the course of 1886 and sought ways to combine the small unions of the area under one banner. The Knights sent representatives to those meetings, and they and other speakers suggested that the Order might provide the vehicle for this federation to take place. Richard Juggins, the foremost trade unionist in the Black Country, repeated his desire 'to unite all trades together so as to form one strong Union, on a similar basis to the Knights of Labour in America' (*Labour Tribune*, 17 April 1886).

That desire did not lead Juggins or a majority of local trade unionists to join the Knights themselves. Having noted their debts to the Knights, they instead formed a new organisation, the Midland Counties Trades Federation, which brought together many of the small unions of the Black Country. Knights in the area initially smiled on the new body. At one of the meetings in 1886 they assured the audience that while they hoped that everyone present would join the assemblies, they 'would not in any way interfere with the objects of federation for the Unions of this country; for, with that, co-operation would be the more easy' (*Labour Tribune*, 17 April 1886). Cooperation was indeed the default setting between the Knights and the unions in the first three years of the assemblies. In the next four years, however, cooperation gave way to rivalry and conflict.

The British Knights and the Unions of Craft Workers: 1886–1889

American Knights of Labor always maintained that their Order grew out of the failures or limitations of the trade unions. Individual unions representing a single trade or craft, they claimed, could never stand against the concentrated power of big business. Only a single movement, bringing all wage earners under a single banner, could succeed where those unions had failed. Their alternative model to the trade unions rested on a combination of trade assemblies, a local unit of workers in the same craft or trade equivalent to a local union branch, and mixed assemblies, which brought together a group of workers in unrelated trades in the same geographical region. Together, Knights

argued, the trade and mixed assemblies allowed the Knights to overcome what they saw as the elitism and exclusivity of craft unions that concerned themselves only with the most skilled and privileged of American workers. As late as 1896, when the Knights had already passed their zenith, one of their leaders still declared that 'any combination, based upon the lines of trade, craft or occupation, which has for its main purpose an intention to force its views upon employers through a strike, must meet with sudden and disastrous failure' (Knights of Labor, 1896: 20–1).

Knights also condemned what they saw as the trade unions' narrow preoccupation with bread and butter issues – wages, working hours, and so on – and their lack of interest in wider political questions. American Knights, and to some extent their British brethren, saw their ultimate goal as the abolition of the wages system, not just ameliorating the condition of workers within that system. They also took up moral issues such as temperance with an enthusiasm that the trade unions never matched. To some extent, the hard-drinking president of the American Federation of Labor, Samuel Gompers, and the puritanical general master workman of the Knights, Terence Powderly, summed up the differences between the two movements on moral questions.

This insistence that trade unions had proved themselves obsolete, ineffective and even morally dubious, and that the Knights must fill the breach, naturally led to tensions with those American trade unionists who preferred to keep their unions independent of the Order. In the mid-1880s this led to a war across the United States between the Knights and those craft unions within the American Federation of Labor. The Knights lost that war. Skilled workers streamed out of the assemblies, some for unions affiliated with the AFL, others out of the labour movement for good. Eric Hobsbawm noted that trend in his study of British general unions in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Those general unions, he wrote, 'avoided the competition with the "crafts" which wrecked the Knights of Labor in the more mechanized USA of the late 1880s'. More precisely, the British general unions organised 'labourers' and left 'artisans' to the craft unions while the Knights tried to organise them all, and faced opposition from the 'crafts' as a result (Hobsbawm, 1949: 139). The British Knights, like their American cousins, also faced damaging and, for some assemblies, fatal opposition from the 'crafts'. That opposition began even as the Black Country assemblies vowed in 1886 to work closely with the new MCTF.

The first rival that Knights encountered in Britain was one of the largest and most powerful unions of them all: the Amalgamated Society of Engineers. Engineers, along with other workers in Birmingham, were attracted to the Knights as their assemblies spread around the area. In mid-1887, the secretary of the Birmingham No. 4 branch of the ASE informed his Executive Council – the body that made decisions between the meetings of the General Council – that many members had already joined the Knights, without, of

course, even thinking of withdrawing from the ASE. The Executive Council responded swiftly, unambiguously and publicly through the pages of the Society's monthly report for September 1887: the rules of the Society did not allow for dual membership (ASE, 1887: 61–2). According to the master workman (president) of Local Assembly 10,227 in Smethwick, Jesse Chapman, hundreds of engineers in Birmingham and the Black Country then defied their national leadership. They remained in the assemblies and visited all the other Birmingham branches of the ASE to make their case, and, according to Chapman, 'they meet with very marked success among the men – many, when matters are fairly explained to them, taking up our side with enthusiasm' (Chapman, 1888).

Richard Hill, the secretary of Local Assembly 7952, led a delegation of Knights to the triennial meeting of the General Council in May 1888 to plead the case of their engineers. The General Council, however, refused even to listen to Hill and his deputation. They upheld the decision of the Executive Council and gave engineering Knights an ultimatum: sever your ties with the assemblies within six months or face expulsion from the ASE. Knights protested to no avail. The ASE's Monthly Report for December 1888 reminded members that the six months had now elapsed, and subsequent reports do not mention any expulsions for members who maintained their allegiance to another society. There was a wider irony here. The ASE in fact had numerous branches in the United States, as well as all over the British Empire. Even more to the point, the ASE did not stop its American members from joining the Knights, mainly because those members would likely have abandoned the Society for the Order in the mid-1880s. That did not stop the General Council from driving Knights out of the engineering trades.

The same pattern – initial cooperation, followed by conflict in which the Knights came off second best – repeated itself with the ironworkers of the Black Country. They, like the craftsmen who ultimately formed the MCTF, also held meetings during 1887 to work out whether their local societies should amalgamate with local unions in the North of England. At a meeting in March the delegate of the ironworks at Corngreaves, near Cradley Heath, insisted that they affiliate with the Knights rather than the North. Workers from Corngreaves, he added, would not accept any alternative. That does not mean that his proposal met with unanimous or even majority approval. One delegate claimed that the Knights were the more expensive option and that they always 'interfered with politics'. Another delegate interjected, to general laughter, that 'he had greater faith in getting some of his money back from the North than from America' (*Birmingham Daily Post*, 1 March 1887). The majority of the delegates evidently agreed. At the next meeting a different delegate represented Corngreaves and claimed that his predecessor spoke only for himself (*Stourbridge Express*, 12 March 1887). Delegates from the Black Country helped to lay the groundwork later in 1887 for Edward Trow's new union, the

Amalgamated Association (also known as the Associated) Iron and Steel Workers of Great Britain.

Despite this setback hundreds of ironworkers had joined the Knights. At the start of 1888, however, the Associated Iron and Steel Workers, supported by the West Bromwich *Labour Tribune*, began to win ironworkers away from the assemblies. The *Tribune* called their attention to the Order's reverses in the United States, gave plentiful space to letters from Black Country ironworkers in America who were critical of the Knights of Labor, and praised and publicised the growth of Trow's new union. By November 1888, the *Tribune* was reporting 'a numerous migration from the ranks of the Knights of Labour to the A.A.I.S.W.' (*Labour Tribune*, 17 November 1888). This migration took a long time to finally come to an end. As late as 1892, the president of the Association told a Royal Commission that 'a large number of those men [the Knights] are now joining us', and that 'relations with them are friendly' (Royal Commission on Labour, 1892: 311). The victory of the Associated and the defeat of the Knights, however, were no less complete for being drawn out.

Even the Midland Counties Trade Federation turned from friend to enemy over the course of the 1880s. Most of the Black Country assemblies had joined the new Federation, and the leaders of both organisations worked together between 1886 and 1888 to settle disputes. In 1889, however, friendly relations broke down. The Knights came to realise that the Federation was less an ally than a rival, which slowed the growth of the assemblies because local workers tended to join a union affiliated with the Federation instead of, not as well as, joining the Knights. Their tactics grew increasingly desperate. Chainmakers affiliated with the Federation claimed in May and June of 1889 that Knights were using aggressive tactics to get them to withdraw from the Federation and join the assemblies instead. Richard Juggins now 'disclaimed any understanding' between the Knights and the Federation (*Midland Counties Express*, 4 May 1889). From then on cooperation gave way, not necessarily to conflict, but to the displacement of the Knights by the Federation, which continued to grow even as the assemblies of Black Country craftsmen stagnated.

All three cases demonstrated the ability of the Knights to quickly attract recruits in a wide variety of industries and trades. Yet all three cases also demonstrated their weakness when faced with local rivals, established or not. The ASE, which simply gave dual unionists an ultimatum and successfully enforced it, exposed that weakness most effectively. The MCTF and Associated Ironworkers were new bodies that could not impose the same level of discipline. They nevertheless succeeded in driving out the Knights because they offered a more comprehensive regional organisation, in the case of the MCTF, or national organisation in the case of the ironworkers, compared with the Order's patchwork of local assemblies linked to a faraway headquarters on the other side of the Atlantic. Edward Trow's *Ironworkers Journal* gave a succinct explanation of this appeal in September 1887. 'The experience of the past

proves that no branch of trade or any district associations can successfully compete with capital,' the *Journal* argued. 'To do this a powerful National Association is needed, embracing all districts and all branches of the trade'. George Barnsby put it even more simply. The Order's 'ultimate failure in the Black Country was due to there being a British organisation able to do everything that the Knights could do – the Midland Counties Trades Federation' (Barnsby, 1977: 85).

The Knights lost their battles with the crafts. Even as they did so, however, they continued to open new assemblies and attract new members in more and more parts of Britain and Ireland towards the end of the 1880s. At Walsall, on the northern fringes of the Black Country, hundreds of workers preferred the Order over the MCTF and swelled the ranks of Local Assembly 454, which was led by Haydn Sanders, one of the first socialists to win election on a socialist ticket to any town council in the United Kingdom. Assemblies opened in Liverpool, representing dock labourers, tramwaymen and other trades; in Rotherham, representing workers in the stove-grate industry; in Derry and Glasgow, representing general labourers; and continued to attract workers in Birmingham and the Black Country. The assembly of glassworkers, Local Assembly 3504, continued to operate without any interference from the rest of the British labour movement – in no small part because it did not jostle for jurisdiction with any local union. Despite their defeats at the hand of the MCTF, Associated Ironworkers and Engineers, the Knights reached somewhere between 10,000 and 15,000 members in 1890. That was because of the general upswing in trade, and the upswing in trade-union action that accompanied it. As the craft unions closed some doors to the Knights, the 'new unionism' opened others.

The Knights and the Unions of Unskilled Workers: 1889–1894

Historians used to take the 'new unionism' for granted. Between about 1888 and 1892, and perhaps for several years before or after those dates, the British labour movement was transformed. Union membership rose from 817,000 in 1888 to 1,470,000 in 1890. The number of strikes rose from 517 in 1888 to 1,211 in 1889, and the number of strikers increased from 119,000 in 1888 to around 400,000 in 1890 (Cronin, 1982: 89). A rash of new unions appeared, the best known of which are the Dockers and Gasworkers. To an unprecedented extent these unions organised among the ranks of the semi-skilled, unskilled and female workers, previously neglected by the TUC. Socialists and socialism also entered into the mainstream of the labour movement, and arguments between the new, generally younger and more radical 'new' unionists and the more cautious 'old' unionists dominated meetings of the TUC in the early 1890s.

Some historians have since questioned all the elements of this narrative and particularly the idea that the 'new unionism' represented a break with existing patterns within the British labour movement. The new unions, they argue, soon came to resemble the established unions rather than the other way around. Socialists represented only a very small minority of those active in the new unions. The existence of movements such as the agricultural workers in the 1870s was proof that the focus of the new unions on unskilled workers was not all that new (Matthews, 1991: 24–58). These criticisms all have some merit but they do not explain away the general ferment of the late 1880s and early 1890s, the great expansion of the labour movement in that period, or the new importance of hitherto unorganised trades and industries within that movement. The new unionism was a new departure even if it did not completely break with what came before it.

The Knights of Labor contributed to that new departure. I have argued elsewhere at greater length that the Knights were part catalysts for, and part actors in, the new unionism (Parfitt, 2016). Many of the early organisations associated with the term, such as the National Labour Federation on Tyneside, were consciously modelled on the American Knights and even wrote to the Order's headquarters in Philadelphia seeking advice on how best to proceed (Duffy, 1968: 210–12; Ramsey, 1886; Searles, 1991: 37). 'New' unionists, from Will Thorne of the Gasworkers to John Williams of the National Federation of Labour Union, were impressed by the Knights and their victories in the United States during the mid-1880s. For those new unionists who wanted to form a wider federation of workers, regardless of skill and even gender, the Knights proved that such a federation could work as well in practice as it appeared in theory.

The British assemblies were themselves a part of the new unionism. They pioneered the organisation of unskilled workers and established federations of workers on a local level in several places. Knights in Walsall, in particular, briefly established a powerful federation of the town's small crafts between 1889 and 1890, and claimed to organise forty distinct trades. They also revived the Walsall Trades Council (*Halfpenny Weekly*, 30 November 1889). Knights in Glasgow and the surrounding area briefly created more than a dozen assemblies. Little remains of their composition but we do know that they revived organisation among dock labourers at Androssan, in Ayshire, and in Glasgow itself (Levy, 1988: 46–7; Marwick, 1967: 67). Derry's Local Assembly 1601 was 'comprised of all classes of industry in this city', and organised unskilled labourers from 1889, almost two years before the Gasworkers and the National Union of Dock Labourers arrived in the town to do so (Stewart, 1891). Rotherham assemblies organised more than a thousand workers of all grades of skill in the stove-grate industry in 1889 and 1890, and, as in Walsall, they organised a Trades Council for the town. The largest and the most promising

of the Order's work among previously unorganised industries at this time came in Liverpool, where Local Assembly 443 organised dock labourers from 1889, before either of the two dockers' unions created in this period.

As in the iron industry and small crafts of the Black Country, Knights in these places exploited wide gaps in the existing labour movement and benefited accordingly. As in those previous examples, however, they soon ran into conflict with rival unions – in this case, unions that had been formed after the Knights had already established themselves in the areas in question – or with local Trades Councils that saw the Knights as unwelcome interlopers and rivals. The same pattern of initial cooperation with local unions, followed by conflict and eventual defeat, held good in most cases too. Sometimes, of course, that initial stage of cooperation was left out. In the Glasgow area the Order grew very quickly in 1889 to around a dozen assemblies with about a thousand members, mainly unskilled workers, in total. When they applied for affiliation with the city's Trades Council in March 1890, however, they were rebuffed. One delegate drew attention to the fact that the Knights did not represent a single trade and so they 'could not, according to the constitution of the Council, be admitted'. The Council tabled the resolution until the Knights could address them in person two weeks later, but when they did the Council approved the resolution by 34 to 16 (*Glasgow Weekly Herald*, 29 March 1890). The Glasgow Knights could not make further headway against the combined opposition of the local labour movement. Their assemblies disappeared later in the year and their leader, James Shaw Maxwell, soon left for London to take up a position with a new radical newspaper, the *People's Press*.

The Derry Trades Council proved similarly implacable towards the assembly in that town, which organised more than 800 members at the start of 1891. The Council had made its own strides towards organising unskilled workers, and bridging sectarian divisions in the town, from 1889 onwards. It chose as the vehicle for this project not the Knights but the London-based Gasworkers' Union, which was busy expanding throughout Britain and Ireland as a union of general labourers and arrived in Derry in 1891. The Gasworkers and the Trades Council set about destroying the reputation of Local Assembly 1601 in several ways. First, they claimed that the Knights operated illegally, as they were not registered under the Trade Union Acts. Secondly, the Gasworkers claimed that the leaders of the assembly refused to support the assembly's own members when they went on strike. Thirdly, they suggested that Derry's Knights could not rely on financial support from Knights across the Atlantic, and that this connection with America was a hindrance and not a help to labourers in Derry (McAteer, 1991: 12–19). Local Knights even claimed that the Trades Council 'resorted to the device of getting a number of their tools enrolled in the Assembly' to further weaken it (*Journal of United Labor*, 30 July 1891).

These criticisms had the desired effect. Mutterings from the Gasworkers and the Trades Council forced the assembly to launch a strike of general labourers in June 1891, demanding extra pay. Financial assistance from America was not forthcoming, partly because the requests for help went missing at the headquarters in Philadelphia, and partly because Derry's Knights were still reeling from the theft of their funds by a previous treasurer – which they could not get back through the courts because they were not registered under the Trade Union Acts. Broke, and having confirmed the accusations of their enemies, the Derry assembly shrank from 800 members at the start of 1891 to less than 100 at the end of it. The assembly dissolved in the next year. Having brought the new unionism to the town they were now shouldered aside by one of the largest of the British new unions (McAteer, 1991: 12–19).

Local Assembly 443 in Liverpool suffered an almost identical fate. That assembly grew out of agitation for a strike of tramwaymen in May 1889 and very quickly established a presence on the docks. Three months later it organised 250 members and, by the end of the year, opened five new preceptories – sub-branches based on the model of the glassworkers assembly – which it planned would become assemblies in their own right. As the first organisation to pay special attention to the Liverpool dockers the Knights initially worked quite closely with the local branch of the recently formed National Sailors' and Firemen's Union. Aside from that organisation the Knights pre-dated any of the other 'new unions' – and like their leader, Samuel Reeves, the most prominent socialist in the city, the Knights should be remembered as 'a pioneer of the New Unionism' (Bean, 1972a: 282–5).

But these pioneers of the new unionism soon faced conflict with another new union, the National Union of Dock Labourers (NUDL). The NUDL had begun in Glasgow at the start of 1889, and it arrived in Liverpool just after the Knights, in May 1889. The Knights were uncomfortably familiar with one of the NUDL's co-founders, Richard McGhee, who had actually worked as an organiser for assemblies in the Black Country and had departed for Glasgow with an organisers' commission from the Knights in his suitcase before absconding to start his new union (Kenefick, 2007: 32). Differences between the two organisations soon became apparent. The Knights insisted that all disputes between workers and employers and the docks be resolved through negotiations, and signed agreements with many of the stevedores and shipping companies of the waterfront over the course of 1889. The NUDL, as soon as it arrived on Merseyside, led calls for a strike to win higher wages and better conditions (*Liverpool Echo*, 27 January 1890; *Halfpenny Weekly*, 1 February 1890). Those calls became only more attractive to Liverpool dockers once the Great London Dock Strike began in August.

The Knights and the NUDL, meanwhile, traded insults and accusations. When NUDL members refused to unload cargoes alongside non-union workers, Knights honoured their agreements with the shipping companies and

stepped in to unload them. As the companies began to give preferential treatment to the members of Local Assembly 443, however, the NUDL referred to them in public as scabs who would not strike under any circumstances. They repeated these claims at an 'uproarious' meeting of the assembly in January 1890, which ended with 'disorderly scenes' and 'several violent altercations' between Knights and NUDL members that continued into the early hours of the morning (*Liverpool Mercury*, 31 January 1890). These criticisms had a similar effect to those made in Derry, and the Knights lost further support when the NUDL led the dockers on strike in April 1890. Even though the strike ended in defeat, the NUDL had organised nearly 15,000 Liverpool dockers by the middle of the year. The Knights, now widely seen as strike-breakers, unwilling to do more than talk to employers, had lost their relevance (Bean, 1972b: 77; Taplin, 1974: 79–80). Local Assembly 443 wound up in early 1891. Its application to the Liverpool Trades Council – which had not looked with favour on the Knights – still awaited a response of one kind or another.

Knights in Liverpool were undone by a union founded by a former Knight. In Walsall and Rotherham the Knights created new organisations that soon rendered the Knights superfluous. Local Assembly 454 in Walsall had, in 1888 and 1889, grown nearly a thousand members strong and entered local politics in earnest. Its leader, Haydn Sanders, served as an independent socialist on the Walsall Town Council and in 1889 the Knights put forward two further candidates for the council and only barely failed to have them elected. Part of this failure was due to opposition from some local trade unionists, especially those representing small trades that were in danger of being swallowed up by the assembly. One of them, Samuel Welsh, memorably described the Order as 'a clever Yankee speculation got up for the purpose of providing good berths for high-paid officials to fatten upon the industry of their dupes' (*Walsall Observer*, 11 January 1890).

Sanders and the Knights, and Samuel Welsh and some trade unionists, each held meetings to revive the Walsall Trades Council, which had dissolved a decade previously, and thereby emphasise their leadership over the local labour movement. After some further public disagreements, however, the two factions declared a truce and jointly opened the new Walsall Trades Council in March 1890. The Walsall assembly had operated as a federation of the many small trades present in the town, and as the nucleus of a local working-class political movement. The Walsall Trades Council now assumed both functions and left the Knights without a clearly defined role, made worse when Sanders left Walsall in April to lead a strike in Rotherham. The assembly disappeared soon afterwards.

A similar fate awaited the assemblies in Sanders's destination, Rotherham. Knights there created Local Assembly 1266 in mid-1889. Ten more assemblies, comprising in total around one thousand members, had joined the first by the

start of the following year. Most of these members worked in the stove-grate industry, and in March 1890 they demanded a 10 per cent wage increase from their employers on the grounds that they had not benefited from the new, more productive machinery in recent years (*Reynolds's Newspaper*, 11 May 1890). Knights sent a delegation from Birmingham to meet with the employers, who refused to see them. In response the stove-grate workers went on strike and asked Sanders to lead them. He arrived in Rotherham in April, publicly determined to end the strike by negotiation – but the employers refused to see him too. New assemblies continued to appear in Rotherham as the strike went on and, in May, the employers folded and the stove-grate workers won their 10 per cent. The Knights had won the largest strike in their British and Irish history (*Rotherham Advertiser*, 17 May 1890).

But this was not even a pyrrhic victory. The Rotherham stove-grate workers decided to organise stove-grate workers in other parts of Britain, not through the Knights but through a new National Union of Stove-Grate Workers headed by none other than Haydn Sanders, erstwhile leader of assemblies in Walsall and Rotherham. Initially, Sanders expressed the hope that members of that union would also join or remain in the assemblies, and for several years after the strike some of them did (*Sheffield Telegraph*, 20 May 1890). Both organisations joined forces to create the new Rotherham Trades Council, also headed by Sanders. Again, however, this new body undercut any hope that the Knights may have had that their assemblies might act as a federation of local trades in the town. With these hopes dashed, and with the Order surplus to the requirements of the stove-grate industry, the Rotherham assemblies struggled on until 1894, when they formally dissolved.

The story of the Knights and the new unions extended the patterns established during their conflict with the crafts. The Knights exploited some gap in a local labour movement and their assemblies grew, until they came into contact with a union that claimed jurisdiction over the workers that the Knights also targeted. The Knights invariably lost, sometimes immediately, as in Glasgow, relatively quickly, as in Liverpool, or more slowly, as in Derry, Walsall and Rotherham. The last two cases provided a variation on this theme: Knights actually helped to create the organisations – Trades Councils and the National Union of Stove-Grate Workers – that rendered the Knights irrelevant. It seemed that wherever a local alternative existed the Knights were doomed to fail, whatever the contributions that they had made to the industry or area in question.

Conclusion: between the old and the new unionism

We began this chapter with the sweeping changes that transformed the British labour movement in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The growth of national unions, the proliferation of Trades Councils at a local level

and the development of independent working-class politics all built and expanded on what had come before – and all these quantitative changes soon turned into qualitative ones as well. The Knights, as a foreign organisation that aimed to bring workers of all kinds into their assemblies, could not fit into any one of these boxes and never had the means to provide a workable alternative. In the iron and engineering industries, and in the many small trades of the Black Country, the Knights made quick gains between 1886 and 1888. They then ran into new or existing unions that promised comprehensive organisation on a regional or national basis – the ASE, MCTF and Associated Ironworkers – and could not offer the workers involved an appealing alternative. The fact that Knights never faced conflict in the glass industry, because no rival union existed, only further underlined this rule.

Knights helped to bring about the new unionism and grew rapidly in 1888 and 1889, only to find again that they could not compete with the new national unions – the NUDL, the Gasworkers' Union and even their own creation, the National Union of Stove-Grate Workers. Their one remaining source of appeal, that the assemblies could coordinate industrial and political struggles at a local level, was usurped by the rise of the Trades Councils. Caught between these two trends, the Knights were left with no clear role in Britain, and their remaining assemblies did not survive the depression of the mid-1890s.

These defeats should not take anything away from the contributions that Knights made to the British labour movement during the course of their history. Many well-known figures in the British labour movement passed through British assemblies or were closely tied to them. That list includes, but is not restricted to, Keir Hardie, Robert Cunninghame Graham, James Shaw Maxwell, Ben Turner, Michael Davitt and James Sexton. The British and Irish assemblies pioneered the new unionism in many places, and they provided a model that other new unionists drew on for their own organisations. Aside from the work of assemblies in Walsall, Derry, Liverpool and other places in organising workers on a broad scale and encouraging other unions to follow their act, Knights encouraged many of the trade unionists who led the 'new unions'. Ben Tillett of the Gasworkers, John Williams of the National Federation of Labour Union, and Richard McGhee of the National Union of Dock Labourers, to name only the most conspicuous examples, all derived inspiration from the Knights of Labor, whether in Britain or the United States. Knights were also part of the gradual development of independent working-class political movements that led, in time, to the British Labour Party. Keir Hardie ran as an independent at Mid-Lanark in 1888 on the programme of the 'Sons of Labour', a document plagiarised directly from the Order's *Declaration of Principles*. The first secretary of the Independent Labour Party in 1893, James Shaw Maxwell, had led the short-lived assemblies in Scotland.

The Knights were a catalyst for and an actor in all of these trends but they were not allowed to survive long enough to enjoy the fruits of their labour. That might be one epitaph for the Knights of Labor in Britain and Ireland: agitators and instigators but shouldered aside, in George Barnsby's words, once 'a British organisation able to do everything that the Knights could do' arrived on the scene (Barnsby, 1977: 85).

We can derive at least one lesson from that process. Foreign movements can and have inspired many of the changes that have transformed British labour over the last two hundred years, but British movements have been the ones to complete them. They have often kicked over the traces of foreign influence as they did so. They were certainly thorough in the case of the Knights of Labor, which were part of the great changes of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries but were ultimately displaced by them, and then largely forgotten. In this ironical way the roots of their failure lay in their success – and in the British unions that fought them and benefited from it.

References

ASE (1887) 'Abstract of the Council's Proceedings', Modern Records Centre, University of Warwick.

Barnsby, G. (1977) *Socialism in Birmingham*, Wolverhampton: Integrated Publishing Services.

Bean, R. (1972a) 'Samuel Reeves', in Bellamy, J. M. and Saville, J. (eds) *Dictionary of Labour Biography*, Vol. I, London: Macmillan, pp. 282–5.

Bean, R. (1972b) 'A Note on the Knights of Labour in Liverpool', *Labor History*, 13:1, pp. 68–78.

Chapman, Jesse (1888) Letter to Terence V. Powderly, 12 May, Terence V. Powderly papers (TVP), The American Catholic History Research Center and University Archives, Catholic University of America.

Cronin, J. (1982) 'Strikes, 1870–1914', in Wrigley, C. (ed.) *A History of British Industrial Relations, 1875–1914*, Amherst: Harvester, pp. 72–98.

Duffy, A. E. P. (1968) 'Eight Hours Day Movement in Britain, 1886–1893', *The Manchester School*, 36:3, pp. 203–22.

Fones-Wolf, K. (2002) 'Immigrants, Labor and Capital in a Transnational Context: Belgian Glass Workers in America, 1880–1925', *Journal of American Ethnic History*, 21:2, pp. 59–80.

Hobsbawm, E. J. (1949) 'General Labour Unions in Britain, 1889–1914', *Economic History Review*, 1:2, pp. 123–42.

Kenefick, W. (2007) *Red Scotland! The Rise and Fall of the Radical Left, c1872 to 1932,* Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.

Knights of Labor (1896) *Proceedings of the General Assembly of the Knights of Labor*, Philadelphia: Knights of Labor.

Levy, C. (1988) *Ardrossan Harbour, 1805–1979*, Glasgow: Workers Educational Association.

Marwick, W. H. (1967) *A Short History of Labour in Scotland*, Edinburgh and London: W. & R. Chambers.

Matthews, D. (1991) '1889 and All That: New Views on the New Unionism', *International Review of Social History*, 36:1, pp. 24–58.

McAteer, S. (1991) 'The New Unionism in Derry, 1889–1892: A Demonstration of its Inclusive Nature', *Saothar*, 16, pp. 11–22.

Parfitt, S. (2015) 'The First-and-a-Half International: The Knights of Labor and the History of International Labour Organizations in the Nineteenth Century', *Labour History Review*, 80:2, pp. 135–67.

Parfitt, S. (2016) *Knights Across the Atlantic: The Knights of Labor in Britain and Ireland*, Liverpool: Liverpool University Press.

Pelling, H. (1956) 'The Knights of Labor in Britain, 1880–1901', *Economic History Review*, 9, pp. 313–31.

Ramsey, J. (1886) Letter to Terence V. Powderly, 6 December, Terence V. Powderly papers (TVP), The American Catholic History Research Center and University Archives, Catholic University of America.

Royal Commission on Labour (1892) *House of Commons Parliamentary Papers Online*. Available at: www.proquest.com/products-services/House-of-Commons-Parliamentary-Papers.html. Accessed 4 May 2017.

Searles, M. (1991) 'The Origins of New Unionism on Tyneside', *North East Labour History*, 25, pp. 25–50.

Skrabek, Q. (2006) *Michael Owens and the Glass Industry*, Gretna, LA: Pelican.

Stewart, William (1891) Letter to John W. Hayes, 14 August, John W. Hayes papers (JWH), The American Catholic History Research Center and University Archives, Catholic University of America.

Stourbridge Express, 12 March 1887.

Taplin, E. (1974) *Liverpool Dockers and Seamen, 1870–1890*, Hull: Hull University Press.

Walsall Observer, 11 January 1890.

Weir, R. E. (2009) *Knights Down Under: The Knights of Labour in New Zealand*, Newcastle-upon-Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing.

3

The struggle for control of the Durham Miners' Association, 1890s–1915*

Lewis H. Mates

Introduction

This chapter offers a case study from the era that saw the emergence of the Labour Party. It focuses on the various forms of division and cleavage that impacted on the functioning of the Durham Miners' Association (DMA) as political activists sought to control it. This affords insights into three major forms of disunity: intra-organisational, inter-organisational and that between labour organisations and 'spontaneous' working-class protest. It explores two crucial themes: first, the diversity and complexity of disunities; secondly, their importance in explaining historical outcomes.

Several characteristics made this miners' union worth fighting over. The first was its longevity. Founded in 1869, by the turn of the century the DMA had already weathered several serious industrial storms. These included significant downturns in the coal trade – the bulk of Durham coal was exported and particularly susceptible to fluctuating prices on the international markets – changes in how miners' wages were calculated and a county-wide strike in 1892. Organising in one of the country's largest coalfields, by 1910 the DMA was the second largest miners' district union after the more recently established, and less cohesive, South Wales Miners' Federation. Its size afforded it tremendous resources, including an impressive headquarters on Durham city centre's North Road, replete with statues of its pioneers overlooking passers-by. By January 1912, the DMA had over 120,000 members and almost £0.5m of funds. This history and size equated to prestige and, more tangibly, considerable regional and national influence in both the industrial and political spheres (Mates, 2016a).

The DMA had been a divisive influence outside the Miners' Federation of Great Britain (MFGB) until it finally voted to affiliate in November 1907. The union soon began to exercise a powerful influence on the politics of the miners and, once the MFGB affiliated to the Labour Party in 1908, in wider Labour politics as well. Locally, too, the main DMA agents (full-time officials) wielded significant political clout, throwing their personal weight, and the union's resources, firmly behind the Liberals in the county from the mid-1880s, when most working-class men exercised the franchise. This working-class liberalism fed from the region's prevalent nonconformism. DMA leaders like Wesleyan Methodist John Wilson (general secretary from 1892) endorsed coal owner paternalism and the notion of shared interests between masters and men in ensuring the well-being of the industry (Espinasse, 1972).

Leaders v. led ('rank-and-file'): the historiographical debates

There was a basic tension between the conciliatory, moderate, Liberal miners' agents and many union members who went on strike, not only in the 1892 county-wide action but also in numerous local disputes. These were often spontaneous and, because they were therefore not officially sanctioned, received no central DMA support. Indeed, localised unofficial strikes often brought the local lodge (union branch) leaders engaged in them into direct conflict with the agents over issues of procedure or solidarity. This basic potential 'disunity' between moderate leaders and a 'militant' rank-and-file has been explored in approaches influenced by Marxism and/or anarchism, particularly those pioneered by the New Left in the 1960s, most notably by E. P. Thompson (Eastwood, 2000).

Most directly pertinent is *Pit Life in County Durham*, written by young Durham pitman Dave Douglass while studying at Ruskin College, and specifically the product of Raphael Samuel's *History Workshop*. Douglass focused on militant lodges and their conflictual relations with local coal owners and union agents from the 1870s to the 1930s. He concluded: 'there were the men, the owners, and firmly between them the full-time agents who negotiated on their behalf but came to totally unsatisfactory agreements and then spent the bulk of the time trying to ram them down the throats of the men' (Douglass, 1972: 81). Published in 1972, *Pit Life* came at a crucial time of increasing rank-and-file militancy, particularly of miners, who embarked on the first of two successful struggles against the Heath government in that year. *Pit Life* thus offered a contextualisation and, perhaps more importantly, a normalisation of contemporary events by pointing to a long history, evident even in the apparently historically moderate Durham coalfield.

A critique was quick to emerge, however. Frank Webster attributed the 'thesis that the union officials were the constant betrayers of their members' to Douglass (Webster, 1974: 24). Webster asked why, if there was so much rank-and-file dissatisfaction, the agents were never removed by lodges and

were very rarely even formally challenged. Why, too, did lodges not simply elect militant agents in the first place? And, thirdly, how could the agents possibly be out of touch given the high levels of rank-and-file union activism that Douglass explored (Webster, 1974: 25–30)? Roy Church (1986: 711) made strikingly similar remarks about Keith Burgess's (1975: 188–90) work on British industrial relations, and this debate played out more generally, too, in the 'rank-and-filist' controversy (see this book's introduction).

Nevertheless, Douglass's work was important in placing intra-union divisions firmly on the research agenda. *Pit Life*'s impassioned prose revealed that the history of institutions could be human and rendered much more engaging than the rather dry institutional studies that Douglass criticised. While Douglass necessarily focused on rebellious lodges, it is clear in both his and Webster's accounts that there was no simple and uncomplicated rank-and-file/leadership split in the DMA. Rank-and-file Durham miners were keenly divided in terms of industrial and political militancy and activist commitment, even before the advent of a full-blooded, organised socialist challenge in the coalfield in the late 1890s.

Leaders v. led: the empirical material (1890s–1909)

With the founding in 1893 of the nominally socialist Independent Labour Party (ILP) came a new and partly ideologically driven challenge to the Durham coalfield's apparently hegemonic liberalism. From the late 1890s to 1908, the clearest disunity in the union was between ILP rank-and-file activists and the Durham agents, and the fluctuating coalitions of support they could respectively marshal from among the union's membership. Effectively, this conceptualises the struggle as one between 'rival factions of would-be leaders, each seeking to present themselves as the authentic spokesmen for the interests of their members', albeit that the agents, in controlling the union's machinery and resources, occupied the strategic high ground (Zeitlin, 1989: 53). Conducted largely inside the DMA but between activists of two different political parties, this deepening disunity was both intra-organisational and inter-organisational.

By the late 1890s, Durham ILP activists were emerging in some collieries – often, but not invariably, the larger, newer concerns – as lodge leaders and officials. Armed with the votes their lodges held in the DMA's decision-making processes – to a limited degree allocated proportionally – they began to advance their counter-positions to the agents inside the union and outside of it through the rank-and-file movements they established periodically from the turn of the century. The ILP activists' central demands until 1908 revolved around several core themes. The first was wages and, in times of rising coal prices (such as 1899–1901 and 1907 when rank-and-file movements emerged), the need for them to keep pace. This was often coupled with calls to raise the 1879 'basis', the point from which all wage increase percentages were

calculated. A higher basis meant any percentage increase in wages would be greater. Intimately related were claims about the inadequacies of the Conciliation Board. ILP activists tended to regard it as another version of the sliding scale it replaced. The Conciliation Board was a 'peace at any price institution' because it calculated wage awards only in relation to coal prices (*Durham Chronicle*, 30 March 1900). Even then there were occasional excessive delays before new wage awards were paid; and, as far as the miners were concerned, the increments offered were frequently inadequate. ILP activists thus periodically proposed the Conciliation Board's reform or, more drastically, its abolition. Fundamentally, endeavouring to break the traditionally accepted link between wages and coal prices – and to advance one of the MFGB's central aims – they also called for a miners' minimum wage. On occasion, they demanded that a new, higher basis should also constitute this minimum (Mates, 2016a: 76–8, 82–4).

A second major campaigning theme surrounded the DMA's industrial and political affiliations. The ILP wanted the DMA to affiliate to the MFGB as they shared two of the Federation's founding aims: the minimum wage and the eight-hour day. The union had only experienced a short and abortive spell inside the MFGB in the early 1890s as the Durham leadership rejected these self-same Federation aims (Mates, 2013a: 50). Both were reckoned to place too heavy a strain on the economics of the older Durham collieries in the west of the county, mostly, by this time, working small, difficult and therefore comparatively unprofitable coal seams. The eight-hour day was also regarded as undesirable as it apparently threatened to *increase* the hours of Durham's hewers, the numerically dominant elite of actual coal-getters who often worked under seven hours per day. ILP activists attempted to advance their political project directly inside the DMA. But their efforts to secure the union's affiliation to the Labour Representation Committee from 1900, and the Labour Party itself, that emerged after the 1906 general election, met with no lasting success before 1908. The eight-hour day was equally difficult to promote: 71 per cent of Durham miners voted against it in June 1903. The issue then dropped until the new reforming Liberal government introduced an Eight Hour Bill in 1906 (Webster, 1974: 227–9, 245–6).

While many ILP initiatives failed to garner sufficient lodge support at DMA council, considerable numbers did not even make it to a lodge vote. This was thanks to the implacable hostility of the agents, and particularly general secretary John Wilson. There is no 'conspiracy theory' (Church, 1986: 711; Webster, 1974: 26) in recognising that Wilson was a master manipulator: of those less experienced and adept than himself on the executive, and of the DMA's rulebook. As the ILP-controlled lodges grew in number, and coalesced in an informal 'radical lodge alliance' within the DMA, so issues around democratic control of the union assumed more salience. Consequently, a third major theme of ILP activism focused on efforts to democratise the DMA's

organisation and to enable the lodges and their memberships to exercise more power over their executive representatives and agents. There were calls, for example, for the abolition of the executive's power to keep lodge motions off the agenda. Before 1908, all democratising proposals were rejected by lodges or successfully countered, deflected or nullified by the wily Wilson. Even extensive alterations to the union rulebook in December 1902 changed very little in practice. Wilson argued over the fine meanings of new rulebook wordings to engineer his desired outcomes. In December 1905, he even managed to change the rules to make changing the rules in the future much more difficult (Mates, 2016a: 77–85).

There was a further significant facet to the basic dynamic of disunity inside the DMA between the agents and ILP rank-and-file activists. Several lodge-nominated elected representatives sat on the DMA's Executive Committee for twelve-month periods. These were increasingly leading ILP activists like Jos Batey, elected to the executive for the first time in 1901 (Mason and Nield, 1974). In one respect this was positive for the ILP, as it was both a consequence and, by connection, a cause, of growing influence within the lodges. Yet the executive's decisions suggest clearly that Wilson and his fellow agents remained firmly in control and able to contain any challenge his less experienced and short-term opponents on the executive could hope to muster. Indeed, ILP lodge-elected executive members ran the risk of being implicated in executive decisions that worked against the agenda of their own party's radical lodge alliance. Similarly, lodges could nominate and vote for members to sit on bodies like the Conciliation Board as well, with the same attendant potential problems for any ILP activists elected. In practice, it is difficult to discern ILP executive members being blamed for unpopular executive actions – even in the extreme circumstances of 1910 discussed below – perhaps precisely because it was widely recognised that the executive was Wilson's plaything. In terms of disunities, however, it remains important to distinguish between the full-time agents and short-term (twelve months) lodge representatives sitting on the executive in the period before 1908.

The lines of disunity within the union threatened to alter radically after the passing of the Liberal government's Eight Hours Act. The Act itself, of course, provoked continued disunity. While Wilson maintained hostility, there was by no means a unified response even from Durham's socialist miners. They complained that the legislation was opaque and that, while it would shorten underground lads' working hours by around a fifth, it threatened to reduce their piecework wages as well as to lengthen the hewers' shifts. Furthermore, the legislation excluded surface workers (usually paid a day-rate), whose shifts would have been shortened considerably had it applied to them. Other socialists, however, proposed new models of shift patterns which, they claimed, could accommodate a lads' shorter working day and ensure that hewers had to work no longer (nor work an extra third shift) while

maintaining – or at least not significantly reducing – coal output and therefore profits (Mates, 2016a: 85–8).

Nevertheless, with the national eight-hour day in coal mines now inevitable, the argument for Durham staying outside of the MFGB – recognised as a potentially powerful instrument in terms of bargaining with coal owners – was fatally weakened. In December 1907, DMA members duly voted about 5:2 in favour of MFGB affiliation, an event that had appeared remote only nine months previously (*Durham Chronicle*, 6 and 13 December 1907). Soon, the ILP's 'political' project also appeared more tenable when, in early 1908, the MFGB invited its members to vote over affiliation to the Labour Party. In May 1908, Durham's northern neighbours, Northumberland, voted to affiliate and their 'Lib-Lab' miner MP announced his intention to retire rather than stand as a Labour candidate at the next election (Satre, 1999). The disunities in the miners' union appeared to be simplifying. Formally, at least, all miners in the union were also now part of the same political party: Labour. Wilson, however, was diehard. He claimed that any Durham ballot on Labour affiliation contravened a DMA rule that, ironically enough, radical lodges had introduced some years before as a way of *preventing* the union supporting Liberals (*Durham Chronicle*, 15 May 1908). Wilson then secured lodge agreement that the membership leave the whole issue in the executive's hands which, naturally, meant his own. Unsurprisingly, the executive then ruled out holding a Labour Party affiliation ballot in Durham (Webster, 1974: 251).

But Wilson could not block the ballot in other coalfield districts, and they endorsed the Federation's move to Labour. Accordingly, DMA agent and erstwhile Liberal William House converted to Labour in 1908 (Saville, 1974). This development added another layer of complexity to the intra-organisational divisions between Durham miners, who were now all formally part of the Labour Party (see below). Yet Wilson's canny manoeuvring allowed him to refuse the Labour whip, and radical lodge efforts to remedy the constitutional impasse in December 1909 by amending the rules proved futile. Wilson simply defied the new rule that the DMA run parliamentary candidates exclusively in line with Labour's rules and constitution, and stated his expectation that Durham miners would again foot his election expenses. In the January 1910 general election, Wilson stood (uncontested) once again as a Lib-Lab, but really a Liberal. Formal inter-organisational political disunity and confusion between Liberals, 'Lib-Labs' and Labour remained among Durham miners even after the 1908 MFGB Labour affiliation vote (*Durham Chronicle*, 17 December 1909).

Leaders v. spontaneous working-class protest? The Eight Hours Agreement disputes (1910)

Wilson's re-election in January 1910 was, however, a mere side-show in the conflict that suddenly convulsed the coalfield and the union. It resulted from

the Eight Hours Agreement (hereafter simply 'Agreement'), which stipulated how the miners' eight-hour day would apply in Durham. The Agreement's most controversial sections were the lifting of restrictions on coal-drawing time – which threatened to flood the market with cheap coal that would then depress wages – and its acceptance of the three-shift system. Seventy-five per cent of Durham hewers were working a two-shift system. Adding a third hewers' shift meant a massive extra domestic burden on the shoulders of miners' womenfolk, as well as impacting negatively on the social lives of hewers themselves. The third hewers' shift also rendered mine safety maintenance more difficult. The agents did not consult the lodges over the Agreement before signing it on 13 December 1909 and its full terms were not publicised until a week later, just days before Christmas. This left time for some lodges to hastily organise protests, but very little to consult with their employers and insufficient time to submit the legally required fourteen days' notice to strike before the Agreement came into force on New Year's Day 1910 (Mates, 2016a: 102–3).

The resulting situation was about as close to 'spontaneous' working-class protest as could be achieved in a coalfield workforce that was 80 per cent unionised by 1910. Miners revolted against their agents and the owners, with lodge leaderships tending to reflect the prevailing feeling at their colliery. In the confusion, many lodges went on strike immediately, or after briefly trialling the three-shift system. Ninety lodges were represented at a protest conference on 12 January. Of these, fifty-one were on strike and the rest either operating the three-shift system 'under protest' or working their strike notices (*Durham Chronicle*, 14 January 1910). In total, 1.28 million working days were lost in Durham due to disputes over the Agreement in 1910.

Spontaneity was evident in the violence that subsequently erupted. On 17 January, up to 10,000 Durham miners from the South Moor area marched on Gateshead to protest at DMA agent John Johnson's role in the Agreement as he stood for re-election to Parliament. Around 400 protestors attacked Marley Hill colliery en route and, marching back from Gateshead, another group attacked a colliery in Birtley. Three days later there was violence between the police and miners raiding Murton colliery coal heaps. Then, on the evening of Wednesday 26 January, the most serious rioting of the dispute broke out in Horden. Miners attacked the Horden colliery manager's residence and, the following day, looted and razed the social club. In both Murton and Horden the owners were trying to use the Agreement to implement even more onerous four-shift systems (*Newcastle Daily Chronicle*, 18, 27 and 29 January 1910).

These riots point to a remarkable feature of events that also suggest spontaneity and a purer manifestation of the 'full-time officials v. rank-and-file' model. Some Liberal lodge leaders, hitherto uninvolved in the radical lodge alliance, were suddenly at the forefront of the agitation. A significant example was John Reece (Morrison lodge), who initiated and led an ultimately unsuccessful legal challenge to get the central DMA to pay all lodges lock-out

allowances (to part-compensate members for wages lost during the disputes). This prominence meant that Reece was among the nominees standing against the DMA's agents in December 1910. Ordinarily the agents' re-elections were an uncontested formality. Indeed, Reece received nominations for four of the five agent positions, more than any other individual, and other Morrison and South Moor lodge officials predominated among nominees against the incumbents (*Durham Chronicle*, 21 January 1910; 4 February 1910). One reason why all the incumbent agents retained their positions must have been the strength of underlying loyalty among the union's membership, something from which Wilson was to draw, with diminishing returns, for the rest of his tenure. The agents had weathered an incredibly difficult year, surviving a 'no confidence' vote in February in part by delaying it sufficiently to take just enough of the edge off their members' hostility. By December 1910, while tensions remained, their intensity had diminished somewhat from the levels of eleven months earlier (Mates, 2016a: 112–14, 122).

It was equally important, however, that only Wilson himself faced a single opponent (Reece). All the other agents, including those most associated with defending the Agreement (Johnson and William House), had multiple candidates standing against them. This split the opposition vote, thereby aiding the incumbents. It also revealed how politically divided the rebellious 'rank-and-file' (meaning lodge officials as well as 'ordinary' union members) were. Indeed, Reece himself explained some four years later that he did not hold Wilson responsible for the Agreement. Reece defended his liberalism in a lengthy and increasingly personal exchange with a socialist official of another lodge, pointing out that most of the DMA executive who signed the Agreement were ILP men. Reece would brook no implied criticism of Wilson, who was 'such an honourable man' (*Blaydon Courier*, 14 March 1914). The party-political dimension was evident during the 1910 Gateshead riots as well. Protesting miners paraded the streets of Gateshead chanting slogans against Johnson – standing for the first time as a Labour candidate – and in support of his Liberal opponent. Johnson lost but, taking the January 1910 general election results in Durham mining seats together, perceived close personal association with the highly unpopular Agreement was a more significant variable in explaining defeat than the Labour label itself (Mates, 2016a: 111–12).

Nevertheless, the violence indicated another more fundamental division among the DMA's rank-and-file. The attack on Marley Hill, which included miners looting and smashing windows for around an hour, occurred because the colliery was working normally. Similarly, the assault on the Birtley colliery later the same day saw striking miners engaging in brutal hand-to-hand fighting not only with a contingent of one hundred police, but also with other miner employees of the Birtley Coal Company, who were ready and waiting for the protestors. In fact, the Agreement did not affect every Durham colliery in the same way. Between eighteen and twenty-five newer, larger collieries

operated three-shift systems before January 1910, and most of these made only minor modifications to accommodate the underground haulage workers' shorter shift. Four of these collieries did strike against a new four-shift system but were content to maintain their already operating three-shift systems. A much smaller group of collieries, for various reasons, retained (modified) two-shift systems. Overall, while at least 118 collieries experienced some kind of stoppage related to the Agreement, around thirty of these did not become involved in the formal protests against it. And there remained over fifty other Durham collieries – more than a quarter of the total – that implemented a new three-shift system without any form of protest or stoppage (Mates, 2016a: 104–5, 112–13). Spontaneous and widespread though the anti-Agreement protests were, they did not unite the clear majority of the union's rank-and-file against their full-time leaders. The latter's survival of the 'no confidence' vote testified to that.

Not only did the Agreement fail to completely unite the rank-and-file (Liberals, Labour/ILP and non-aligned) in opposition but it also partially divided the pre-existing ILP-led lodge alliance. This was because most of the collieries operating the three-shift system before 1910 were among the most active in the radical lodge alliance. As such, it was only mildly surprising that these lodges often found themselves on the other side of the argument from their erstwhile two-shift lodge allies in 1910. Yet there was even division *within* this small group of pre-1910 three-shift system radical lodges. Dawdon, for example, protested against the Agreement and nominated opponents to the incumbent agents, while Ryhope supported them in December 1910. The only uniform rank-and-file consensus was that the four-shift system was unacceptable. Individual radical lodge responses to the Agreement, its implications and what to do about them, were often inconsistent and varied over time. This suggests some internal struggle within lodges between various factions and illustrates the labyrinthine complexities of the issue. Lodges were torn between loyalty to central leaders (either the agents, ILP members of the executive, or both), the needs of their own specific members and those of wider Durham miner solidarity that often demanded diametrically opposed (or sometimes not obvious) courses of action (Mates, 2016a: 125–8).

Unsurprisingly, this disunity and confusion was equally evident among leading ILP activists. As John Reece pointed out, several of their names were appended to the actual Agreement. The twelve-month terms of half of these representatives ended in December 1909, meaning that later calls for the executive to resign included, rather unfairly, miner representatives who had played no part in formulating the Agreement at all. This offers at least part of the explanation for how the executive won the 'no confidence' vote: the agents and ILP activists on it were lumped together. This notwithstanding, it is highly unlikely that lodge representatives on the executive had had any real say in the negotiations with owners over the Agreement anyway, which explains

why most of those who *had* signed it were subsequently re-elected to the executive. This is probably why there was only one example of an ILP executive signatory of the Agreement trying immediately to defend it, on the grounds that the executive had 'done its best' (*Durham Chronicle*, 31 December 1909).

Other ILP activists in the same awkward position maintained rather lower profiles, as did many of their hitherto most prominent comrades whose names were not on the Agreement. More obvious were the several ILP lodge leaders who voiced the anger of their members at the Agreement, and who did not defend the principle of the eight-hour day nor suggest ways in which it could be amended to render it more acceptable. The topics of ILP branch meetings in 1910 generally eschewed the Agreement, the three-shift system and the eight-hour day, which was remarkable at a time when, until the minimum wage was taken up again, it was by far the most pressing issue for the county's miners. For the most part, it fell to national ILP leaders like Keir Hardie to defend the Eight Hours Act in Durham. Speaking at the summer 1910 Durham miners' gala, Hardie reminded the largely demoralised crowd that the Act had reduced the working hours of every underground South Wales miner (*Durham Chronicle*, 19 August 1910).

Seven essential 'disunities' (1911–1915)

The events of 1910 left the ILP in Durham mining areas beleaguered, many of its activists confused, subdued and apparently impotent. But the party's Liberal rivals among the agents had suffered similarly, their credibility tarnished permanently by the deeply flawed Eight Hours Agreement and the strife and ongoing bitterness brought about by the proliferation of the three- and four-shift systems it fostered. In fact, in 1915 two leading ILP coalfield activists, Jos Batey and W. P. Richardson, replaced Wilson as union agents. This represented a startling achievement that would have been almost inconceivable only five years earlier (Martin and Saville, 1976). Batey and Richardson's victories in 1915 were also due in considerable part to a mass rank-and-file movement (hereafter simply 'movement') that emerged in summer 1911 around renewed demands for a miners' minimum wage. Seven essential 'disunities' taken together explain this movement's birth, development and ultimate success, as well as its weaknesses.

The first disunity was an aspect of the 'full-time leaders v. rank-and-file' model: that between the 'Labour' figures on both sides. The key example of a Labour union agent was William House, who, though a self-styled socialist who rebuked Durham miners for 'sending rich capitalists to Parliament', was curiously accommodating towards the Liberal government itself (*Durham Chronicle*, 19 August 1910). In July 1912, for example, House praised recent Liberal legislation relating to mining and national insurance that had brought, or was

about to bring, considerable discord to the Durham coalfield. Unsurprisingly, such sentiments found no echo in the rhetoric of leading rank-and-file ILP activists. Indeed, as the ILP-led movement for the minimum wage grew after summer 1911, so the annual Durham miners' galas became increasingly excruciating. In July 1912 and 1913, Labour agents like House and ILP movement activists serving on the executive and sharing the gala platform exchanged barely disguised insults (Mates, 2016a: 195, 207–10, 273–4).

The second disunity evident after 1911 was the generational cleavage within Labour between the former Liberal House (born 1854) and the leading figures of a younger ILP generation: Jack Lawson (born 1881) and W. P. Richardson (born 1873) (Bellamy and Martin, 1974). Between them were ILP activists like Jos Batey (born 1867), still House's junior by thirteen years. Batey's cohort led all the major ILP-inspired rank-and-file initiatives before 1911. But the post-1911 movement was initiated by a new cohort of younger activists growing up in already changed times, when the ILP had become a more potent force on the ground and therefore a more obvious choice for political activity from the outset. Lawson, the younger of the two leading ILP coalfield figures after 1911, had had the very unusual experience of studying at the trade-union-sponsored Ruskin College, Oxford, for two years (Lawson, 1944). As he and Richardson took up the cudgels in 1911, so the older cohort of ILP activists fell away. Some retired, while others were elected into full-time positions. A significant group of this older cohort of ILP activists were, however, openly hostile to, or sceptical of, the minimum wage itself. Indeed, Batey was unusual in being involved in the post-1911 campaigns, albeit only in the second rank of a movement led by younger and less experienced – but certainly energetic and dedicated – activists (Mates, 2016a: 164–6, 285). The reward for Batey's long-standing rank-and-file activism, including working closely with Lawson and his younger comrades after 1911, was election as an agent in 1915.

The third disunity was between institutions and ideas within the left challenge to the Liberals: between the reformist, State-based socialism of the ILP and the revolutionary syndicalists who sought to harness working-class power by either transforming existing trade unions or forming new, revolutionary ones from scratch (Holton, 1976). In the Durham coalfield, the Socialist Labour Party (SLP)'s presence was enhanced from 1909 when George Harvey returned to agitate in the coalfield after being radicalised at Ruskin College (Douglass, 2011). Harvey was in Lawson's cohort at Ruskin. By autumn 1912, Harvey was joined by a second revolutionary, Will Lawther, himself radicalised after a year at Central Labour College in London, which was established as a Marxist split from Ruskin in 1910 (Smith, 1976). While both Harvey and Lawther began their political lives in the ILP, they were the exception in Durham. Precious few Durham ILP activists left their party for syndicalism. While some did, on occasion, praise syndicalists and their aims, they regarded

the doctrine as impractical when miners' urgent grievances demanded immediate action and tangible results. Indeed, Jack Lawson – who corresponded with at least one revolutionary he met at Ruskin – peddled a militant, class-based rhetoric that embraced several key syndicalist themes and demands, including an aggressive industrial policy, union democratisation and industrial unionism. Yet this was but one facet of the ILP-led movement's two-pronged industrial and parliamentary strategy that effectively outflanked and marginalised the syndicalist challenge. While ILP activists operated at a considerable advantage – their robust coalfield organisation pre-existed and dwarfed that of the syndicalists – also crucial was the movement leaders' intelligent strategic positioning of their politics (Mates, 2013b).

A fourth disunity, within syndicalism, played a further part in explaining its comparative marginality. Harvey's rhetoric aped that of the SLP's leading intellectual Daniel de Leon, who was fiercely sectarian towards those who ostensibly had most in common with him politically (Mates, 2016b). Doctrinal divisions between Durham syndicalists were most obvious in October 1912, when they appeared to be attempting to act in unison through their 'Durham unofficial reform movement' (DURM) (an effort to replicate its South Wales equivalent that had famously produced the syndicalist classic *The Miners' Next Step* the previous January). At a DURM organised meeting in Chopwell, Lawther spoke first, arguing for South Wales miners' syndicalism, to an audience full of ILP movement activists. Harvey then addressed the meeting from the floor, which itself did not augur well in terms of the DURM's unity. Harvey dubbed Lawther's syndicalism 'a halfway house' when miners 'must go to the higher pinnacle of organisation'; in other words, Harvey's brand of revolutionary politics (*Blaydon Courier*, 19 October 1912). It became clear in the subsequent discussion that syndicalism's opponents could exploit the doctrinal differences among the syndicalists to their advantage, while those interested but new to the ideas could be excused for their apparent confusion at the competing versions presented to them. Lawther, though moving towards anarchist syndicalism in 1913, did continue to support Harvey, and the two appeared together at the Durham miners' gala in 1913. But the DURM itself did not last into 1913 and with its passing went the opportunity for the union's syndicalists to combine under an umbrella banner that could have maximised the impact of their relatively small numbers. It might also have helped to sideline some of the doctrinal specifics of both camps that did not appear particularly applicable to the Durham mining context. Harvey's advocacy of dual unionism – essentially starting new revolutionary unions from scratch – seemed irrelevant in such a heavily unionised coalfield, while Lawther's complete rejection of political action was hard to sell to miners steeped in traditions of mainstream political participation. Lawther's principled refusal to stand for union positions denied him an important platform to influence his fellow miners (Mates, 2013b).

These four disunities all explain outcomes. The importance of the fifth disunity, political differences between the ILP movement leaders and the national leadership of the party, was that it did *not* seem to impact negatively on events on the ground. That national Labour leaders regarded syndicalism as a threat was clear when the Webbs and Philip Snowden, a regular speaker at the Durham miners' gala, published critiques of it. So too did Ramsay MacDonald, who dubbed syndicalism the 'impatient, frenzied, thoughtless child of poverty, disappointment, irresponsibility' (MacDonald, 1912: 71). As seen above, this antipathy did not preclude Durham movement leaders from a much more open, creative and ultimately successful engagement with syndicalism. The coalfield movement also received significant support from Labour's national institutions. The national ILP published Lawson's 1912 pamphlet on the minimum wage, and the party's national paper *Labour Leader* provided another vital mouthpiece. With the movement leaders' growing advocacy for a strong parliamentary Labour Party, aims and objectives overlapped with the national leadership. That the national party was prepared to contest seats against Liberals in the coalfield in two by-elections (in 1913 and 1914) must also have placated eager grassroots ILP activists, despite their party's third place finishes in these contests (Pugh, 2010: 95–6). Certainly, local ILP leaders were not publicly critical of Labour's parliamentary performance in this period. Instead, they used movement platforms to talk-up Labour MPs' achievements during the minimum wage debates in 1912, and repeatedly emphasised the putative benefits of having more Labour representatives in Parliament (Mates, 2014).

The sixth disunity was within the movement itself. No movement that could mobilise over half the Durham coalfield could hope to be always entirely united. This disunity itself subdivided into, first, tensions between movement leaders and militants and, secondly, between the lodges involved. Tensions between movement leaders and led – the first subdivision – were manifest over its aims and remit. This was evident in January 1912, when Lawson's mention of the three-shift system from a minimum wage movement platform prompted cries of 'stick to the minimum wage' (*Newcastle Daily Chronicle*, 22 January 1912). This specific source of disunity was easily dealt with, however: problems associated with the Eight Hours Agreement were simply dropped from the movement's agenda.

But disunity between the movement's leaders and led was also evident in a more fundamental way: over if, how and when to use industrial action on the minimum wage issue. Movement leaders had called for national strike action to secure the minimum wage in spring 1912. Durham miners duly obliged, with a two-thirds vote in favour. Subsequently, movement leaders intermittently threatened a strike over grievances with which the Minimum Wage Act had not adequately dealt. Chief among these was that the law had not included the specific figures the miners had demanded: the so-called

'5 and 2 [shillings]' for adults and children respectively. Matters came to a head in October 1913 when Durham miners responded with fury to their minimum wage being effectively frozen at an already very unpopular low level, while their actual wages had grown appreciably. Movement leaders reported that 'all over the County great difficulty was being experienced … to prevent their men from striking against the [new] award' (*Durham Chronicle*, 31 October 1913). Even without official DMA and MFGB support, at least five collieries struck at this time, whether in line with their officials' advice or not. The new minimum wage award was a contributory factor (if not the sole cause) in all these disputes. Jack Lawson moved from advocating a legal challenge to the minimum wage award to, four weeks later, threatening a long protest strike. Yet, while some collieries continued to strike piecemeal on issues around the minimum wage in 1914, the movement itself began developing the political side of its strategy, simultaneously de-emphasising the strike option. This appeared to resolve – or at least paper over – this specific disunity in the months leading up to the outbreak of the Great War (Mates, 2016a: 231–4).

The second subdivision of the sixth disunity was between the larger and smaller lodges active in the movement. It explains why the movement's apparent considerable size to some extent belied its effectiveness inside the DMA. Before 1910, the larger and more modern collieries were foremost in the radical lodge alliance. DMA rules meant these lodges were effectively underrepresented in the union's decision-making machinery. This was important as lodge votes determined all the main aspects of union policy. The degree of this under-representation grew with the growing memberships of the largest lodges. Addressing this under-representation was an obvious aim in terms of democratising the union. Yet, while many of the largest lodges were active in the movement after summer 1911, all efforts to deal with the lodge underrepresentation question occurred outside of the movement's specific union democratisation programme. A likely direct consequence was that all proposed rule changes on this issue failed to win majority support when they were voted on at union meetings. This apparent failure was almost certainly because the main movement leaders from summer 1911 were based in the lodges of smaller collieries and therefore effectively over-represented inside the union. Any move to redistribute votes more proportionately among the lodges would have diminished their own influence, despite its promise to augment the movement's overall voting power. Even then, the movement managed, in December 1913, to secure individual member voting to elect new agents – to replace lodge votes – and a rulebook commitment from the DMA to exclusive support for Labour candidates at elections. Nevertheless, a degree of ongoing disunity between the large and smaller movement lodges precluded more significant constitutional victories inside the DMA. The vagaries of the increasingly outdated rulebook clearly benefited some (leaders) inside the movement, but

arguably at the expense of the movement as a whole (Mates, 2014: 324, 333–4).

The seventh disunity operated at the micro level, between the main movement leaders, though there was no significant public rancour between them. Indeed, 'difference' is probably more accurate than 'disunity'; but this category demonstrates the extent to which a movement owes its nature and impact to the activism of particular individuals. While aiming to avoid a 'great man' approach to history – albeit at a grassroots level – it is clear that Jack Lawson was central to understanding the tone and energy of the post-1911 movement, notwithstanding his own rather modest (in two senses) account of his involvement (Lawson, 1944: 17). Most movement meetings had several speakers, drawn both from its own officials – elected after it became more formalised into the Durham Forward Movement (DFM) in May 1912 – and from widespread involvement of grassroots activists, most of whom were lodge officials as well. In terms of numbers of speaking appearances, however, Lawson was only really run close by W. P. Richardson, his fellow DFM official. It was Lawson who provided the most sweeping and aggressive rhetorical moments as well as authoring a brilliant minimum wage pamphlet (Lawson, 1912). The movement without Lawson would surely have lacked a certain vigour and drive, and not have achieved quite as much as it did. Indeed, there is even a hitherto unrecognised 'disunity' in terms of Lawson's own political career, between his early militancy and later moderate labourism. The main interpretations of Lawson have suggested his later politics characterised his ideology from the outset, when the reality is far more interesting, revealing a complex and fully three-dimensional activist (Bellamy and Martin, 1974; Bythell, 2016).

Conclusion: unity, disunity and outcomes

A crucial starting point in understanding political processes inside the labour movement is recognising the multiple disunities that run through institutions and between activists in organisational and ideological terms. To achieve their political aims, activists themselves need to recognise these disunities. They can then seek to enhance divisions that serve their ends and to overcome those they need to build coalitions of support sufficient to form influential movements. In the Durham coalfield, a mostly younger generation of ILP activists did just this from summer 1911, through the rank-and-file movement they built around the minimum wage. In so doing they had to tackle another fundamental 'disunity': that within the coalfield's highly diverse and specialised workforce; between the oldest and youngest workers, the infirm and the physically fit, surface and underground workers, day-wage and piece workers. In practice, the movement struggled to provide a consistent appeal to all these grades of miner, their task rendered even more difficult by unyielding

legislation, a minimum wage board that managed to divide-and-rule by offering comparatively generous terms to selected grades of workers some of the time and not to others, by coal owners who responded in different ways to the minimum wage, and by their own agents' opposition. Indeed, the solid two-thirds majority the movement helped to secure for a national minimum wage strike in 1912 was about as close as we get in the coalfield to the basic 'leaders v. led' model (Mates, 2013a).

Though far from perfectly unified, the generally younger ILP activists managed to forge a movement with sufficient coherence to undermine the Liberal agents, whose own stubbornness was self-defeating, and to outflank the syndicalists; a movement that permitted them to present themselves as the union's future leaders. They reaped the benefits when these self-same movement activists – many of whom were unknown before 1911 – dominated the elections for new DMA parliamentary candidates in 1914, and then the 1915 agent elections (when Batey and W. P. Richardson were elected to replace Wilson). With the balance in the struggle for control of the DMA's immense prestige and resources now decisively swung in the socialists' favour, their next step, to secure miners' votes for Labour, could be that much more concerted and effective. Indeed, the movement was already developing this strategy in 1914, based around the reasonable assumption – the DMA's parliamentary candidates were now almost exclusively movement leaders – that Liberal candidates would have less knowledge and be less supportive than their miner Labour counterparts towards proposals to amend the Minimum Wage Act in 1915 (Mates, 2016b: 258–61, 270). In developing a dual industrial and political strategy during these years, the movement had – despite the strategy's potential and actual inconsistencies – managed to transcend yet another fundamental disunity that was so troubling to the Labour Party's national leaders: that between the industrial and the political spheres of experience.

Note

* I would like to thank Silvia García Navarro for her insightful comments on an earlier draft of this chapter.

References

Bellamy, J. and Martin, D. E. (1974) 'Lawson, John James', in Bellamy, J. M. and Saville, J. (eds) *Dictionary of Labour Biography Vol. 2*, London: Macmillan, pp. 27–30.

Burgess, K. (1975) *The Origins of British Industrial Relations: The Nineteenth Century Experience*, London: Croom Helm.

Bythell, D. (2016) 'Lawson, Jack', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* online. Available at: https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/47371. Accessed 3 March 2016.

Church, R. A. (1986) *The History of the British Coal Industry. Vol. 3, 1830–1913: Victorian Pre-eminence*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Douglass, D. (1972) *Pit Life in County Durham: Rank-and-File Movements and Workers' Control*, Oxford: Ruskin College.
Douglass, D. (2011) *George Harvey: Pitman Bolshevik*, Pelaw, Gateshead: Follonsby Miners' Lodge Banner Association.
Eastwood, D. (2000) 'History, Politics and Reputation: E. P. Thompson Reconsidered', *History*, 85:280, pp. 634–54.
Espinasse, M. (1972) 'Wilson, John', in Bellamy, J. M. and Saville, J. (eds), *Dictionary of Labour Biography Vol.1*, London: Macmillan, pp. 348–50.
Holton, B. (1976) *British Syndicalism 1900–1914: Myths and Realities*, London: Pluto.
Lawson, J. (1912) *A Minimum Wage for Miners: Answer to Critics in the Durham Coal Fields*, London: ILP Publication Department, National Labour Press.
Lawson, J. (1944) *A Man's Life*, London: Hodder & Stoughton.
MacDonald, R. (1912) *Syndicalism: A Critical Examination*, London: Constable & Co.
Martin, D. and Saville, J. (1976) 'Richardson, William Pallister', in Bellamy, J. M. and Saville, J. (eds) *Dictionary of Labour Biography Vol. 3*, London: Macmillan, pp. 153–5.
Mason, A. and Nield, B. (1974) 'Batey, Joseph', in Bellamy, J. M. and Saville, J. (eds) *Dictionary of Labour Biography Vol. 2*, London: Macmillan, pp. 31–3.
Mates, L. H. (2013a) '"Seven shillings is not exactly the millennium": Economic Liberalism and the Campaign for a Miners' Minimum Wage in the Durham Coalfield', *Historical Studies in Industrial Relations*, 34, pp. 49–81.
Mates, L. H. (2013b) 'The Limits and Potential of Syndicalist Influence in the Durham Coalfield before the Great War', *Labor History*, 54:1, pp. 42–63.
Mates, L. H. (2014) 'Rank-and-File Movements and Political Change before the Great War: The Durham Miners' "Forward Movement"', *Historical Research*, 87:236, pp. 316–43.
Mates, L. H. (2016a) *The Great Labour Unrest: Rank-and-File Movements and Political Change in the Durham Coalfield to 1914*, Manchester: Manchester University Press.
Mates, L. H. (2016b) 'Syndicalism and the "Transnational Turn"', *Capital and Class*, 40:2, pp. 344–54.
Pugh, M. (2010) *Speak for Britain! A New History of the Labour Party*, London: Bodley Head.
Satre, L. J. (1999) *Thomas Burt, Miners' MP: The Great Conciliator*, Leicester: Leicester University Press.
Saville, J. (1974) 'House, William', in Bellamy, J. M. and Saville, J. (eds) *Dictionary of Labour Biography Vol. 2*, London: Macmillan, pp. 185–7.
Smith, R. (1976) 'Obituary Article: Sir William Lawther', *Bulletin of the North-East Group for the Study of Labour History*, 10, pp. 27–33.
Webster, F. (1974) 'The Durham Miners: A Sociological Interpretation', MA thesis, Durham University.
Zeitlin, J. (1989) '"Rank and Filism" in British Labour History: A Critique', *International Review of Social History*, 34:1, pp. 42–61.

4

Contested coordinator: the Hull Trades Council, 1872–1914*

Yann Béliard

Introduction

Trades Councils are prominent actors in all general histories of the labour movement: the foundation of the Trades Union Congress (TUC) in 1868 owed a lot to the initiative of the London Trades Council founded half a century before in 1818; and by the 1880s, there were more than one hundred of them across Britain. Because they constituted, outside of the TUC, the only bodies uniting workers beyond sectional barriers, Trades Councils – often called Trades *and Labour* Councils because of their openness to the unskilled – have been the subject of countless monographs.[1] Yet there are few comprehensive studies of them. The panoramas offered by C. Richards (Richards, 1920) and W. H. Fraser (Fraser, 1967) cover only limited periods, so that the most ambitious narrative to this day remains Alan Clinton's *Trades Councils in Britain, 1900–1940* (Clinton, 1977).[2]

Forty years later the study of Trades Councils still offers a stimulating angle to rediscover the tensions that affected the British labour movement in its time of greatest growth. What makes them all the more fascinating is that, in the eyes of the big chiefs, those horizontal structures were always seen with suspicion – as illustrated by Sidney Webb's judgement: 'The crowded meetings of tired workmen, unused to official business, with knowledge and interest strictly limited to a single industry, is useless … and ineffective'. Those 'microscopic TUCs', he added, were bound to be 'wild and inconsistent', 'fitful and erratic' (quoted in Clinton, 1977: 97).[3] Clinton's work offers a more balanced view: 'The Trades Councils have developed within the complex and shifting dialectic in the trade unions between national and

local, leaders and led, and between the active rank-and-file and the professional bureaucracy' (Clinton, 1977: 1). He suggests that they had the merit of incarnating new aspirations, a point of view which this chapter intends to interrogate.[4]

Founded in the late 1860s, the Hull Trades Council, like its counterparts in other big towns, was created to unite the efforts of trade-union activists pertaining to different industries. Yet its unifying vocation did not prevent internal conflicts. This study seeks to identify the diverging factors at the root of those conflicts, from the Trades Council's origins to 1914, to understand the way the question of working-class unity was debated, and how those conceptions changed over time. How were the political divergences observed on the national level translated on the ground, in the provinces? Was the timing the same? The local perspective will be used to make the picture of labour's forward march more complex. The scrutiny of the first two periods (1872–1893; 1894–1904) offers a revision of Raymond Brown's *Waterfront Organisation in Hull, 1870–1900*, in which he states that 'while there was considerable friction at times between the unskilled and skilled representatives on the Hull Trades Council, more important was the general unity which prevailed' (Brown, 1972: 11).[5] Following John Saville, I argue instead that the divisions were significant, and that the Lib-Labs at the head of the Trades Council had a major responsibility in that situation. The exploration of the two subsequent moments (1905–1910; 1911–1914) draws on my own PhD thesis on class relations in Hull (Béliard, 2007) and on further consultation of the local press and labour archives.[6]

1872–1893: the struggle to unify a disparate proletariat

On May Day 1931, two years after the conquest of the Hull City Council by the local Labour Party, the fiftieth anniversary of the foundation of the Trades Council was proudly celebrated (*Hull Sentinel*, 3 May 1931). In fact the Trades Council had been in existence since at least 1872, when it was formed by seamen and dockers to centralise the conduct of a strike. By then Hull was already a booming port town, with trade based on the export of coal and manufactured goods, and the import of European raw materials (Bellamy, 1965). Between 1870 and 1914, its population doubled, the size of its docks soared, as did the profits of the Wilsons, owners of the biggest family-run fleet of ships in the country. The proportion of unskilled port workers among the working population increased from 45 to 55 per cent over the same period, the 'labour aristocracy' of skilled workers employed on the periphery representing a smaller group than in other towns of similar size. The Hull Trades Council was original in that it did not bring together existing unions – the dockers' and the seamen's generally casual status making the creation of permanent organisations particularly difficult – but was in and of itself an attempt to create

the solid bond they had so far lacked. Once the fragile unions formed by the port workers during the strike dissolved, however, so did the Trades Council.

Necessity resurrected it in 1881, when a strike over wages paralysed the port for a month. Launched by the Hull Marine Firemen's Mutual Association on 30 May, the movement embraced the dockers on 13 June and the sailors on 16 June. Though work resumed at old rates on 1 July, this time the Hull Trades Council survived and became one of the strongest in the country. As in other localities, it turned itself into a political pressure group expressing concrete claims, from the creation of a free library to that of education facilities for working-class children. What was remarkable in the case of Hull was the central role played inside the Trades Council by the leaders of the unskilled workers, many of whom were of Irish or European origin. In the mid-1880s however, a trade depression led to a certain demoralisation of port labourers, who soon vanished from the Trades Council's Executive Committee (henceforth the EC). No longer in a position to deal with industrial matters on the waterfront, the Trades Council shifted its attention to the political field – in 1886 it changed its rules to authorise political discussions. It was able to secure the election of its president, compositor Fred Maddison, on the Town Council in 1887. An undeniable breakthrough – three more Trades Council delegates joined him in 1891 – it was also an ambiguous one. For Maddison was a member of the Liberal Party, a party whose figureheads in Hull were two shipping magnates, MPs C. M. Norwood and C. H. Wilson. When Maddison left Hull in 1889, he was replaced at the head of the Trades Council by shipwright W. G. Millington, whose sensibility was also 'Lib-Lab' in political matters and conciliatory in industrial ones. In 1885 the Trades Council delegates who stood to the left of the Maddison–Millington clan, belonging to the Hull Radical Club, supported the first working-class candidate ever in a general election in Hull, painter N. B. Billany. But his campaign, invoking republican and secularist values more than a sense of class identity, was no threat to the dominant class collaboration line.

In 1889, though it was affected by a short strike in June, Hull did not take part in the labour upsurge affecting Britain's major ports in August. Precisely because he was afraid of the troubles in London, Wilson chose to sign a closed-shop agreement with the local representatives of Ben Tillett's Dock, Wharf, Riverside and General Labourers' Union (DWRGLU), and to recognise the Hull Seamen's Union (HSU), rather than face a strike. The closed shop became the rule, helping those unions as well as the Trades Council to thrive. However, because in June the Trades Council had not opposed the interference, from the outside, of Havelock Wilson's National Seamen and Firemen's Union (NSFU), the HSU's leader J. B. Butcher, who feared such competition, declared that 'the so-called Trades and Labour Council [had] ceased to be what its name implies' (*Hull News*, 6 July 1889). He withdrew his union from the Trades Council – a secession that would have long-lasting consequences. In

spite of that amputation, the Trades Council prospered. From 5,000 members in 1889 it rose to 20,000 in 1891, with a strong proportion of dockers on the EC. A couple of craft unions left, but the Trades Council was reinforced by the arrival of several newly organised sections of workers, such as tramwaymen, shop assistants and gas workers. In 1890, with support from the Trades Council, anarcho-communist cabinetmaker Gustav Schmidt – also known as Gus Smith – led a strike in the furnishing trades which ended in concessions over pay and conditions, and allowed the Trades Council to integrate within its ranks numerous workers of German and Polish origin (Béliard, 2010a). Smith, who in the 1880s had set up the German-speaking Freiheit Club on the margins of the local labour movement, became one of the pillars of the Trades Council – in May 1890 he organised the first ever demonstration in Hull in favour of the eight-hour day.

Those glory days of growth and unity came to an end in 1893 – a year that transformed the Hull Trades Council. The Shipping Federation, formed by British ship owners in 1890 as a tool to crush the dockers' and seamen's New Unions, cornered Wilson into abandoning the closed-shop scheme. On 4 April he locked out all the men who refused to swap their union card for the Federation Ticket. On 19 May the dockers resumed work under worsened conditions, with their union virtually destroyed. As opposed to the isolationist HSU, the Trades Council had been supportive, paying out the £12,000 it had received from all over the country to the dockers and their families. It was also in the name of the Trades Council that Smith invited hundreds of dockers' wives to take to the streets. But the lesson was tough for those who had hoped that a moderate Trades Council could play a mediating role in the dispute. The fact that the Liberals had chosen Maddison as their candidate for Central Hull in 1892 had not stopped Wilson from attacking the dockers, nor had it stopped the Liberal government from sending troops to protect the strikebreakers. In the months that followed, the Trades Council lost most of its unskilled members. Its efforts to turn the local working class into a force to be reckoned with had come to a spectacular halt. The 1893 defeat in Hull was part of a more general swing of the pendulum, during which employers took back the concessions they had been constrained to make in 1888–1890. The Trades Council's disintegration was no local exception but a 'collateral damage'.[7]

1894–1904: 'Progressive Alliance' or working-class solidarity?

Turning its back on the 1893 disaster, what was left of the Hull Trades Council decided that the best strategy to defend the cause of labour was to avoid direct confrontation with the employers in the industrial arena and concentrate all efforts on the electoral field. Workplace issues were not abandoned but strikes were declared outmoded, and conciliation encouraged. With the DWRGLU

wiped out and the HSU fully committed *not* to collaborate with the rest of the labour movement – so as to preserve its special relationship with the Wilsons – the Trades Council gave up the ambition of organising the port's labourers. In the aftermath of 1893, transformed into a 'yellow stronghold', Hull became a favourite recruiting ground for the Shipping Federation when it needed to break a strike in Glasgow or Hamburg, as well as for the National Free Labour Association. A couple of lightning strikes in 1900 allowed the DWRGLU to revive by pulling together one-third of the 10,000 men employed on the docks, but they remained discriminated against compared with 'Ticket men' and stayed aloof from the Trades Council (Davies, 2000: 195–8).

In spite of the gap now separating the bulk of maritime workers from the Trades Council, it was born again thanks to the progress of trade-union organisation in areas that were peripheral to the port economy, in shipbuilding and above all in the building industry. As early as 1891, the carpenters, joiners, masons and bricklayers had founded a Hull Building Trades Council of their own, a sort of 'Council within the Council' that was only affected marginally by the 1893 fiasco. In 1899 the boom in housing created the ideal situation for a victorious strike. It gave them a prominent role inside the Trades Council, which was reconstructed around that nucleus: in 1898, it claimed to be the second largest Trades Council in the United Kingdom, and the one with the greatest number of representatives on public bodies – including School Boards and Boards of Guardians. In 1905, half the members of the EC belonged to the building trades, while neither the dockers nor the seamen were represented. In that period of renaissance, however, the Trades Council came under the ideological influence of the Liberals as never before (Béliard, 2014).

In the mid-1890s, realising that the Trades Council was a force that would not disappear but might be tamed, the Liberals invited its eight town councillors to form a 'Progressive Alliance' with them. The proposal was accepted and the newly formed 'Progressive Party' secured a majority on the City Council from 1898 to 1902. Under the leadership of Lord Mayor Alfred Gelder, the Lib-Lab alliance – a tandem where the labour element played second fiddle – implemented a policy at odds with old-style laissez-faire liberalism, based on the development of public services (Gillett and MacMahon, 1989). It was during those years that printer F. W. Booth, the editor of the Trades Council's official organ, the *Monthly Labour Journal*, started to publish a weekly column on labour topics in the *Hull Times* under the pen name 'Peter Progress', a pseudonym symbolic of that era of municipal reform and civic faith. The *Monthly Labour Journal* itself replaced the symbols of class pride on its cover – a stonecutter and his tools – with a Viking longship merely symbolising the locality. In 1897, when Hull was made a City on the occasion of Queen Victoria's Jubilee, as well as in 1902, when Edward VII's accession to the throne was feted, the Trades Council did not utter a discordant note.

Between 1895 and 1905, it even gave up its May Day celebrations. However strong numerically, the Trades Council had almost become a labour branch of the Liberal Party. The values defended in the Trades Council's year books – which praised 'the honest citizen worker' as opposed to 'idlers and loafers', and advocated dialogue with the employers rather than the 'obsolete and barbarous' strike weapon – also testify to what might be called its 'Progressive subordination' (Béliard, 2007: 323). Kind words for the Liberal entrepreneurs and politicians who had crushed the dockers, open disdain for the poorest sections of the proletariat: the Trades Council had lost both the will and the possibility to reconnect with Hull's casual masses.

However, a minority inside the Trades Council was unsatisfied with the Lib-Lab partnership and, from 1893 onwards, gathered under the flag of the Independent Labour Party (ILP). In 1893, the ILP secured two seats on the Town Council – seats it retained until 1899. In 1895, Keir Hardie's followers dared present a candidate in West Hull against Wilson himself: docker Tom MacCarthy. He did not attract more than 6,637 voters, but his 17.4 per cent represented an honourable result. His defiant campaign – led without endorsement from the Trades Council, though the Trades Council did support Maddison's Liberal candidacy in Central Hull – had at least sent the message that there was an alternative to deference. In 1896, a young carpenter named Alfred Gould went so far as to present the EC with a motion stating that only independent labour candidates should be backed. It was defeated by 67 votes to 25, illustrating the solidity of the Lib-Lab current, as well as the growing weight of the ILP – that same year, another ILP member, George Belt, was elected deputy chairman of the Trades Council, after a campaign stressing the necessity to reach out to the atomised port workers. The ILP voice lost ground in the Gelder years – which coincided with the Boer War and its khaki, jingoistic atmosphere. Yet the Taff Vale judgement in 1901 gave credibility to Gould's advocacy of unity around class independence rather than with the Liberals. His insistence was rewarded in 1902 when the Trades Council agreed to send two delegates to the Labour Representation Committee (LRC)'s conference in Birmingham. A page was about to be turned.

1905–1910: the ILP as engine and cement

Contrary to Brown's claims, the independent labour group on the City Council was formed in 1905 – not 1911 – and socialists did play an important role in the life of the Trades Council in the years preceding the Great War. In March 1905, seven out of the nine City Councillors affiliated to the Trades Council signed a text proclaiming their refusal of any links with the Liberal and Conservative Parties, thereby dissolving the Progressive Party. In December 1905, contacted in secret by both the Conservatives and the Liberals to stand in the next general election under their colours, Gould gave publicity

to his refusal of those deals – making any return to past compromises impossible (Béliard, 2013). The passing from one era to another was symbolised by Millington's death on 9 December 1905 – he was one of the two Trades Council councillors who had refused to cross the bridge. The Lib-Lab sensibility, however, survived, embodied by former secretaries of the Trades Council, Watson Boyes and T. G. Hall – both vilified by Gould as 'Renegade Labour' though they belonged, like him, to the building trades. Soon the Labour Group on the City Council took root, with never fewer than five representatives. Even Booth, a Lib-Lab at heart, ended up embracing the independence turn. Year in, year out the Labour Group promoted working-class interests in matters great and small – as many Trades Councils did in the years following the 1906 electoral breakthrough of the LRC and the founding of the Parliamentary Labour Party.

Though the ILP did not succeed in bringing representatives of the dockers and seamen back into the Trades Council, it made a point of addressing their preoccupations. In June 1905, a demonstration was organised in favour of 'the Right to Work' – a similar initiative in 1884 had been rejected by the Trades Council as too socialist. The ILP-led Trades Council campaigned successfully for Hull Corporation to keep control of the telephone system; open a hygienically suitable public abattoir; cut the price of tram fares; and provide schoolchildren with free meals. It also insisted that the Corporation should sign no contracts with employers who underpaid their workers, and that municipal employees should receive fair pay. In 1909, the Trades Council became affiliated to the National Committee to Promote the Break-Up of the Poor Law. This did not stop the Labour Group from campaigning in the Guardians' elections, with results that were in constant progress from 1905 to the war. Gould's fellows also inspired a victorious campaign against the privatisation of passageways by the North Eastern Railway Company. Trades Council members were invited to reclaim the streets and address the general public, for example on May Days, which became a must, allowing thousands of workers – skilled or unskilled, enfranchised or not – to express not only their attachment to their comrades abroad but also their determination to take their affairs into their own hands at home. Though the ILP favoured electoral over industrial means, the Trades Council was more supportive of workplace struggles than it had been for years. In 1907 it brought moral and material support to five hundred women on strike at a tin factory – probably the first female strike in the history of Hull. The Trades Council also spoke out in favour of a series of work stoppages: between 1906 and 1910, it supported the all grades movement that developed on the railways, and also the strikes that repeatedly paralysed the shipyards. Gould disapproved of open collaboration with business, condemning labour leaders who were too friendly with famous union-busters or who sat on chambers of commerce side by side with renowned exploiters.

The turning of the Lib-Lab page did not put an end to the priority given by the Trades Council to the institutional fields – on the contrary. Emancipation from the Liberals meant that independent representation for labour was to be sought on every possible occasion. On 18 April 1906, Gould chaired the founding meeting of the Hull branch of the Women's Labour League (WLL), which had just been set up as a female counterpart of the ILP and in which his wife and daughter were both involved. The Trades Council did not run any candidates in the 1906 general election but, in a by-election on 29 November 1907, it supported James Holmes, a leader of the Amalgamated Society of Railway Servants. Securing 29 per cent of the vote, he was not far behind the Conservative and the Liberal candidates – 35 and 36 per cent respectively. After that the Labour Party's progress in Hull slowed down – it was unable to run any candidates in the 1910 general election. But a continued presence of Trades Council delegates on the Town Council, School Boards and Boards of Guardians was preserved.

Though Gould did not call himself a socialist, the combative spirit he breathed into the Trades Council made it a more welcoming place for men with radical views, a case in point being Smith, who returned to the EC's fortnightly meetings. In 1907, no longer rejecting the supposed extremism of the socialists, the Trades Council successfully resisted a ban the City Council wanted to impose on the outdoor gatherings of the Social Democratic Federation and the ILP. In 1910 Smith even convinced a majority of the Trades Council that it should be open to representatives of 'all Labour and Socialist bodies', not just to trade-union delegates – which allowed socialists such as Fabian doctor Joseph Nelson and pawnbroker Ernest Gaunt to step inside (*Hull Times*, 29 January 1910). Exchanges with the expanding socialist milieu also worked the other way round: many Trades Council delegates – for example Walter Litchfield, the president of the Hull co-operative movement – participated in two socialist circles: the Hull Socialist Club and the Clarion Fellowship Club. The Trades Council was thus transformed into a very broad church. In 1908 it gave a precious hand to the Labour Party's eighth annual conference. 'Men who do not wear the red tie of Socialism at their work adopt it on such occasions … Women too, in their dress and milliners, found a lace for the red of revolution' (*Hull Daily Mail*, 20 January 1908). The conference boosted the Trades Council's prestige, as did a smaller event in which it was involved in 1909: a 'socialist crusade' launched by three Congregationalist preachers (Béliard, 2007: 576–87).

The apparent unanimity among the leaders of the Trades Council did not mean that they agreed on the foundations and purpose of their unity. For Smith, the Trades Council was to develop into an instrument for the seizing of power by the working class and the establishment of socialism. But the ILP members had something different in mind. Gould's conceptions are summed up in his interventions at the TUC, where he represented the Hull Carpenters

and Joiners without interruption until the war. He contested the very legitimacy of the TUC and its Parliamentary Committee, arguing that a body uniting the Labour Party and the trade unions would be more efficient. Such an organisation would not only expel officials standing as Conservative or Liberal candidates but would also re-establish Trades Councils in their rightful place – the TUC had excluded them in 1895, for fear of internal contestation (Clinton, 1977: 96).[8] The balance of forces between Smith's and Gould's visions was made clear in July 1910, when Smith was the only delegate on the EC to support a public meeting organised by the DWRGLU, the others being too afraid of the 'adverse criticism' that the main speaker, Tom Mann, would surely inflict on the Labour Party (*Hull Times*, 16 July 1910). Evidently, though Gould and Booth tolerated Smith's eccentricities, they had no intention of abandoning the parliamentary path for that of 'direct actionism' recommended in America by the Industrial Workers of the World and in France by the Confédération Générale du Travail. By 1910, the ILP's views had the upper hand inside the Trades Council but that domination was problematic. Was the official foundation of a Hull Labour Party in 1910 not about to make the Trades Council redundant? How could the Trades Council claim to speak for the local working class at large when its ties with the wharfs, quays and warehouses were so loose? The zenith of ILP activism in 1907–1908 was also the peak of strike-breaking activity for Hull's 'yellow battalion'.

1910–1914: the revolutionary challenge to labourism

Between 1911 and 1914 British society was shaken by an unprecedented strike wave which has gone down in history as the Great Labour Unrest. As in 1888–1891, but on a vaster scale, the most exploited section of the working class revolted for better wages, shorter hours and the recognition of its unions. Those claims were not revolutionary *per se*, but the employers were so reluctant to satisfy them that the workers had to resort to unusually radical means to obtain concessions. Among miners and railwaymen, among dockers, seamen and 'factory girls', the means advocated by Tom Mann's syndicalist current – direct action, solidarity strikes, sabotage – found many echoes. Because the hopes initially placed in the PLP were losing out to the feeling that it was too indulgent towards the Liberal government, because the old unions' bargaining methods were not allowing the workers to obtain their share of the nation's wealth, the country was seized by a striking fever that challenged both the ruling classes and the organised labour movement. Whereas in Liverpool the Trades Council formed the backbone of the Joint Committee that provided leadership for the general transport strike of August 1911, it was sidetracked in Hull when the unskilled took action. Yet in spite of the absence of syndicalist agitators (Brooker, 1979; Lloyd, 1972), the rebellious mood penetrated the ranks of the Hull Trades Council, provoking or revealing an

ideological rift that was bigger than the Lib-Lab v. ILP gap of the 1894–1904 decade.

In February 1911, the railwaymen's strike sparked a heated debate in the *Monthly Labour Journal*, with one voice praising their 'successful warfare' (A. Lockwood, 'ILP notes', *Monthly Labour Journal*, 206, February 1911) and another deploring their 'violent, clumsy methods' (A. Grainger, 'Some Labour Movements', *Monthly Labour Journal*, 209, May 1911). Lockwood, a leftist inside the ILP, saw the strike as evidence that 'United we stand and win; divided we fall and lose', and that time was ripe for a nationalisation of the railways. Grainger, on the other hand, insisted that 'a revolution … in England is out of place' and attacked the radicals with vigour: 'I have been told that industrial unionism and one or two outlandish "isms" have obtained a slight footing in the city … We must recognize that every enthusiastic worker devoting his energies to such movements is a valuable worker, lost to our own cause, working against us … We must have unity in our class to secure a majority of votes at the elections,' he concluded, his eyes fixed on the Commons, expressing what was then the dominant feeling inside the Trades Council.

In the strike that paralysed the port of Hull from 14 June to 2 July, the only part played by the Trades Council was that of financial supporter – the Relief Fund paid out a total of £562 to the strikers. The Trades Council, however, failed to act as a mediator – a position occupied more efficiently by G. R. Askwith for the Board of Trade. The Joint Strike Committee was led by two men who had no links with the Trades Council: John Bell for the NSFU and John Burn for the National Union of Dock Labourers (NUDL).[9] Booth praised Askwith, Bell and Burn for their efforts to appease the strikers' anger, while denigrating the latter's lack of discipline (*Monthly Labour Journal*, 212, August 1911). The Trades Council was more effective in its mediating operations during a more localised strike at Reckitt's, in support of hundreds of women workers.[10] But for all its suspicion towards the strike wave, the Trades Council had to admit, in its Annual Report for 1911 (*Monthly Labour Journal*, 218, February 1912), that it had benefited from 'the great spirit of labour unrest'. Eleven new trade-union branches had jumped on board, including the Jewish tailors and tailoresses and, more importantly, the NSFU and the NUDL, now stronger in Hull than their rivals – respectively the HSU and the DWRGLU.[11]

In 1912, the Lockwood–Grainger duel was re-enacted and pushed further with an argument between Joe Higgins and A. G. Shackles that lasted for months. Under the title 'These Strikes Should Cease' (*Monthly Labour Journal*, 218, February 1912), Shackles argued that 'the day of strike as a weapon of the working class is, or should be, over. It is a useless way of attempting to improve our conditions.' He also accused Mann's 'Don't Shoot' pamphlet of being detrimental to democracy. Higgins, who was calling for a centralisation

of all working-class forces to give the strike movement a clearer direction, replied no less sharply:

> Plenty of good food, shorter working hours, a decent education of the right kind – all of which we have not got – are just as essential in the making of a democracy as is the right to vote. […] The function of the Socialist is to destroy all bad law and destroy the State that makes and upholds it, and substitute in its place a Cooperative Commonwealth. (*Monthly Labour Journal*, 221, May 1912)

In 1913–1914 the rampant social agitation fuelled the conversation between reformists and revolutionaries. The *Monthly Labour Journal* opened its pages to new contributors, all members of the British Socialist Party (BSP) formed in 1911 by the coming together of the Social Democratic Party and radicalised members of the ILP. Shackles could still voice his disapproval of the general strike and justify the repression suffered by Sylvia Pankhurst – according to him 'the arch-conspirator of all and the most deadly danger to the State' (*Monthly Labour Journal*, 233, May 1913). But his gradualist strand was outnumbered. Though Booth was still the editor, most editorials now came from the left wing. Two young members of the BSP, Will Grainger and Cornelius Shearsmith, were particularly loquacious. Grainger denounced the schemes for compulsory arbitration in industrial disputes that many trade-union officials cherished: 'The Right to Strike … remains the strongest weapon in the armoury of militant labour … Until we have a revolution in British politics, Parliament will do no more than register the industrial changes that have taken place out of its walls' ('The Last Straw', *Monthly Labour Journal*, 237, September 1913). In 'The New Rebellion' (*Monthly Labour Journal*, 241, January 1914), he went further still in his criticism of trade unions:

> These have grown old and ceased to be effective, become indeed part of the established order of our society. We are just beginning to feel the impulse of a new spirit of revolt which shall supersede the older methods […] Sympathetic action must displace the sectional strike, and national and international organisation must supersede the present sectional and often overlapping organisations.

They should instead, he argued, fight for 'the entire control of industry by the workers'.

As for Shearsmith, he was the chief supporter in Hull of the Dublin dockers' prolonged strike, organising Jim Larkin's visit hand in hand with the local branch of the *Daily Herald* League. Extremely critical of the TUC's passivity ('A Disgraceful Congress', *Monthly Labour Journal*, 241, January 1914), he championed what he called 'greater unionism': 'If there is one question concerning Trade Unionism which, more than any other, should be settled by the rank-and-file rather than by the leaders, it is the question of general policy' ('The Question of Method', *Monthly Labour Journal*, 243, March 1914). He

contended that 'the real battlefield of Labour [was] not at Westminster, but in the workshop and in the factory, in the mine and in the mill' (*Monthly Labour Journal*, 240, February 1914), that the target of any trade unionist should be the organising of the 15 million 'unorganised' workers – which in Hull implied associating the port labourers much more closely to the Trades Council. So in many ways it seemed as if unity on a more radical basis, as in 1905, had triumphed. A symbol of that leftward move, veteran Smith was allowed in 1912, for the very first time, to sign two editorials for the *Monthly Labour Journal*.

On the eve of the war, competing unities

But the breakthrough of the rebels on the printed page did not reflect the emergence of a clear majority inside the Trades Council, nor was it synonymous with tangible influence over Hull's working class. Even though Smith and Shearsmith were now in a position to set the tone of the Trades Council's public interventions, their impact on proletarian opinion was limited. For all his prestige, Smith was already a figure of the past and, aged fifty-nine, he died on 23 June 1913. Shearsmith, though the chairman of a fast-growing and highly feminised branch of the National Union of Clerks, also lacked connections with the waterfront; and his sudden death on 1 July 1914, at the age of twenty-nine, interrupted the plans he had for a more inclusive Trades Council. Between 1910 and 1914, the Trades Council failed to retrieve its role as prime coordinator of the maritime labourers, as the organisations with which they were now more directly in contact were the rising national unions such as the NSFU and the NUDL. The change of scale in industrial disputes since the early 1870s meant that the Trades Council was somehow dwarfed, as the fights now opposed gigantic national and international protagonists.

The NUDL, though nominally affiliated to the Trades Council, hardly needed it to deal with its own business. By January 1913, it had grown from 1,000 to 8,000 members, and coexisted peacefully with the DWRGLU's 2,000 members. The monthly paper it published from January 1912 onwards, the *Humberside Transport Workers' Gazette*, soon reached the impressive circulation of 10,000 copies, and its price – half a penny – made it more accessible than the *Monthly Labour Journal*. Its motto, 'United We Stand, Divided We Fall', made its philosophy explicit: 'the casual workers in Hull', once treated as 'the scum of the earth', were now determined to defend their rights by using 'industrial solidarity' instead of 'sectional solidarity' (*Humberside Transport Workers' Gazette*, January 1912). In September 1911, Burn even became involved in struggles outside of his official remit, creating NUDL branches among tailors, oil millers and women workers – thus intervening on grounds once reserved to the Trades Council. If possible, the NSFU, also officially attached to the Trades Council, was even more reluctant to play the

inter-sectional game. Bell, who felt little solidarity with the local labour movement, was happy enough so long as his branches grew and employers agreed to treat him as their privileged partner. Once the 1911 strike was over, he neglected relationships with the dockers' representatives to the point of being insulting.[12] As Burn and Bell made no mystery of their allergy to socialism and syndicalism, they had fewer reasons still to connect with the Trades Council when it turned red.[13]

Another reason why the victory of the revolutionary tendency should be qualified is that it was only able to occupy more space inside the Trades Council because the more moderate elements were focusing their efforts on the consolidation of an alternative network, that of the Labour Party. In the mid-1890s, the Trades Council had hosted, as a minority group, the first advocates of independent labour representation. After 1905, those men had secured a majority on the EC, turning the Trades Council into a body whose priority was the orchestration of electoral campaigns. In 1910, however, with the advent of a Hull Labour Party, the body created by the Trades Council emancipated itself from its creator, and started to act as an autonomous being, following an agenda of its own. From then on, it monopolised the labour movement's electoral activities, leaving the Trades Council in charge of the industrial front – a front where it could not compete with the NUDL or the NSFU. In the municipal election of November 1913, the six working-class candidates were officially supported by the Trades Council, the ILP and WLL branches, as well as by several unions. But the first name on the list, significantly, was now the Hull Labour Party. A sign of the times was the launch, in April 1913, of a new paper: *The Dawn: Hull's Labour Monthly, A Review of Local Government and Politics*. The editorialist was Gould himself, the man who had led the Trades Council in the years 1905–1910 but who had now practically ceased to write for its *Monthly Labour Journal*. With a circulation of around 15,000 copies, *The Dawn* provided Hull workers, for only one shilling per year, with news on both electoral and industrial affairs – in obvious competition with the *Monthly Labour Journal*. Though no member of the ILP dared to declare the Trades Council dead, many saw the Labour Party as a superior form of organisation – an opinion which only a few years earlier had already been formulated in the boldest terms:

> A Trades Council candidate speaks for and includes only those connected with the Trades Council, but a Labour candidate speaks for and includes all those who labour. A mighty difference. One idea is parochial; the other universal. One is narrow and stunted; the other broad and deep. One is a decaying and sectional idea; the other is full of life and promise, and a communal idea. One is for the responsibility of a section and an obligation to it only; the other is for the responsibility of a community, and an obligation to the community. (*Monthly Labour Journal*, 207, March 1911)

Even May Day, once a Trades Council preserve, was now co-organised.

Two events sponsored by the Trades Council in spring 1914 illustrate how limited its leftward turn was. One was a meeting held on 29 March to welcome two South African trade unionists deported by their government for their participation in railway and mining strikes (Béliard, 2009). Gould, not Shearsmith, acted as chairman and praised the men for their refusal to see 'the conditions of the white man' reduced to 'the level of that of coloured or Chinese labour'. He also presented the Boer farmers who had repressed the strikers as 'dirty and disreputable' (*The Dawn*, May 1914). Such was the point of view – at odds with the internationalist standpoint of the young guard – that was offered on that evening to Hull workers as the Trades Council's authorised interpretation (*Monthly Labour Journal*, 246, June 1914). On 15 April, Gould presided over a seamen's meeting concerning the employment of Chinese sailors on British vessels (Béliard, 2010b). Adhering to the NSFU's 'yellow peril' thesis, he embraced its call for the exclusion of all non-white workers from British ships – once again demonstrating that Grainger, Shearsmith and their like had not succeeded in making their antiracist understanding of class solidarity the dominant one. As Booth wrote in his obituary for Shearsmith, not unkindly but realistically: 'his views for the re-organisation of society … did not find general favour' (*Hull Daily Mail*, 2 July 1914).

This sheds cruel light on Smith's hopes that the Trades Council could be transformed into an instrument for the overthrowing of capitalism. Like Mann who defended a 'boring from within' strategy, Smith believed neither in constructing a revolutionary party from scratch nor in creating new unions outside of the existing ones. Instead he thought militants should work inside them so as to bring about their amalgamation, federation and radicalisation – precisely what he tried to do inside the Trades Council. He also claimed that the Labour Party coupled 'Trades Unionism with Revolutionary Socialism' and that, combining cooperation with labour representation inside local and national institutions, it could be a tool for radical change (*Monthly Labour Journal*, 220, April 1912). Those judgements were proved over-optimistic when the war broke out. In February 1914, the *Monthly Labour Journal* had wished its readers 'a Happy and Prosperous New Year, … one of uninterrupted progress' (*Monthly Labour Journal*, 242, February 1914). But progress was interrupted in September 1914, when the Hull Trades Council, walking in the TUC and Labour Party's footsteps, accepted the 'social truce' and embraced the war effort in the name of national unity. Antiwar declarations were relinquished, and the Trades Council accepted seeing its role reduced to a strictly humanitarian one. The old guard was back in control.

Conclusion

This study of the Hull Trades Council from its foundation in 1872 to 1914 is an invitation to reflect upon the history of Trades Councils more generally. It illuminates their role in the growth of class consciousness over that period,

the possibilities they offered for fostering a kind of proletarian unity different from that elaborated in the parliamentary milieu, as well as the obstacles that the left-wingers had to face in their attempts to build the type of unity of which they dreamt. Clinton argued that, between the 1880s and 1926, 'the councils became an instrument for all those with ideas that emphasised the need for working-class solidarity, and for those who wanted to see a working-class movement that was more democratic, less bureaucratic, and concerned with political questions beyond the mere winning of elections' (Clinton, 1977: 81). The Hull scenario, to a certain extent, confirms that analysis, and the sense that Trades Council activists often displayed more imagination, initiative and firmness than national leaders. The inter-war history of the Hull Trades Council, marked by a renewed conflict between moderates and radicals – this time grouped around the Communist Party of Great Britain and the Minority Movement – points in the same direction.

Yet this chapter also shows how difficult it was to overcome at the local level the divisions and handicaps that existed at a broader, national or even international level. During the Great Unrest, Mann highlighted the need for a National Federation of Trades Councils that would replace the formal and inefficient unity embodied by the TUC with a real, more efficacious one. That federation would be a stepping stone towards the indispensable One Big Union, and hopefully become the backbone of a revolutionised society. But it was not established until 1922 and failed to dislodge the TUC as the chief unifier. As Clinton observed quite rightly, the paradox is that 'the changes the Trades Councils themselves recommended in the direction of centralisation and unification of effort within the trade-union movement … acted against the amplification of their own role' (Clinton, 1977: 5–6).

The failure of the Councils of Action – bodies often closely linked to the Trades Councils – to subvert the TUC's General Council in the 1926 general strike, though it did initiate a period of decline for Trades Councils, was not the final word (Burns, 1926). With ups and downs they survived, in spite of the suspicion they inspired in high places, in spite of the dissolution of the London Trades Council in 1974. The actions led by the Hull Trades Council over the most recent decades and up to the present day continue to testify to the workers' need for unity at the grassroots, and for a policy more daring than the TUC's 'new realism' – as illustrated by the Hull Trades Council's unwavering support for workers in local and national disputes, including the miners in 1984–1985 and the Liverpool dockers in the 1990s. Today, the Trades Councils have been renamed 'Trade Union Councils', and there are 148 of them around the country. Whether the TUC is as supportive of them as it claims on its website, time will tell (TUC, 2017). Still, the diverging visions of labour unity that competed for influence inside the Hull Trades Council between 1872 and 1914 have a strangely familiar ring, and echo many of our contemporary preoccupations.

Notes

* I wish to thank Neville Kirk, Ophélie Siméon and Keith Sinclair for their helpful comments.

1 The historiography on other parts of the British world is also impressive, as Trades Councils were formed at the same time in Canada and Australia.
2 The book was based on the PhD he completed in 1973 under Ralph Miliband's supervision.
3 In France the equivalent of the Trades Councils, the *bourses du travail*, were allotted a more honourable place, becoming in 1902 one of the two pillars of the Confédération Générale du Travail, alongside the vertical *fédérations professionnelles*.
4 Clinton was well placed to tackle the question, having moved across various Trotskyist groups before joining the Labour Party and its faction-ridden Islington branch.
5 The book was based on the PhD he completed in 1966 under John Saville's supervision.
6 This chapter is an expanded version of a paper given on 16 December 2006 at the seminar that the late François Poirier coordinated at Paris 13 University: 'Le Trades and Labour Council de Kingston-upon-Hull, c.1870–1914: les métamorphoses d'un réseau syndical'.
7 The closed shop was not reinstated in the port of Hull until the 1960s.
8 The need for a trade-union body that would be less exclusive than the TUC had been felt since the early 1870s and indirectly gave birth to the Irish TUC in 1894 and the Scottish one in 1897.
9 Both unions belonged to the National Transport Workers' Federation, a unitary body set up in November 1910 to coordinate the efforts of the biggest unions in the sector.
10 The Trades Council's concern for the female proletariat is exemplified by a column in the *Monthly Labour Journal* entitled 'Women's Corner', which resonates with Anna Clark's chapter in this volume: 'Of servant girls' troubles, there seems no end. The recent whisper of a strike among them vanished with the passing of the Coronation holiday, which, doubtless, most of them got. Indeed, the alpha and the omega of a domestic servant's grievances seem to be the question of out-of-doors liberty' (*Monthly Labour Journal*, 211, July 1911).
11 Annual Reports (*Monthly Labour Journal*, 231, February 1913; *Monthly Labour Journal*, 242, February 1914) underlined the increase in the number of societies affiliated to the Trades Council, resulting from victorious disputes in smaller companies led by workers hitherto unorganised.
12 His indifference to the general interests of workers was made clearer still after the war, when he ran in the general election of December 1918 as 'the seamen's candidate', against the Labour Party one.
13 The NUDL and the NSFU's indifference to the Trades Council can be compared to the attitude of miners' trade unions towards Trades Councils. In locations where miners formed the bulk of the working class, they saw very little point in paying allegiance to a smaller body, as illustrated by Lewis Mates's chapter on Durham in this volume.

References

Béliard, Y. (2007) 'The Origins of the Great Labour Unrest: Class Relations in Hull, 1894–1910', PhD dissertation, Paris 13 University.

Béliard, Y. (2009) 'Imperial Internationalism? Hull Labour's Support for South African Trade-Unionism on the Eve of the Great War', *Labour History Review*, 74:3, pp. 319–29.

Béliard, Y. (2010a) 'From Gustav Schmidt to Gus Smith: A Tale of Labour Integration (Hull, 1878–1913)', in Bantman, C. and Berry, D. (eds) *New Perspectives on Anarchism, Labour and Syndicalism: The Individual, the National and the Transnational*, Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars, pp. 44–60.

Béliard, Y. (2010b) 'Le syndicat des gens de mer contre le Péril Jaune: les ressorts d'une campagne oubliée (Royaume-Uni, printemps 1914)', *Cahiers d'Histoire: Revue d'Histoire Critique*, January–March, pp. 63–79.

Béliard, Y. (2013) 'Les proto-travaillistes et l'argent des conservateurs: du scandale Hyndman-Champion (1885) à l'affaire Alfred Gould (1905)', in Fée, D. and Sergeant, J. C. (eds) *Ethique, politique et corruption au Royaume-Uni*, Aix-Marseille: Presses Universitaires de Provence, pp. 11–28.

Béliard, Y. (2014) 'The Lib-Lab Roots of New Labour', in Guy, S. and Marshall, C. (eds) *The Victorian Legacy in Political Thought*, Bern: Peter Lang, pp. 297–313.

Bellamy, J. (1965) 'Some Aspects of the Economy of Hull in the Nineteenth Century', PhD dissertation, University of Hull.

Brooker, K. (1979) *The Hull Strikes of 1911*, Beverley: East Yorkshire Local History Society.

Brown, R. (1972) *Waterfront Organisation in Hull, 1870–1900*, Hull: Hull University Press.

Burns, E. (1926) *The General Strike, May 1926: Trades Councils in Action*, London: Labour Research Department.

Clinton, A. (1977) *The Trade-Union Rank and File: Trades Councils in Britain, 1900–1940*, Manchester: Manchester University Press.

Davies, Sam (2000) 'The History of Hull Dockers, c. 1870–1960', in *Dock Workers: International Explorations in Comparative Labour History, 1790–1970*, London: Routledge, pp. 180–212.

Fraser, W. H. (1967) 'Trades Councils in England and Scotland, 1858–1897', PhD dissertation, University of Sussex.

Gillett, K. and MacMahon, E. (1989) *The History of Hull*, Hull: Hull University Press.

Lloyd, A. P. (1972) 'The Influence of Syndicalism in the Dock Strikes of 1911 in Hull and Manchester (and Salford)', MA dissertation, University of Warwick.

Richards, C. (1920) *A History of the Trades Councils, 1860–1875*, London: Labour Research Department.

TUC (2017) 'Trade Union Councils and County Associations 2017 directory'. Available at: www.tuc.org.uk/sites/default/files/2017TCDirectory_0.pdf. Accessed 4 April 2017.

5

Domestic servants and the labour movement, 1870s–1914

Anna Clark

Introduction

> In connection with a proposal to form a Domestic Servants' Union at West Hartlepool, a novel demonstration took place in that town on Monday 4 April 1892. A large number of young women attired in neat servants' costumes walked in procession through the streets carrying clothes props, flatirons, slop-pails, dustpans, brooms, scrubbing brushes, and so on. The procession created much amusement and was accompanied by large numbers of people. The demands of the young women were for shorter hours and a weekly half-holiday. (*Bristol Mercury*, 6 April 1892)

The responses to this procession illuminate the division between domestic servants and the organised working class, and, indeed, wider visions of class and the labour movement. On the one hand, the *Liverpool Mercury* dismissed the servants' complaints, asserting that 'domestic servants … in well-regulated houses where mistresses have a due sense of their own responsibility, do not as a rule fare badly' (7 April 1892). This was part of a larger vision of a united People led by paternalist employers, politicians and philanthropists who claimed that independent working-class leadership was unnecessary. Servants were an essential part of this vision because they were seen as deferential to their employers. On the other hand, many trade unionists believed that women, let alone servants, had no place in a movement led by skilled men. T. D. Thredfall, the labour columnist of the *Manchester Times*, mocked the 'shrill cries and vigorous speeches' of these 'young ladies' who wanted to form a union (*Manchester Times*, 8 April 1892). Trade unionists attempted to exclude women from certain occupations, such as surface coal work, by arguing that women could always find work as domestic servants (John, 2013).

Yet some domestic servants felt drawn to a third vision of working-class consciousness that encompassed the unskilled and women. As the Hartlepool report suggests, some servants considered themselves part of the trade-union movement. For instance, the Hartlepool servants are portrayed as carrying the tools of their trade, as did male trade unionists in their own processions, and they demanded shorter working hours, as did other unions. In 1891, reformer Amy Bulley explicitly compared domestic servant discontent to trade unionism. She believed that servants were on the 'brink of rebellion', expressing their discontent by talking back and refusing to do certain tasks (Bulley, 1891: 177–8). Not only that, they tried to organise unions beginning in the 1870s; in 1892, a domestic servants' union formed in London and persisted for some years.[1]

Deference or class consciousness?

A consideration of domestic service is essential to an analysis of the working class since they formed such a large part of it. Around 1900 female domestic servants were between 20 and 40 per cent of all women workers, the largest single occupation for women, and in 1911 male and female domestic servants made up 13.9 per cent of occupied adults.[2] And not all servants were female; for instance, the 1911 census reported there were 1,690,692 female servants and 304,195 male servants (Census, 1918). About one-third of female domestic servants were non-resident, such as 'day girls' who went back to their families to sleep, charwomen who came in occasionally, and cleaners in institutions (Hatton and Bailey, 2001: 110).

In the United States or in the colonies, race strongly shaped domestic service, but in metropolitan Britain, class defined domestic service (Hansen, 1989; May, 2012; Urban, 2009). Irish women were discriminated against, especially in the mid-century, but their numbers increased in domestic service in the late nineteenth century (Dhulchaointigh, 2012: 87–96; Walter, 2004: 471–88).[3] Although it was occasionally suggested that Chinese domestic servants be imported to replace restive British ones, this plan was never carried out (*Dundee Courier*, 25 June 1872; *Liverpool Echo*, 28 September 1897; *Manchester Courier*, 7 September 1882).

Historians have long assumed that servants were deferential and could not express class consciousness (Thompson, 1988: 248). Drawing on oral histories, Lucy Delap presented a more subtle analysis; servants may not have been deferential, but they largely accepted their lot (Delap, 2011). But Selina Todd and Alison Light point out that servants expressed frustration and resentment instead of or as well as loyalty, often moving from job to job rather than being attached to particular households for years (Light, 2010; Todd, 2009).

Servants faced the problem that many working-class people, socialists and trade unionists did not see them as members of the working class. Herbert

Miller, a former soldier, said that working-class people scorned servants for their lack of independence, declaring that 'poorly clad, half-starved factory hands … would blush to the roots of their hair were it once known that a most distant relation had so lowered herself as to become a domestic servant'. One factory girl told him that she wouldn't be a servant 'because I'm above that poor scum what mustn't wear a feather or a ribbon, or breathe the fresh air, without asking somebody's leave, and because I likes my liberty' (Miller, 1876: 18–19). Some early twentieth-century socialists thought of domestic service, like the army, as an anachronistic remnant of feudal, personal relationships of service (Shaw, 1911: 122).

Elite philanthropists certainly tried to inculcate deference into servants and presented themselves as caring for their domestics (Haims, 1981; Klein, 2012; Koven and Michel, 1993; Lewis, 1994). For instance, Queen Victoria and titled lords and ladies sponsored the Domestic Servants' Benevolent Association, founded in 1846 to provide pensions for domestic servants; to qualify, servants had to request nominations from former employers and friends. However, the plan was never actuarially sound, and the fund could provide pensions for only nine or so servants out of 145 applicants each year (Domestic Servants' Benevolent Institute, 1876). More systematic was the Metropolitan Association for the Befriending of Young Servants (MABYS), founded in 1875, three years after a wave of servant agitation. Led by aristocratic ladies and powered by middle-class volunteers, it declared that their duty was to supervise servants in a maternal fashion. The ladies worried about the young girls who typically left large district schools or workhouses at age thirteen to take up service in dark kitchens in lower-middle-class or upper-working-class households; they feared they were isolated and prone to bad moral influences, but they were also determined to train them up to be good servants (MABYS, 1885; Murdoch, 2006: 181). While recognising that girls preferred factory work, they tried to persuade them that they would be more protected within the household (MABYS, 1891). They advised mistresses to treat servants like members of the family, but they also admonished servants to remember they were 'subordinates'. Most of the girls accepted MABYS visitors, with some exception (MABYS, 1891).

Faced with this pressure to be deferential, and often labouring alone, how could domestic servants get the idea of class consciousness let alone organise unions? First, servants were not necessarily isolated from other working-class people. While many servants came from rural backgrounds, others were from skilled working-class families. Furthermore, servants went to markets to shop for food, and they also dealt with tradesmen who came to the house. In multi-servant households, their closest associations would be with other servants.

Secondly, while the personal relationship of mistress and servant could lead to gratitude and deference, this very intimacy could also spark intense class resentment. As Cambridge don Ellen Darwin wrote in 1890, domestic service

was where 'two great classes, Capital and Labour, come into the closest and most direct personal relationship' (Darwin, 1890: 286). Domestic servants may have been physically part of the household, but they were not treated as part of the family; wearing uniforms, sleeping in attics or kitchens, forbidden from sitting or speaking in front of their mistresses, dealing with the intimate dirt of the household, they were often regarded almost as a race apart, and, as we shall see, they resented it (Davidoff, 1995: 18–40).

Thirdly, by the late nineteenth century servants were also largely literate, and they had access to newspapers in their employers' homes. Not only that, servants often wrote letters to newspapers articulating their grievances, occasionally sparking unionising efforts, and, in turn, reports of unions prompted servants to write in.[4] Because most middle-class people employed servants, 'the servant question' was of wider interest than other labour news, so accounts of their agitation were often printed and reprinted in regional and national mainstream newspapers.[5] The labour-oriented newspaper of the 1870s, the *People's Advocate*, reported on servants' unions, and the working-class *Reynolds's Newspaper* included them in its labour coverage in the 1890s. Servants also wrote letters to Margaret Harkness, a social investigator, for her study of women's work in the *British Weekly*, a Christian socialist-inspired newspaper (Harkness, 1889: 111). Of course, philanthropists also tried to inculcate deference through the press and pamphlets for servants. The *Domestic Servants' Journal* was published in the 1870s to encourage servants to be obedient and deferential. The 1913 newspaper *The Domestic Servants' Advertiser* also published letters from servants as well as advertisements from mistresses seeking help. Addressing this dual audience, the newspaper printed servants' grievances but also advised them to accept their lot. We do not know how many of these letters were actually written by servants, but their grievances and proposed solutions were usually very different from those of the mistresses who wrote in. The newspaper controversies about service could incite efforts to organise domestic servants' unions, and, in turn, reports of servants' unions sparked off further controversies and complaints about service. Newspaper letters have an immediacy lacking in the retrospective accounts of memoirs and oral history interviews, where it might have been painful to recollect past experiences of class humiliation.[6]

Servants' grievances and class antagonism

Although servants' complaints had appeared in newspapers before, Dundee servants sparked a notable flurry of correspondence when they attempted to organise in 1872 (Dussart, 2005: 171). I shall show that the Dundee servants' sentiments were echoed for decades in newspaper letters to the editor, revealing a debate over whether servants should be or were deferential or class

conscious. Then, I shall examine their relationship to the wider trade-union movement.

Dundee servants spontaneously organised meetings where 'exuberant' servants dressed in their Sunday best loudly shouted their grievances from the floor, expressing hostility to their mistresses. One servant said that 'You know some [mistresses] are just set up with a little authority, and they think they have the ball at their own feet, and that they can kick it any way they like' (*Belfast News-Letter*, 23 May 1872; *Dundee Courier*, 27 April, 5 June 1872; *Leeds Mercury*, 18 May 1872).

Dundee servants and those who wrote in other places complained about issues that might seem trivial, such as mistresses who controlled their appearance and prevented them from reading and playing the piano. It might be thought that by dressing fashionably and playing the piano, servants were simply emulating their mistresses. But these issues had important symbolic ramifications for much larger debates about class in late nineteenth-century Britain. Employers expected servants to be plain, asexual and educated only in religion and housekeeping. In fact, MABYS explicitly warned servants against emulating their mistresses, for 'the lesson we all need to learn [is] that the end of life is not happiness but usefulness' (MABYS, 1885: 10). So when servants wore fashionable clothes and hairstyles instead of uniforms, and yearned to play the piano and read, they were rejecting the assumption that they were different from ladies.

For instance, the Dundee servants hated the high feather-type cap called a 'flag' typically worn by servants in their town, for 'We live in a free country, and we have no business to wear those things that are a badge of servitude' (*Dundee Courier*, 11 June 1872; see also *Belfast News-Letter*, 23 May 1872; *Morpeth Herald*, 9 November 1872). The *Daily News* rebuked the Dundee servants for wearing large chignons, declaring that when a young woman 'consents to fill an inferior position in a household, she cannot be allowed to compete with her mistress or the young ladies' (*Daily News*, 25 April 1872). But the *People's Advocate* declared, 'Are not mistress and maid both part of the womanhood of the nation? … In that case, if the mistress uses a chignon of real hair to augment her own loveliness, why should the maid not elevate her hair with a jute bun?' (*People's Advocate*, 17 July 1875).

The advent of universal public education in 1870 raised the aspirations of servants and made reading an issue (Beetham, 2009: 185–186). After the Dundee meetings, servants complained their mistresses no longer allowed them to see the newspapers (*Lloyds Weekly Newspaper*, 3 November 1872). In 1872, one mistress blamed the recent introduction of universal education for the insubordination in Surbiton (Pink, 1997: 5). In 1897, Mary Fisher, a Liverpool servant, lamented that 'They have made us like our betters and have taught us other things, and either we shall have to get more freedom, or the

law will have to take pity on servant girls and let them be brought up without any education at all.' But another servant said 'a well-trained servant has no desire to use her mistress's drawing room or piano' (*Liverpool Echo*, 21 and 28 September 1897). At a 1906 Women's conference where mistresses and maids met together, the maids demanded that their employers allow them to read the newspapers (*Manchester Guardian*, 25 October 1906). 'Sally' in Brixton complained to the *Domestic Servants' Advertiser* that her mistress did not want her to get a library ticket. The advice columnist sympathised, as long as she wasn't 'one of those weak-minded girls who will stop to read a chapter in the middle of bed making' (*Domestic Servants' Advertiser*, 9 July 1913).

Domestic servants also repudiated the claim that they were treated as part of the family; instead, they complained that they were treated no better than animals (see also Harkness, 1889: 157, 160; *Liverpool Echo*, 28 September 1897; *Sunderland Daily Echo*, 26 February 1890). One Dundee girl claimed her mistress said servants were 'pigs' (*Belfast News-Letter*, 23 May 1872). A servant wrote to Margaret Harkness that 'Masters and mistresses of the tradesman type forget that servants are human beings like themselves … Servants might often ask, "Is thy servant a dog?"' (Harkness, 1889: 153). Similarly, a Surbiton servant wrote that 'if some ladies showed a little more consideration for their servants and treated them as if they were of the same flesh and blood as themselves and not as though they were some kind of animal created expressly for their convenience, there would be less dissatisfaction among not only servants in Surbiton, but in general' (Pink, 1997: 4).

Servants also repeatedly argued that they were treated like slaves – after all, the common term for a maid of all work was 'slavey', but even cooks and maidservants described themselves in these terms. A Glasgow servant supported unions because 'Some mistresses cannot get Enof out of Por Slaves' (*Glasgow Herald*, 3 May 1872; see also *Edinburgh Evening News*, 10 September 1897; *Sunderland Daily Echo*, 26 February 1890; *Worcester Journal*, 4 November 1865). Another servant wrote 'I hope all parents will endeavor to give their children a trade; then they will be respected, and not treated as slaves' (Pink, 1997: 4).

Above all, servants complained they were treated like machines. In doing so, they implicitly rejected the notion that domestic service was a familial relationship in a nurturing household; instead, they portrayed it as a dehumanising industrial relationship like that in a factory. In 1880, nine domestic servants from Harley Street declared that servants would behave better if masters did not treat them like 'machines' (*London Standard*, 22 June 1880). Signing herself 'One of the Sufferers in the Slavery Line', another servant said 'People think that servants are made like machines' (*Hastings and St. Leonards Observer*, 22 February 1896). In 1892, servant 'Mary of Broomhill' wrote, 'We are not steam engines, or any kind of machine, but human beings' (*Sheffield Daily Telegraph*, 17 September 1892). A London coachman declared that masters

just want 'machines' for servants, but he felt that servants wanted to rise and better themselves – by forming unions (*People's Advocate*, 11 September 1875; see also *Glasgow Herald*, 2 October 1913 and *Hull Daily Mail*, 8 July 1908).

Servants and trade unions

In comparing themselves to machines, these servants signalled their commonality with the labour movement, although trade unionists did not always take them seriously. Dundee had a strong industrial trade-union movement, and wildcat strikes frequently erupted in the jute mills where women worked (Gordon, 1991: 170). An unusually low percentage of households in Dundee kept servants – only 4.05 per cent.[7] The Dundee servants informed the Amalgamated Society of Engineers about their efforts, and later met with the Dundee Trades Council; however, the council thought the women could not manage their own business and tried to take over this group (*Dundee Courier*, 27 May, 8 and 11 June 1872; *Lloyd's Weekly*, 3 November 1872; *Reynolds's Newspaper*, 18 June 1872).

Although their movement failed, the Dundee women inspired other servants to think about organising. Male servants in Leamington proposed a union (*Birmingham Daily Post*, 30 April 1872). In suburban Surbiton, washerwomen were rumoured to have gone on strike, and a footman declared 'Britons will never be slaves' (Pink, 1997: 4). In the Glasgow papers, one domestic servant doubted that unions were necessary, but another declared the domestic servants of Glasgow should strike for 'freedom' and 'equality' with all other trades and professions (*Glasgow Herald*, 25 and 30 April, 3 May 1872). In 1875, coachman William Thompson explicitly referred to the Dundee women in organising union meetings (*People's Advocate*, 3 July and 11 September 1875).

In 1875, the radical London paper the *People's Advocate* stated that servants should be considered as part of the 'labouring classes' and lauded them for demanding recognition of their humanity and rights as citizens. The paper editorialised that 'the masters do not want thinking, intelligent human beings, but machines'. At a meeting in Bayswater of both male and female servants, Thompson called on skilled labourers to respect the unskilled, for 'all labour is honourable'; he agitated for the vote as well (*People's Advocate*, 19 June, 11 September 1875). Servants also rejected 'the tyrannical oppression of deceptive Christian ladies' who tried to inculcate deference in servants. G. Leggeter, however, declared that servants just needed to behave so that their masters would treat them well. Thompson responded indignantly that aristocratic employers could not be trusted, citing the Domestic Servants' Benevolent Association as proof; its promises of pensions were illusory, and servants could never attend its meetings (*People's Advocate*, 3 and 19 July 1875).

Servants allied themselves with the contemporary Short Time demands of the labour movement; workers struck and organised successfully for the

nine-hour day in the 1870s, yet servants were not included in any legislation such as the Factory Act of 1874. One paper referred to the Dundee women as a 'Short-Time' union (*Glasgow Herald*, 3 May 1872). The Dundee women demanded a nine-hour day, as well as a half-holiday. Servants often complained that they worked from six in the morning until late at night; mistresses interrupted any free time with demands to answer the doorbell, run an errand or receive a package (Harkness, 1889: 159). In 1872, one Surbiton servant asked: 'Where will you find a respectable class of working-people that are tied to time as we are?' (Pink, 1997: 13).

A Sunderland controversy reveals explicit connections between servants and class consciousness. In 1890, a number of servants wrote to the local Sunderland newspaper signing themselves as 'white slaves'. They were referring to wage slavery, not sexual slavery (*Sunderland Daily Echo*, 26 February, 6 and 26 March 1890; see also Attwood 2014). Sunderland was a working-class town with militant unions in shipbuilding, sailing and coalmining. The controversy seemed to evoke hopes for a wider social transformation: one letter writer expected that a new form of society would erase the distinctions between mistress and servant. Another wrote, 'Soon we shall all be on equal footing. There will be no mistress and servant then … we are human, the same as our so-called lady mistresses.' Yet another servant called on her fellow maids to abandon aspirations to 'poor gentility' and join forces with working men (*Sunderland Daily Echo*, 6 March 1890; see also *Bristol Mercury*, 29 September 1887; *Hastings and St. Leonards Observer*, 22 February 1896).

Although domestic servants never struck, their conditions had improved by the 1890s. Economist W. Stanley Jevons claimed that unions were unnecessary to raise wages; after all, wages for domestic service had risen due to competition (Jevons, 1880: 49). Servants also gained the weekly half-holiday, the original demand of the Dundee servants. By 1894, domestic servants had higher effective wages than many other women workers because they did not have to pay their board and lodging (Royal Commission on Labour, 1894: 483). Women could find jobs on sewing machines or factory floors. Servants emigrated to Canada, Australia and New Zealand, where they hoped to find higher wages and less deference, although they were sometimes disappointed (Fahrni, 1997: 69–98; Miller, 1876: 32; Sager, 2007: 509–37). But it was not just a matter of supply and demand: it is possible that these newspaper controversies also made mistresses more nervous and more willing to concede to servants' demands. For instance, the Sunderland newspaper refused to print any more letters to the editors from servants, because the mistresses gave in to their demands for a half-day holiday per week (*Sunderland Daily Echo*, 26 March 1890).

Responding to these changes, trade unions and female philanthropists in Germany, New Zealand and the United States debated whether servants were better off organised into unions or cared for by benevolent ladies (May, 2011:

8; Millen, 2010; Pike, 2012; Van Raaphorst, 1988). In New Zealand, middle-class feminists called for a legal half-holiday for domestic servants, but they also wanted to improve their conditions in order to get better trained and more docile servants. Servants themselves wrote that their treatment as 'slaves' and 'machines' proved New Zealand was not as classless as it claimed. Trade unions wanted to organise servants so that they could make claims on New Zealand's nascent welfare state (Cook, 1993: 211–13). In Germany, Social Democrats aimed to fold servants into the socialist movement, but bourgeois feminist organisations wanted to inculcate deference in servants (Jastrow, 1899: 633; Reagin, 1995: 61). Newspapers covered organising efforts in these countries, perhaps inspiring British servants to organise, although we do not know of any direct connections (*Daily News*, 28 October 1892; *Manchester Weekly Times*, 4 March 1898; *Reynolds's Newspaper*, 17 September 1893; *Workers' Cry*, 2 May 1891).

The London and Provincial Domestic Servants' Union

During the 1890s, some servants sustained a union for the first time: the London and Provincial Domestic Servants' Union. Its treasurer, servant George Greenman, started this union by meeting on Sundays in Hyde Park, when servants could attend. Delap and Horn briefly mention this union, but there is more to be said about how long it was active – from 1891 to the end of 1903 – and its political impact (Delap, 2011: 89; Horn, 1975: 179). Although the leadership was always male, the committees and members of delegations were 40–50 per cent female. In 1894, its officers told a *Pall Mall Gazette* reporter that it had over 1,000 members (*Pall Mall Gazette*, 14 January 1894). The union tried to serve their practical needs by intervening in magistrates' courts on servants' behalf, and successfully recovering wages unfairly withheld by employers (Greenman, 1891: 9).

On one level, this union appealed to the philanthropic tradition. It resembled a traditional friendly society like those established by employers on behalf of domestic servants, establishing a scheme for sickness and unemployment benefits, and a co-operative society to purchase uniforms (*Reynolds's Newspaper*, 21 February 1897). Indeed, the union made one overture to the middle-class women's movement when its secretary, T. E. Barnes, spoke at a meeting of the Women's Industrial Council to advocate for better understanding between mistress and maid (*Liverpool Mercury*, 27 May 1897). Furthermore, the union 'strongly objected to the strike policy of ordinary trade unions'; of course, domestic servants, isolated in different households, were unlikely to go on strike (*Rules*, 1892: 2).

Nonetheless, the servants' union saw itself as part of a class-based movement rather than of the maternalist efforts to care for women workers. Unlike many servants' friendly societies founded by lady philanthropists, the union

was 'managed exclusively by servants themselves' (*Women's Herald*, 23 July 1892). The Domestic Servants' Union wondered why servants were still 'looked down upon as a class apart' when other workers were doing better, and thought that organisation would solve the problem (*Pall Mall Gazette*, 14 January 1894). The servants' disapproval of strikes was shared by some adherents of the 'new unionism', who preferred demands for legislative action to strikes because strikes were so difficult for low-paid workers (Wrigley, 1982: 31).

Domestic Servants' Union officials participated actively in the Trades Union Congress (TUC) and other labour forums (*Birmingham Daily Post*, 11 November 1892). Greenman was apparently a member of the Social Democratic Federation. At the Labour Commission in 1892, Greenman called for an eight-hour day for servants (Shaxby, 1898: 47). At the 1893 TUC, Barnes asked that the hours of domestic servants be limited to seventy in a week. The motion passed unanimously (TUC, 1893: 88). In 1894, a deputation of union officials asked A. J. Mundella at the Board of Trade for a legal reduction of hours for servants but he refused to consider this issue (*Reynolds's Newspaper*, 18 February 1894). Undeterred, in 1898 Barnes tried to interest Sir Charles Dilke and John Burns, MP in the issue of shorter hours (*Manchester Weekly Times*, 4 March 1898). They also tried to join with the shop assistants' union, since they had made more progress on this issue (*Daily News*, 13 April 1898).

The union also lobbied Members of Parliament to pass a bill requiring employers to give a character (a recommendation) to servants (*Reynolds's Newspaper*, 4 April 1897; *Manchester Weekly Times*, 4 March 1898). Servants had long complained that if an employer refused them a character, they would never be able to obtain another position – this could even drive young women to the streets. In 1897, they submitted a petition on this issue with 10,000 signatures to MP M. White Ridley (*Reynolds's Newspaper*, 4 April 1897). In 1903, the London County Council considered a compulsory character bill in response to the union's efforts (*Evening Telegraph*, 21 September 1903).

The union publicised the issue of workplace dangers for servants at a time when the Liberals were advocating for workmen's compensation and protection for women workers in factories and workshops (Lester, 2001: 478). Servants could fall off ladders when cleaning windows, and exploding domestic boilers could injure them (*Pall Mall Gazette*, 14 January 1894). In 1893, the Domestic Servants' Union lobbied Asquith to include servants in workmen's compensation bills, but he refused and the union held a large meeting in Hyde Park to protest (*Morning Post*, 20 March 1893). Asquith then included servants in his first workmen's compensation bill, but it was defeated (*Reynolds's Newspaper*, 17 January 1897). Eventually the London County Council and other localities prohibited window cleaning by servants (*Evening Telegraph*, 21 September 1903). The London union seems to have fallen into abeyance by that

time, but it did have an impact in setting a precedent for protective legislation for servants.[8]

Domestic servants and the crisis of 1906–1913

Welfare benefits for domestic servants became part of the challenge to the political power of the aristocracy by New Liberals and the labour movement (Thane, 1984: 877–900). Lloyd George and the New Liberals pushed through new welfare benefits in order to defuse competition from trade unions and the Labour Party, but Conservatives and the aristocratic House of Lords defended their position as the natural leaders of society. Ladies claimed they could best care for their servants; but servants' unions demanded health benefits as a right of citizenship. The populist *Reynolds's Newspaper* proclaimed that agricultural labourers and servants no longer 'belong to the slave class, who are born into the world to minister to the wants of other men and women' (*Reynolds's Newspaper*, 11 October 1908). By 1909 domestic servants had begun joining the National Federation of Women Workers. In 1910, servant and suffragist Kathlyn Oliver formed the Domestic Workers' Union in London (Schwartz, 2014: 173–98). By calling them 'Domestic Workers' rather than 'Domestic Servants', she linked them with the wider workers' movement, rather than the traditional service sector.

Lloyd George included domestic servants in some of the provisions of his People's Budget aimed at improving workers' health. In 1906, the new Workmen's Compensation Act finally included servants. Mary Macarthur declared that workmen's compensation could be considered the Servant Girls' Charter; when servants saw they could be protected by legislation, they would be inspired to join unions (*Daily News*, 7 December 1906). In 1911, Lloyd George put forth a health insurance bill that included domestic servants. At first, women trade unionists objected that the bill gave women workers lower benefits than men; Grace Neal of the Domestic Workers' Union pointed out that women were so badly paid that compulsory contributions would not leave them enough money for food (Neal 1911; see also Anson, 1911). But Lloyd George made some concessions, and in return received letters endorsing the bill from a number of individual mistresses and servants, and organisations such as the Women's Co-operative Guild (*Daily News*, 29 November 1911; Hansard, 1911; Macarthur, 1911). Prominent trade-union advocates such as Clementina Black and Mary Macarthur also supported it (Black, 1911: 135; Macarthur, 1911: 7). Margaret Llewelyn Davies of the Women's Co-operative Guild wrote that the bill would allow domestic servants to be considered as 'independent workers with lives of their own' and inspire them to organise into unions (*Daily News*, 29 November 1911). For servant Kathlyn Oliver, the whole controversy revealed the need and the right of domestic servants to

become full voting citizens (Oliver, 1911a: 17, 1911b: 579). Servants and their sympathisers articulated how hard they worked, their ill-health and their need to be included in the legislation; they echoed the earlier language about servants as 'slaves' who worked long hours in ill-health (*Common Cause*, 13, 23 and 30 November 1911; *Daily News*, 27 November 1911).

Yet the maternalist vision of domestic service as benevolent inspired opposition to the bill, formed of a disparate and fractious coalition of aristocratic ladies, ordinary servants, some women's trade-union activists and suffragettes. The Dowager Countess Desart and Lady Brassey of MABYS led this movement (although some members of MABYS supported the bill). A. J. Macgregor saw service as intimate and unmechanical; after all, she claimed, mistresses took care of ill servants with their own hands. She blamed the servants' agitation on socialist 'discontent' (Mcgregor, 1911: 578). As journalist Rebecca West noted, the 'ladies … want to go on "being kind" to their servants. And the milk of human kindness, as we know, is rather a dangerous drug. It makes the employer arrogant. It turns the worker into a contented slave' (West, 1982: 354). Many suffragettes opposed the bill because they saw it as another tax on middle-class women who were not represented in Parliament (Schwartz, 2014; *Vote*, 8 June 1912).

Many servants also joined these protests, for some servants liked the deferential relationship between mistress and maid. Ethel Balfour, Secretary of the National Association of Domestic Servants (presumably a friendly society), wrote to Lloyd George that 'The benefits offered by the Bill are of small use, and the regulations are likely to destroy the friendly relationship that I am glad to say still prevails between Mistress and Maid in the majority of cases' (Balfour, 1911). Most of the servants who objected, however, simply did not like the notion of paying a tax for which they perceived they would get little benefit. Rumours circulated that if servants did not pay their 3d a week they would be sent to jail, and that the bill would allow mistresses to dismiss servants without notice. Ladies of the Primrose League (the Conservative woman's organisation) allegedly coerced domestic servants into signing a petition against the bill (*Daily Mail*, 22 November, 1 and 2 December 1911). In the end, the bill passed, after which these tensions between a deferential and a class-conscious view of domestic servants became part of the wider class antagonism just before the First World War.

Conclusion

Domestic servants' unions never lasted for longer than a few years, but they did gain concessions from the State such as workers' compensation and health insurance. But servants' class consciousness, expressed in their letters to the editor, may have had an impact on their working conditions in other ways, for they alerted mistresses that their surly housemaids were not just an

individual problem but a wider social phenomenon, requiring the concessions of half-holidays and higher wages. Furthermore, we can no longer assume that most servants were deferential and lacking class consciousness; some certainly were, but many of them publicly articulated their grievances. Domestic service was the most intimate expression of class domination as a social relation, and by slighting it the Victorian trade-union movement missed an opportunity to unite the working class. Today, a revived labour movement must take into account the fact that service occupations are supplanting traditional forms of wage labour to develop and create new forms of class consciousness and organisation.

Notes

1 Laura Schwartz writes on the London Domestic Workers' Union which started in 1908 (Schwartz, 2014), but I shall study servants' class consciousness from the 1870s to 1914.
2 The variation has to do with how the census counted servants, which shifted over time (Higgs, 1983: 201–10; Woollard, 2005: 17).
3 For advertisements saying no Irish need apply, see the *Derby Mercury*, 3 November 1886; *Liverpool Mercury*, 31 March 1848; *North Wales Chronicle*, 12 December 1891; *Liverpool Mercury*, 17 September 1847; *Bristol Mercury*, 17 December 1853; *Morning Chronicle*, 26 April 1834.
4 Fae Dussart has examined earlier letters mostly to *The Times* about and from servants in her excellent PhD dissertation (Dussart, 2005).
5 For notable domestic service controversies, see the *Morning Post*, 2, 7 and 13 January 1857; *Bath Chronicle*, 18 and 25 February 1864; *Worcester Journal*, 21 October and 4 November 1865; *Sunderland Daily Echo*, 26 February, 6, 7 and 26 March 1890; *Sheffield Daily Telegraph*, 17 September 1892; *Hastings and St. Leonards Observer*, 22 February 1896; *Liverpool Echo*, 22, 23 and 28 September, 1 October 1897; in addition, see incidents discussed below.
6 Thanks to Selina Todd for this insight.
7 1881 census. Thanks to Evan Roberts for this figure calculated from K. Schürer and M. Woollard. *National Sample from the 1851 Census of Great Britain* [computer file], Colchester, Essex: History Data Service, UK Data Archive [distributor], 2008 and K. Schürer and M. Woollard. *National Sample from the 1881 Census of Great Britain* [computer file], Colchester, Essex: History Data Service, UK Data Archive [distributor], 2003. Distributed by Minnesota Population Center. *North Atlantic Population Project: Complete Count Microdata. Version 2.0* [Machine-readable database]. Minneapolis: Minnesota Population Center, 2008.
8 In Aberdeen between 1899 and 1901, the Gas Labourers' Union and the Mill Workers' Union were interested in organising domestic servants. Joseph Diack of the Aberdeen Trades Council formed a Domestic Servants' League but it did not last (*Aberdeen Evening Express,* 4 January 1899; *Aberdeen Journal*, 25 September and 24 May 1901, in Diack and Duncan, 1939).

References

Anson, L. (1911) 'The Insurance Bill – Domestic Servants and Others', *The Vote*, pp. 67–8.

Attwood, Rachael (2014) 'Stopping the Traffic: The National Vigilance Association and the International Fight against the "White Slave" Trade (1899–c. 1909)', *Women's History Review*, 24:3, pp. 1–26.
Balfour, Edith (1911) 'Letter to Lloyd George 22 Nov.', National Insurance. Domestic Servants. Correspondence with Edith Balfour. 1911. Treasury. TNA T.172/49.
Beetham, M. (2009) 'Domestic Servants as Poachers of Print', in Delap L., Griffin, B. and Wills, A. (eds) *The Politics of Domestic Authority*, London: Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 185–203.
Black, C. (1911) 'The Insurance Bill', *Women's Industrial News*, 55, pp. 135–6.
Bulley, A. (1891) 'Domestic Service: A Social Study', *Westminster Review*, 135:1, pp. 177–86.
Census (1918) *1911 Census General Report, PP1917–18 xxxv, 483, Section IV, no. 4*. Available at: www.visionofbritain.org.uk/census/SRC_P/5/EW1911GEN. Accessed 4 May 2017.
Cook, M. (1993) 'Domestic Workers' Unions 1890–1942', in New Zealand Department of Internal Affairs, Historical Branch, *Women Together: A History of Women's Organisations in New Zealand: nga ropu wahine o te motu*. Wellington: Daphne Brasell Associates Press, pp. 211–13.
Darwin, E. M. (1890) 'Domestic Service', *Nineteenth Century*, 28:162, pp. 286–95.
Davidoff, L. (1995) 'Mastered for Life: Servant and Wife in Victorian England', in Davidoff, L. *Worlds Between: Historical Perspectives on Gender and Class*, London: Routledge, pp. 18–40.
Delap, L. (2011) *Knowing Their Place: Servants in Twentieth Century Britain*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
Dhulchaointigh, G. N. (2012) 'Irish Women Domestic Servants in London', *Soathar*, 37, pp. 87–96.
Diack, W. and Duncan, J. F. (1939) *History of the Trades Council and the Trade Union Movement in Aberdeen*, Aberdeen: Aberdeen Trades Council.
Domestic Servants' Benevolent Institute (1876) A/FWA/C/D32/1, Domestic Servants Benevolent Institute Collection, London Metropolitan Archive.
Domestic Servants' Union (1896) *Women's Industrial Council*, 17, p. 5.
Dussart, F. (2005) 'The Servant/Employer Relationship in Nineteenth-Century England and India', PhD dissertation, University of London.
Fahrni, M. (1997) '"Ruffled" Mistresses and "Discontented" Maids: Respectability and the Case of Domestic Service, 1880–1914', *Labour/Le Travail*, 39, pp. 69–98.
Gordon, E. (1991) *Women and the Labour Movement in Scotland*, Oxford: Clarendon Press.
Greenman, Mr. (1891) 'London Domestic Servants', *Workers' Cry*, 12 September.
Haims, L. F. (1981) 'In their Place: Domestic Servants in English Country Houses, 1850–1870', PhD thesis, Johns Hopkins University.
Hansard (1911) 'Parliamentary Debates 5th Series, 25 May and 6 July'.
Hansen, K. T. (1989) *Distant Companions: Servants and Employers in Zambia, 1900–1985*, Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.
Harkness, M. E. (1889) *Toilers in London: or Inquiries Concerning Female Labour in the Metropolis*, London: Hodder & Stoughton.
Hatton, T. J. and Bailey, R. E. (2001) 'Women's Work in Census and Survey, 1911–1931', *Economic History Review*, 54:1, pp. 87–107.
Higgs, E. (1983) 'Domestic Servants and Households in Victorian England', *Social History*, 8:2, pp. 201–10.
Horn, P. (1975) *The Rise and Fall of the Victorian Servant*, New York: St. Martin's Press.
Jastrow, H. (1899) 'Domestic Servants in Germany: Their Economic, Social and Legal Position', *Economic Journal*, 9:36, pp. 625–33.

Jevons, W. S. (1880) *Political Economy*, New York: Appleton.
John, A. V. (2013) *By the Sweat of their Brow: Women Workers at Victorian Coal Mines*, London: Routledge.
Klein, M. van der (ed.) (2012) *Maternalism Reconsidered: Motherhood, Welfare and Social Policy in the Twentieth Century*, New York: Berghan Books.
Koven, S. and Michel, S. (eds) (1993) *Mothers of a New World: Maternalist Politics and the Origins of Welfare States*, New York: Routledge.
Lester, V. M. (2001) 'The Employers' Liability/Workmen's Compensation Debate of the 1890s Revisited', *Historical Journal*, 44:2, pp. 471–95.
Lewis, J. (1994) 'Women's Agency, Maternalism, and Welfare', *Gender and History*, 6:1, pp. 117–23.
Light, A. (2010) *Mrs. Woolf and the Servants*, London: Bloomsbury E-book.
MABYS (1885) *Tenth Annual Report of the Metropolitan Association for the Befriending of Young Servants*, London: Richardson.
MABYS (1891) 'Annual Report and Statement of Accounts', FGSD 19, MABYS Collection, London Metropolitan Archives.
Macarthur, M. (1911) 'Women and State Insurance', *Women's Trades Union Review*, 82, pp. 7–9.
May, V. H. (2011) *Unprotected Labor: Household Workers, Politics, and Middle-Class Reform in New York, 1870–1940*, Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press.
May, V. (2012) 'Working at Home: Domestic Workers in the Nineteenth and Twentieth-Century United States', *History Compass*, 10:3, pp. 284–93.
Mcgregor, A. J. (1911) 'Letter to the Editor', *Common Cause*, 13 November, p. 578.
Millen, J. (2010) 'Player, Marie Josephine', *Dictionary of New Zealand Biography. Te Ara – the Encyclopedia of New Zealand*. Available at: www.TeAra.govt.nz/en/biographies/2p21/player-mary-josephine. Accessed 1 March 2018.
Miller, H. (1876) *The Scarcity of Domestic Servants: Its Cause and Remedy*, London: W. Lake.
Murdoch, L. (2006) *Imagined Orphans: Poor Families, Child Welfare, and Contested Citizenship in London*, New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press.
Neal, G. (1911) 'Domestic Servants Union', *Common Cause*, 19 October.
Oliver, K. (1911a) *Domestic Servants and Citizenship*, London: People's Suffrage Association.
Oliver, K. (1911b) 'Letter to the Editor-Domestic Service', *Common Cause*, 13 November, p. 579.
Pike, B. (2012) 'Tasker, Marianne', *Dictionary of New Zealand Biography. Te Ara – the Encyclopedia of New Zealand*. Available at: www.TeAra.govt.nz/en/biographies/2t10/tasker-marianne-allen. Accessed 1 March 2018.
Pink, J. (1997) *'Britons will never be slaves': Grievances Aired by Domestic Servants in Kingston and Surbiton in 1872*, Surbiton: JRP.
Reagin, N. (1995) *A German Women's Movement: Class and Gender in Hanover, 1880–1933*, Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press.
Royal Commission on Labour (1894) *Fifth and Final Report*, London: HM Stationer's Office.
Rules of the London and Provincial Domestic Servants Union (Male and Female) (1892), London: Twentieth Century Press.
Sager, E. W. (2007) 'The Transformation of the Canadian Domestic Servant, 1871–1931', *Social Science History*, 31:4, pp. 509–37.
Schwartz, L. (2014) '"What we think is needed is a union of domestics such as the miners have": The Domestic Workers' Union of Great Britain and Ireland 1908–14', *Twentieth-Century British History*, 25:2, pp. 173–98.
Shaw, G. B. (ed.) (1911) *Fabian Essays in Socialism*, Boston: Ball Publishing Co.

Shaxby, W. R. (1898) *An Eight-Hours Day, the Case Against Trade-Union and Legislative Interference*, London: Liberty Review Publishing.
Thane, P. (1984) 'The Working Class and State "Welfare" in Britain, 1880–1914', *Historical Journal*, 27:4, pp. 877–900.
Thompson, F. M. L. (1988) *The Rise of Respectable Society: A Social History of Victorian Britain, 1830–1900*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
Todd, S. (2009) 'Domestic Service and Class Relations in Britain', *Past and Present*, 203, pp. 181–204.
TUC (1893) *Report of the Proceedings at the 26th Annual Trades Union Congress*, London: TUC.
Urban, A. (2009) 'Irish Domestic Servants, "Biddy", and Rebellion in the American Home, 1850–1900', *Gender and History*, 21:2, pp. 263–386.
Van Raaphorst, D. L. (1988) *Union Maids Not Wanted: Organizing Domestic Workers, 1870–1940*, New York: Praeger.
Walter, B. (2004) 'Irish Domestic Servants and English National Identity', in Fauve-Chamoux, A. (ed.) *Domestic Service and the Formation of European Identity*, Bern: Peter Lang, pp. 471–88.
West, R. (1982) 'Domestics', in Marcus, J. (ed.) *The Young Rebecca: The Writing of Rebecca West*, New York: The Viking Press, pp. 353–6.
Woollard, M. (2005) 'The Classification of Domestic Servants in England and Wales', in Pasleau, S. and Schopp, I. (eds) with Sarti, R., *Proceedings of the Servant Project*, Vol. II, Liège: Éditions de l'Université de Liège.
Wrigley, C. (1982) *A History of British Industrial Relations*, Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press.

PART II

Convergences, divergences and realignments on the left

6

‘The people’s main defence against monopoly’?[1] The Co-op, the Labour Party and Resale Price Maintenance, 1918–1964

David Stewart

Introduction

It is surprising that Resale Price Maintenance (RPM), the practice whereby a manufacturer set a minimum retail price at which its goods could be sold,[2] has attracted so little attention from political historians. Between 1900 and 1956 the percentage of British consumer expenditure on price-maintained goods rose from 3 per cent to a peak of 55 per cent, exercising a profound influence on the cost of living (Killingback, 1988: 211; Mercer, 2013: 135). The small amount of literature published on the politics of RPM concentrates on Conservative Party divisions over its abolition (Findley, 2001: 327–53; Mitchell, 2005: 259–88). However, the labour movement’s stance towards RPM remains largely neglected. This is a particularly telling oversight, as in her study of British anti-trust policies, Helen Mercer maintains that the strongest representative of public opinion on RPM ‘was arguably the Co-operative Societies, supported by the Labour Party’ (Mercer, 1995: 149). The Co-op certainly had a genuine grievance against RPM. Manufacturers that upheld the practice either refused the Co-op supplies, asked it to forego the payment of dividend or required any dividend that would have been earned on its products to be incorporated into the retail price. This led the Co-op to condemn RPM as a threat to its principled trading model, based upon voluntary consumer control and distribution of the surplus via dividend. The development of Co-op and Labour policy, therefore, proved pivotal to the campaign against price maintenance, and it was a Co-operative Party MP’s Private Members’ Bill (PMB) that eventually initiated the abolition of RPM. Yet literature on RPM tends either to miss this crucial linkage or underplay its

significance. For example, Matthew Hilton argues that 'the agenda of the Co-operative Party remained largely subservient to the direction of Labour', while Frank Trentmann surmises that cooperation merged into 'social-democratic consumer politics' (Hilton, 2003: 87; Trentmann, 2001: 153). Mercer is the only historian to acknowledge divisions between the Co-op and Labour over the most desirable type of intervention against RPM (Mercer, 1995: 171). This chapter seeks to analyse those divisions through a case study of the Co-op–Labour debate over RPM policy during the period 1918–1964. In doing so the chapter offers wider insights into the contentious political alliance between the Co-op and the Labour Party.

Literature on the Co-op–Labour alliance is limited and characterises the relationship as being dominated by tensions over national affiliation and Labour's preference for State ownership over co-operative association. Kevin Manton identifies the incompatibility of Labour's state socialism and the Co-op's voluntarist consumerism as the main source of conflict in the alliance (Manton, 2009: 756). Although Peter Gurney qualifies this perspective by highlighting the withering of 'the previously widespread belief [within the Co-op], that politics and economics were domains which could and should be separated', he maintains that 'conflicting views of the role of the state continued to undermine unity' (Gurney, 1996: 220, 224). All of these accounts tend to paint the Labour Party in a negative light, presenting Labour's treatment of the Co-op as nonchalant and dismissive. By contrast, Tom Carbery and Nicole Robertson highlight the complexity and diversity of the alliance at both national and local level. Carbery argues that Co-op–Labour relations have been characterised by 'calculated vagueness, uncertainty and instability', while Robertson identifies the method of selecting candidates and the financial assistance that each party should provide as key sources of disagreement (Carbery, 1969: 763–5; Robertson, 2009: 228). Robertson concludes optimistically that these tensions should not be allowed to disguise the benefits that the Co-op gleaned from the alliance in the form of access to government office and direct representation on governmental and departmental committees (Robertson, 2009: 229). Finally, Lawrence Black has sought to shift the debate away from organisational and State structures by emphasising the limits imposed on the Co-op's adaptability by its internal culture and inherited traditions of local autonomy and egalitarianism (Black, 2009: 34, 36; 2010).

This chapter tests the hypothesis that there was an inherent tension between the Co-op's voluntarism and Labour's state socialism, while scrutinising the balance of power between Labour, the Co-op and the trade unions in order to gauge the Co-op's agency within the alliance. How far organisational issues regarding forms of affiliation inhibited the coordination of RPM policy is also analysed. In arguing that the RPM debate contributed towards a significant revision of the Co-op's voluntarism, the chapter challenges and nuances existing interpretations of the Co-op–Labour alliance which privilege divisions

over voluntarism and State action. It posits that by supporting State regulation of profiteering trusts, trade associations and cartels, the Co-op moderated its opposition towards State action and channelled it into an anti-monopolist critique that became a more prominent source of disagreement with Labour than has hitherto been recognised. This brings into focus profound internal Co-op differences over how to marry the defence of its trading interests with RPM prohibition, which manifested in rifts over State-set prices and the interpretation of its anti-monopoly strategy during the formative and closing stages of the debate. Thereafter, the analysis builds upon the traditional emphasis on Co-op–Labour differences over democratic ownership by demonstrating how the Co-op's internal decision-making inhibited the reappraisal of RPM policy. The chapter contends that these tensions were exacerbated by the Co-op's adherence to voluntary local affiliation to the Labour Party, which denied the Co-op access to Labour's policy-making sub-committees. It concludes that these factors combined to generate a degree of dysfunctionality that rendered the coordination of RPM policy nearly impossible, reinforcing the Co-op's junior status in the alliance of consumer and producer democracy.

The imperfect compromise, 1917–1940

Although free trade and voluntarism were at the heart of consumer cooperation, the Co-op encountered organised boycotts by local shopkeepers and withholding of supplies by manufacturers from its inception in 1844. In order to circumvent manufacturers' boycotts the Co-operative Wholesale Society (CWS) and Scottish CWS (SCWS) were established in 1863 and 1868 respectively to procure and distribute manufactured goods to local co-operative retail societies throughout Britain.[3] The creation of the Wholesales represented a milestone in the Co-op's pursuit of a 'Co-operative Commonwealth' in which all trade would be co-operative and all consumers equal. The Co-op was not alone in pursuing a more integrated business structure. During the 1890s private manufacturers formed trade associations, collectivising the practice of resale price maintenance, and in the period 1900–1938 consumer spending on price-maintained goods rose from 3 per cent to 30 per cent (Killingback, 1988: 211). Although the Co-op's membership increased from 1.7 million to 8.4 million in the corresponding period, its share of retail trade was contained at 14 per cent (*People's Year Book*, 1938).

The First World War acted as a catalyst for the expansion of RPM, with the Board of Trade and Ministry of Food routinely consulting manufacturers involved in the enforcement of RPM when fixing maximum prices. Labour movement concern regarding RPM emerged as part of a wider critique of profiteering trusts, cartels and trade associations (Labour Party, 1919: 61). The War Emergency: Workers' National Committee (WEWNC), of which Co-op representatives were active members, campaigned for the immediate

introduction of rationing and closely monitored the prices of working-class necessities (Harrison, 1971). By acting as a coordinating hub, the WEWNC bolstered labour movement cohesion and formed a vehicle to facilitate the inclusion of the organised working class in the expanded wartime state's deliberations. Its activities influenced the government to establish an advisory Consumers' Council to uphold the rights of consumers. The creation of the Consumers' Council, on which Co-operators held eight of the twenty places, was highly significant from the Co-op's perspective as it entailed state recognition of the consumer interest. The establishment of a Committee on Trusts in 1918 to consider measures necessary to safeguard the public interest against trade associations and combines, and its appointment of W. H. Watkins, a member of the Co-op Union Central Board and the Consumers' Council, entailed further recognition of this (Hansard, 1919: 1; Hilton, 2003: 66–74). Watkins and the labour movement representatives welcomed the Committee's recommendation that the Board of Trade should establish machinery to investigate monopolies, trusts and combines, as it strengthened the demand for a permanent Consumers' Council with enhanced powers.[4] However, in an addendum which proposed checking 'capitalist combinations' through the expansion of Co-op trade, state-set maximum prices and the transfer of private monopolies into public ownership, they challenged the Committee's conclusion that RPM restrained inflation and ensured the survival of the distributive and retail trades (Hansard, 1919: 13–14).[5] These attempts to merge the voluntarist belief in a 'Co-operative Commonwealth' with the statist vision of a 'Socialist Commonwealth' brought into question an integral facet of the Co-op's voluntarism – free trade – and combined with the initiation of decontrol during 1919 to spark a heated debate within the Co-op and the Consumers' Council about the most effective means of containing price rises.

The *Co-operative News* concluded that it was 'fraudulent' to propose returning to 'an "open" market when so many sources of supply are controlled in financial interests by various trusts and rings', while the Co-operative Union and Women's Co-op Guild (WCG) championed state-set maximum food prices (*Co-operative News*, 22 February 1919).[6] However, the Wholesales and Joint Parliamentary Committee (JPC) maintained that the expansion of Co-op trade was the most effective means to reduce prices (Hilton, 2003: 74–5; Wilson, Webster and Vorberg-Rugh, 2013: 166–9).[7] The Wholesales were particularly insistent that the involvement of their private competitors in government price-fixing had enabled trade associations and trusts to protect their profits and institutionalise anti-Co-op discrimination within the State. In contrast, advocates of state-set maximum prices contended that wartime controls had demonstrated the value of state intervention to defend working-class living standards (Co-operative Congress, 1920: 550–1). This internal Co-op dissension regarding the merits of free trade reflected an unmistakable divide in the movement over the interpretation of voluntarism arising from the

changed post-war trading and political environment. A truce was eventually brokered by the JPC at the 1920 Co-op Congress whereby the Co-op Union Central Board agreed to drop its opposition to decontrol and advocacy of state-set maximum prices on the proviso that the Wholesales supported a resolution favouring state regulation of the prices of trusts and cartels only (Co-operative Congress, 1920: 187–9).[8] In reaching this compromise the Co-op incorporated state regulation as a facet of its voluntarism.

The way in which this debate played out within the Co-op and on the Consumers' Council had profound implications for the Co-op's relationship with the Labour Party, as, if state action against RPM was to be initiated, the movement required allies in Parliament. The Co-op's negative wartime experience of conscription, taxation and rationing had combined with Co-operators' activity within the labour movement to convince the Co-op to abandon political neutrality in 1917. Initial enthusiasm for a united working-class party rapidly dissipated as supporters of political activity fragmented into two camps. A vocal minority, particularly within the Royal Arsenal Co-op Society (RACS), advocated national affiliation to the Labour Party to avoid splitting the working-class vote, but the majority hoped to forge an alliance with the Labour Party which retained the Co-op's autonomy (Rhodes, 1998: 39–54).[9] Despite Co-op Congress's rejection of formal alliance with Labour in 1919 and 1921 (Adams, 1987: 48–68; Pollard, 1971), the Co-op Party's gradual evolution of local electoral alliances further redefined the Co-op's voluntarism as encompassing independent political action in voluntary alliance with the Labour Party.

The Co-op party secretary, Alf Barnes, described the relationship as an alliance between Co-op consumer and trade-union producer democracy, and raised the possibility of future national affiliation to create a 'comprehensive party' once the Co-op Party had extended the number of societies affiliated to it and attained greater independence within the Co-op movement (Barnes, 1923: 18–19). However, the 1927 'Cheltenham Agreement', which committed the Co-op Party and Labour Party to not contest the same seats and allowed local Co-op parties the autonomy to affiliate to Constituency Labour Parties, enshrined the principle of independent voluntary alliance (Rosen, 2007: 9). The Co-op Party continued to operate as a department of the Co-op Union and thereby remained accountable to the movement. In this way the Co-op could retain a front of party-political neutrality while avoiding incurring the additional cost of affiliation fees to Labour alongside the cost of running the Co-op Party (Wilson, Webster and Vorberg-Rugh, 2013: 186–8).

The imperfect compromise that emerged contained contradictions and constraints that would have longer-term implications for RPM policy. By not nationally affiliating to Labour, the Co-op Party was denied a block vote at the Labour Party conference and potential representation on Labour's National Executive Committee (NEC), both of which exerted influence over

policy-making (Carbery, 1969: 28–34; Rhodes, 1998: 39–54). Although the 'Cheltenham Agreement' sought to establish formal channels of communication regarding organisation and policy-making through the formation of the National Joint Committee of the Labour Party and the Co-op Party, the latter only met intermittently and was emasculated from the outset by the Co-op Party's lack of autonomy within the co-operative movement. This was encapsulated by the Co-op Union's decision to create the National Co-op Authority in 1932, which usurped the Co-op Party's role as a broker between the Co-operative movement and the Labour Party and included representatives from all wings of the movement. Barnes was alive to these problems, highlighting the need to find 'a place for [the Co-op Party] in the political system of the nation' rather than the existing structures of the movement if consumers were not to be 'subordinated to the particular interest of the producer' (Barnes, 1923: 18, 25). This period established the key dynamics of Co-op–Labour relations, as the Co-op fought to retain the independent voluntary alliance and the Co-op Party strove to prove itself to the wider movement, while the Labour Party demanded national affiliation.

In the short term both parties were committed to the re-establishment of a Consumers' Council with a remit to investigate and take action against price-maintenance agreements.[10] Co-op Party MPs, led by A. V. Alexander, who pressed for state regulation of the price and supply of food, openly acknowledged that co-operation required the support of the State if profiteering by trade associations and trusts were to be checked (Gurney, 1996: 221). However, in warning that the Co-op would not support Labour's plans for a 'state monopoly of food', Alexander shifted the terms of debate over the Co-op's relationship with the State away from opposition to state action *per se* and towards an anti-monopolist position (Gurney, 1996: 224). This moderated form of voluntarism won overwhelming approval among Co-operators as it corresponded with the Co-op's preferred role as a consumers' representative, its new-found advocacy of state-regulated prices, and raised the possibility that the threat of state intervention might prompt the voluntary abandonment of RPM by manufacturers.

The election of the second minority Labour government in 1929, which was committed to establishing 'stringent control over monopolies and combines', further raised expectations. The JPC welcomed the introduction of a Consumers' Council Bill to enable the Board of Trade to regulate by order prices that the Council found to be excessive, and was further buoyed by the establishment of the Committee on the Restraint of Trade to investigate restrictive practices, such as RPM (Co-operative Congress, 1930: 71–2). However, this optimism was to be short-lived as the Consumers' Council Bill fell amid concessions to Liberal amendments, which prevented the Council from regulating prices unless it could prove that 'conditions exist which restrict the free play of competition' (Co-operative Congress, 1931: 78). Meanwhile, the Committee on the Restraint of Trade rejected legislation to prohibit

RPM and opposed legal prohibition of refusal to supply, as the JPC's evidence had proposed, on the basis that this would interfere with the freedom to contract.

Gurney identifies this episode as a lost opportunity 'to regulate markets in favour of working-class consumers' (Gurney, 2012: 909). The JPC's immediate response was to emphasise the need for societies and members 'to support CWS and co-operative production to break these boycotts' through voluntary action (Co-operative Congress, 1931: 78). In contrast, the WCG called for 'a system of price control which will safeguard the consumer so that those who have little to spend on food may obtain the utmost value' (Trentmann, 2001: 155). Meanwhile, in attacking collective RPM in 1939, Alexander demonstrated the extent to which the Co-op Party now interpreted voluntarism and state regulation as inter-dependent:

> The State represented the whole of the people and that if profit was made by a State organisation, all citizens entered into enjoyment of that profit. I have heard a different definition of private profit, where people gather together, not merely to carry on individual trade, but in order to buy for a particular combination in the cheapest market and sell in the dearest, and at the highest margin of profit which they can extract from the community. Are these the profiteers, or is the State the profiteer which conducts its business for the benefit of the whole community? (Hansard, 1939)

Therefore, by the outbreak of the Second World War the debates over RPM policy and alliance with the Labour Party had led the Co-op to redefine its voluntarism in relation to political activity and free trade. An anti-monopolist consensus emerged in favour of independent political action in voluntary alliance with the Labour Party and state regulation of prices charged by 'profiteering' trusts, combines and trade associations. Although this resulted in a gradual acceptance of state regulation, the situation was more complex than the fusion of co-operation into 'social-democratic consumer politics' suggested by Trentmann (2001: 153). In particular, divisions persisted over the extent to which the Co-op should embrace state-set prices and further integrate with the Labour Party. Indeed, when the Co-op Union was invited to join the newly established National Council of Labour (NCL) in 1935, the National Co-operative Authority rejected the offer as many of the items under discussion would be outside the Co-op's scope of interest (Whitecross, 2014: 100, 107).[11] These nuanced differences were reconciled through the commitment to a Consumers' Council, but this imperfect compromise was shattered by the experience of the first majority Labour government between 1945 and 1951.

A missed opportunity, 1940–1951

Between 1938 and 1945 the Co-op increased its share of the national grocery trade from 14 to 20 per cent, as the Co-op's policy of limiting price rises

and continuing to pay dividend on non-rationed goods proved attractive in a period of wartime austerity. The Co-op–Labour alliance became more integrated during the war as the National Co-operative Authority joined the NCL in a consultative capacity in 1939 and as a full member in 1941. NCA membership facilitated policy discussions with Labour and the Trades Union Congress (TUC), while providing the opportunity to influence the coalition government. When the National Co-operative Authority expressed concerns that private firms' dominance of Commodity Control Boards was being used to create private monopolies, the Labour Party leader and lord privy seal, Clement Attlee, initially infuriated the Co-op representatives by arguing that it would be difficult to recast the scheme, as food control 'needed to be directed by persons familiar with production or distribution of the commodities' (NCL, 1940a, 1940b, 1941). However, his commitment to raise the matter with the War Cabinet had an effect as the Co-op secured representation on all of the Commodity Boards and the Wholesales came to play a pivotal role in procuring overseas food supplies and assisting the rationalisation of industrial production (Wilson, Webster and Vorberg-Rugh, 2013: 212–13).

The 1945 Co-op Party conference's rejection of direct affiliation prompted the Co-op Party secretary, Jack Bailey, to reopen discussions on a new electoral agreement with Labour (Carbery, 1969: 122–3). The agreement that emerged in 1946 included the formation of a National Policy Committee (NPC) involving the Co-op Union and Labour Party NEC to facilitate the mutual adjustment of their programmes (Whitecross, 2014: 111–12). This was deemed of particular significance by the Co-op as, although the Co-op Party had returned a record twenty-three MPs at the 1945 general election, Labour's manifesto contained mixed messages regarding RPM. Despite promising to prohibit 'anti-social restrictive practices' which inflated 'profits at the cost of a lower standard of living for all', Labour dropped its commitment to a Consumers' Council (Labour Party, 1945: 4–7). Speaking in a Labour Party general election broadcast, Alexander smoothed over these inconsistencies by identifying the Co-op as 'the people's main defence against monopoly' (Gurney, 2015: 239).

During the economic crisis of 1948 the National Co-operative Authority launched a voluntary price reduction policy intended to assist the government in suppressing prices and demonstrate 'beyond doubt' the Co-op's claim to 'a place of national significance' (Co-operative Congress, 1948: 283; NCL, 1948a, 1949; National Co-operative Authority, 1949). Amid this inflationary pressure, Labour developed a convoluted strategy to tackle RPM, influenced by the TUC–Labour Party Joint Sub-Committee on Trusts and Cartels, which entailed the Board of Trade investigating restrictive practices on a case-by-case basis (NEC Sub-Committees, 1946). In order to address union concern that outright prohibition of RPM would result in job losses and wage reductions, the president of the Board of Trade, Stafford Cripps, agreed to establish a

Committee of Inquiry on RPM to avoid 'condemning the system outright'.[12] Cripps's decision revealed one of the key limitations of the 1946 agreement as Labour was able to side-step the newly formed NPC by shifting emphasis towards its own sub-committees to maintain policy-making autonomy and pressure the Co-op to affiliate nationally. The leverage exerted by the TUC also highlighted the extent to which Labour-affiliated trade unions were able to use the sub-committee structure to influence Labour policy-making and position the TUC as the dominant working-class partner of the State, marginalising the Co-op in the alliance of consumer and producer democracy.

Nonetheless, in an effort to balance competing Co-op and union interests, Cripps proposed a compromise intended to address what he perceived to be the most malign effects of RPM on the Co-op without immediately prohibiting the practice. Emphasising the need to give 'the co-operative method of trading … our fullest support', Cripps identified the Co-op as a 'special case' given that the 1930 Committee on the Restraint of Trade had already concluded that there was 'no justification in principle' for anti-Co-op discrimination (Cripps, 1946). Cripps proposed using Defence Regulations to issue orders to 'monopolistic suppliers' of specified goods which would prevent discrimination against dividend and require them to supply against demand from all sources. The proposal was predicated on the basis that the Co-op's primary objection to RPM stemmed from its interference with dividend, and Cripps envisaged 'proceeding first with those cases which are of most practical importance to the Co-operative Movement' (Cripps, 1946). Although Mercer and Manton have both highlighted Cripps's memorandum, neither has considered the Co-op's response (Mercer, 1995: 154). In fact, the JPC rejected Cripps's offer, citing the Committee on the Restraint of Trade's assertion that compulsion to supply was a legal impossibility (Lambert, undated; NCL, 1948). The CWS led on this issue, rejecting 'special pleading on dividend' while advocating general consumer legislation to establish a Monopolies Commission with the power to prohibit RPM (Co-operative Union Parliamentary Committee (CUPC), 1950).

The Co-op's rejection of Cripps's proposal exposed emergent tensions in the Co-op–Labour alliance over the relationship between RPM and monopolies policy. The Co-op's desire for universal anti-monopoly legislation applicable to all restrictive practices, including RPM, clashed with Labour's partial, targeted approach, which decoupled RPM and monopolies policy. Already frustrated by Labour's reluctance to recognise it as a national consumers' representative equal in status with the TUC and Federation of British Industries, the Co-op developed a stinging critique of Labour's nationalisation programme (Manton 2009: 772–3). Labour's abortive proposal to nationalise the Co-op Insurance Services prompted the Co-op Party, alienated by its marginalisation and anxious to prove its worth to the movement, to berate Labour for its conflation of common ownership with nationalisation. Bailey and his

deputy Harold Campbell condemned nationalisation as 'undemocratic' and 'monopolistic' and championed consumer control as 'the only true [all-embracing] classless control' (Campbell, 1947: 6, 16). In doing so, they articulated an anti-monopolist position, which unified the Co-op and galvanised the principle of independent Co-op political activity by underlining the Co-op Party's role in advancing the consumer interest.

Influencing the deliberations of the Committee of Inquiry on RPM became a test of the Co-op's agency as an independent consumers' movement. Underlining the need for outright prohibition, the JPC's written evidence emphasised that the worst cases of anti-Co-op discrimination were practised through individual RPM. It proposed empowering the Board of Trade to investigate price-maintenance agreements and impose fixed maximum prices on goods found to be generating excessive profits (CUPC, 1947). However, when the JPC gave oral evidence to the Committee its testimony was contradictory ('Transcript', 1948). The CWS was aghast at the JPC and SCWS representatives' use of 'fixed prices', 'nationally controlled prices' and 'maximum prices' when describing the Co-op's preferred position (CWS Sub-committee, 1948 and undated report). To compound matters the WCG informed the Committee that fixed retail prices offered 'marked advantages' because they made it 'easier to plan and check household expenditure' (Hansard, 1949: 10). When the Committee of Inquiry reported back in 1949, it recommended the outlawing of collective RPM and the retention of individual RPM to protect brands against loss-leaders. The Committee agreed that there was 'no reason why a retailer's right to distribute some of his profits [through deferred dividends] should be restrained or restricted' and proposed further consultations to find a voluntary solution (Hansard, 1949: 20, 33–4).

Following fruitless negotiations over the voluntary modification of RPM, the 1950 Labour manifesto pledged that 'anti-social private agreements to keep prices too high will be dealt with' (Labour Party, 1950: 7). The president of the Board of Trade, Harold Wilson, responded by launching a full-scale review of consumer policy in the aftermath of Labour's narrow victory. Plotting 'a middle path between wartime control and unfettered free market liberalism', Wilson proposed combining state regulation with increased price competition (Hilton, 2003: 154–5). The Co-op was expected to enhance retailing efficiency and in so doing generate price competition through the expansion of self-service retailing, which it had pioneered since 1942 (Manton, 2008: 281–2). RPM prohibition was now interpreted as a prerequisite for stimulating greater price competition (Manton, 2007: 328). Publication of a White Paper was delayed until June 1951, as RPM reform became enmeshed in internal Cabinet wrangling over the nationalisation of distribution and an alternative TUC proposal to retain individual RPM subject to oversight by a National Pricing Authority and special provision for Co-op dividend (Manton, 2007: 329–31; Mercer, 1995: 156, 162). The White Paper, which advocated

prohibition of collective RPM and the modification of individual RPM to allow only the prescription of a maximum price, was abandoned by the Conservatives following their victory at the 1951 general election (CUPC, 1951; Hansard, 1951).

Labour's eventual endorsement of RPM prohibition encapsulated the misunderstanding that characterised the Co-op–Labour alliance. In supporting outright abolition, Labour felt that it had addressed the Co-op's demand for general legislation to combat RPM. However, by interpreting RPM prohibition as an anti-inflationary lever to stimulate price competition while austerity was being eased, Labour overlooked the potential for radical reform of retailing, based upon the collective empowerment of consumers, implicit within the Co-op's anti-monopolism. Reflecting on this period, Gurney has concluded that 'the potential of the Labour Party to radically restructure British society in the second half of the twentieth century was thus seriously undermined by its inability to properly integrate the interests of organised producers with those of consumers' (Gurney, 2005: 985). The tension that inhibited Co-op–Labour relations by 1951 stemmed from the Co-op's stringent anti-monopolist critique of state socialism and the preferential corporatist role accorded to the trade unions. A cohesive corporatist relationship with the Labour government, akin to that of the TUC, failed to emerge due to Labour's reluctance to recognise the Co-op as a national consumers' movement and the Co-op's exclusion from Labour's policy-making sub-committees. The lack of coordination regarding RPM policy, which was exacerbated by the Co-op's difficulties in articulating a consistent policy position and the Labour Party's sidelining of the NPC, effectively rendered that aspect of the 1946 agreement stillborn, and fuelled the misunderstanding that characterised the alliance. Yet the Co-op suffered from some self-inflicted wounds. Its unbending pursuit of the outright abolition of RPM denied the movement the unique opportunity to use the Cripps compromise to create an advantageous dividend-based trading position prior to eventual RPM abolition. Moreover, it inadvertently aligned the Co-op with a competitive vision of RPM abolition that was far less benevolent towards its trading interests and the ideology of collective consumer control than the regulatory statist sentiments that underpinned the Cripps compromise.

Planning v. competition, 1951–1964

Following Labour's 1951 general election defeat, debate within the labour movement became polarised between advocates of price competition and state economic planning. Labour's stance on RPM was challenged by the TUC and the Union of Shop, Distributive and Allied Workers (USDAW). Citing concerns that 'unrestricted capitalist competition' would undermine wages while highlighting the risks posed to the Co-op by 'cut price wars', USDAW

presented individual RPM as an essential part of a planned economy (Labour Party, 1952: 84–5). As a result of this union counter-attack, Labour conceded that RPM would only be outlawed subject to 'satisfactory safeguards for workers in the distributive trades and productive industry' (Labour Party, 1952: 84–5). Wilson negotiated RPM policy in the midst of these tensions when chairing the Labour Party's Cost of Living Working Party during the build-up to the 1955 general election. The Working Party advocated the immediate imposition of a price freeze on essential commodities and the vetting of all future price rises by the Board of Trade to avoid profiteering (Labour Party, March 1955). However, following a meeting with the TUC in March 1955 the Working Party agreed that 'definite proposals should be made only on those points where the party and the TUC were known to be in agreement' (Labour Party, 8 March 1955). This raised questions as to 'how far [Labour] should consult [the Co-op] … and at what stage', especially as the Co-op Party had recently displayed its policy-making autonomy by developing plans for a Ministry of Consumers' Welfare, which had not been approved by Labour, and was demanding its own party-political broadcasts (Labour Party, February 1955). Despite assuring the Co-op Union that its proposals would include legislation to prevent discrimination against the Co-op through RPM, the Working Party's final report fudged the issue by deferring a decision until the Committee of Investigation into Collective Discrimination had reported, further underlining how lack of access to Labour's policy sub-committees impeded Co-op efforts to shape RPM policy (Labour Party, 10 March 1955).

The Committee raised the Co-op's hopes by recommending prohibition of RPM, but although the 1956 Trade Restrictions Act abolished collective RPM it further strengthened individual RPM (Hansard, 1955: 81–4). In return for compulsorily registering existing agreements with a Restrictive Practices Court, manufacturers could now enforce individual RPM through High Court injunctions. To compound matters, Clause 20 of the Act stated that deferred discounts, such as dividend, could be treated as a form of price-cutting against which manufacturers could evoke the law. The Co-op Party MP, George Darling, described the legislation as a consciously 'anti-co-operative measure' implemented by the Conservatives on behalf of their 'business friends', and his words presaged growing labour movement unity on RPM (*Co-operative News*, 19 May 1956). The TUC's evidence to the Committee of Investigation had argued that, providing there was a 'public check' on individually maintained prices, manufacturers should be empowered to take price-cutters to the courts (TUC, 1956). However, following a meeting with the Labour Party NEC in November 1955 the TUC General Council agreed to oppose the legislation.

Labour supported a Co-op Party amendment in defence of dividend and insisted that manufacturers should only be permitted to use individual RPM

if the High Court determined that it was in the public interest. A further proposal by Labour, which mirrored the Cripps compromise, sought to empower the Board of Trade, on receipt of a recommendation from the Monopolies Commission, to issue an order preventing discrimination against dividend. The Co-op Party's endorsement of this strategy, which the JPC had previously rejected as unworkable, demonstrated the urgent need to coordinate RPM policy (Bailey, 1956; Parliamentary Labour Party (PLP), 1964a). However, Labour simultaneously refused the Co-op prior consultation in policy development unless a reciprocal agreement could be reached (Phillips, 1956). This reflected Labour's conviction that 'the extension of the Co-operative Party was giving rise to the danger of a party within a party' and resulted in a fundamental revision of the existing electoral agreement, which was terminated in 1957 (General Secretary's Policy and Publicity Sub-committee, 1953; Labour Party, 1957). Despite successfully resisting national affiliation by highlighting the importance of the Co-op Party's independent organisation and finance to targeted constituency campaigning, Labour imposed significant limitations on Co-op autonomy in the revised agreement reached in 1958, which limited the Co-operative Party to thirty candidacies per general election, including those seats already held by the party. Once again, the coordination of policy-making was neglected as the agreement dissolved the NPC, and only included a vague commitment to establishing 'such machinery as may be found convenient' (Carbery, 1969: 115–20).

Meanwhile, the 1956–1958 Co-operative Independent Commission (CIC) chaired by the Labour Party leader, Hugh Gaitskell, offered Labour advocates of price competition an opportunity to apply their vision of consumerism to the Co-op. Administered by the leading revisionist intellectual, Anthony Crosland, the CIC questioned the merits of democratic consumer control as a means of counteracting monopolies and emphasised that the Co-op needed to be more responsive to market forces in order to meet new individual consumer demands (Black, 2009: 35). The Co-op's reluctance to introduce the CIC's recommendations further jaundiced Labour revisionists' views of the Co-op, reinforcing the marginalisation of the anti-monopolist perspective (Black, 2010: 54–7). *Plan for Progress*, published by Labour in 1958, was largely non-committal with regards to RPM, raising the possibility of either removing selected commodities from the individual enforcement of RPM or subjecting them to government price control depending on circumstances. Despite restating Labour's commitment to amend the 1956 Act to prevent discrimination against the Co-op and other traders which paid deferred discounts, it concluded that the future of individual RPM would 'have to be reviewed in light of experience' (Labour Party, 1958: 40–2). Three years later *Fair Deal for the Shopper* pledged only to permit individual RPM when it could be shown to operate in the public interest (PLP, 1964a: 2). The latter policy statement coincided with the TUC's conversion to opposing individual RPM due to its

post-1956 experience that 'the stores which indulge in price cutting are the best payers, while those that are in favour of RPM are the most difficult in regard to wages' (TUC, 1961: 276).

Price competition now emerged as a major source of division between Labour and the Co-op. During 1960 a rebellion occurred among local co-op retail societies, alarmed by the intensified price competition with multiple stores that accompanied the rapid disappearance of RPM on most groceries after 1956 (Mercer, 2013: 144; Shaw and Alexander, 2008). Divisions became apparent after the Board of Trade launched a private inquiry into individual RPM, which involved the JPC distributing a questionnaire to a sample of local retail societies (Co-operative Congress, 1961: 66). Although all of the societies were united in their condemnation of anti-dividend discrimination, price competition was rejected on the grounds that it produced diminished customer service and confusion among shoppers. A general consensus emerged in favour of fixed prices in order to prevent the use of loss-leaders and 'wild price cutting' by multiples, while a number of societies advocated uniform national prices to shift competition towards customer service and exploit the trading advantage offered by dividend (CUPC, 1960a). The JPC, however, opted to ignore the questionnaire and submitted a memorandum to the Board of Trade reiterating the movement's established policy on the grounds that too few societies (29 out of 84) had responded and the findings were contradictory and inconsistent (CUPC, 1960b, 1960c, 1960d).

A vocal minority on the Co-operative Union Central Executive Committee (CUCEC), led by the chairman of Nottingham Co-op Society, Cyril Forsyth, contested this decision, demanding separate legislation to prevent anti-Co-op discrimination instead (CUCEC, 1960). However, the majority of the Central Executive maintained that while Co-op members might benefit from fixed prices through dividend, RPM ran contrary to the consumer interest as it encouraged monopoly and enabled private profiteering. It was conveniently concluded that it 'would look ludicrous' to alter RPM policy two months after the JPC's submission of evidence. This internal debate revealed divergent interpretations of the Co-op's anti-monopoly strategy. In effect, many local retail societies now perceived unregulated price competition rather than individual RPM as the principal monopolist threat. Their support for the fixing of prices through a combination of RPM and state regulation should, therefore, be interpreted as a means to counteract the perceived instability of price competition and constrain the rise of monopoly multiple retailers. In advocating the extension of state regulation and seeking to realign the Co-op's role as a consumers' movement more closely with retail societies' trading interests, they anticipated a further revision of the Co-op's voluntarism.

While the Conservative government prevaricated on the Board of Trade's findings, the Co-op Party, intent on demonstrating its agency as an independent consumers' party, seized the initiative. Having won a place in the

ballot for PMBs, the Co-op Party MP for Wednesbury, John Stonehouse, had initially intended to propose a Bill to regulate Trading Stamps. However, the Co-op Party Secretary, Campbell, Research Officer, David Wise, and Research Assistant Victor Blease advised him that this measure risked dividing the movement and suggested a Bill to prohibit individual RPM instead (Carbery, 1969: 192–3). The irony of this decision cannot be overstated. When Stonehouse introduced his Bill in December 1963 it exposed the divisions over RPM which had been suppressed in 1960. For the first time, fissures emerged within the Wholesales. The CWS Dry Goods Committee urged the main board to review the movement's position immediately, only for the president of the CWS, Leonard Cooke, to retort that 'if you don't like it, you should have spoken when we were passing the resolution [in 1956]' (CWS Dry Goods Committee, 1964). Tom Taylor, a director of SCWS, emerged as one of the foremost critics of the Bill, arguing that there was 'nothing wrong with national uniform prices' as part of a planned economy in which Co-op members could reap rewards through dividend (*Co-operative News*, 11 January 1964).

However, drawing on the CIC's emphasis on market forces, Stonehouse presented the Bill's opponents as intent on protecting inefficient business practices that ran contrary to the consumer interest: 'I am painfully aware of the trading difficulties of some retail societies today, but they have little chance of overcoming them if they have to rely on sheltering behind an already crumbling system of RPM' (Black, 2009: 35–6; *Co-operative News*, 11 January 1964). The Conservative government responded by publishing its own Resale Prices Bill in February 1964. Despite welcoming the repeal of clause 20 of the 1956 Act, the Co-op was not at the forefront of Labour's thinking. Acknowledging the monopolist implications of the legislation, Douglas Jay emphasised the need to proceed cautiously to avoid being linked 'with the large combines against the small shopkeepers' (PLP, 1964b). Campbell optimistically concluded that through Stonehouse's Bill the Co-op Party had finally succeeded in 'giving a needed consumer orientation to the Labour Party', but in reality the reform entrenched Labour's competitive vision of consumerism to the detriment of the Co-op's anti-monopolism (*Co-op Party Monthly Newsletter*, 1964). At the 1964 general election Labour dismissed RPM abolition as 'tinkering' (Labour Party, 1964a: 75; 1964b). Pledging to take the power to review unjustified price increases through the National Board for Prices and Incomes, price competition became central to its anti-inflationary strategy, while the trend towards monopoly became more pronounced. Conversely, the warnings of Stonehouse's opponents proved prescient as the 1964 Act had a devastating effect on Co-op trade, contributing towards a 35 per cent reduction in its share of retailing between 1966 and 1971 (Mercer, 2013: 149).

The manner in which the RPM debate climaxed between 1951 and 1964 stemmed from the disorientating effect on the Co-op of rising competition

from multiple retailers, which fed into divisions between the Co-op and Labour over the relationship between RPM, state economic planning and anti-monopolism. Organisational tensions with Labour over the coordination of policy, encapsulated by Labour's insistence that participation in its policy committees should be linked to national affiliation, further complicated relations. However, the escalating price competition that accompanied the 1956 Act ruptured the Co-op's anti-monopolist consensus on RPM prohibition to such an extent that when Stonehouse introduced his PMB he was no longer articulating a unified Co-op position on RPM. This explanation partially reinforces Manton's argument that the Co-op's economic performance shaped its relationship with Labour (Manton, 2009: 759–60). However, in contrast to Manton's emphasis on Labour's negative perception of the Co-op's trading efficiency, the events leading to RPM prohibition reveal that the Co-op's own interpretation of its deteriorating business performance proved an equally significant complicating factor in Co-op–Labour relations. Indeed, through its reluctance to reappraise the implications of RPM abolition, the Co-op inadvertently endorsed a model of competitive consumerism which reinforced its trading difficulties and represented the antithesis of voluntary consumer control.

Conclusion: a dysfunctional alliance?

In analysing the debate over RPM this chapter has challenged the prevailing perception that the Co-op–Labour alliance was defined by a simplistic binary divide between voluntarist and statist approaches. Manton's conclusion that Labour's preference for state power was 'anathema to a movement that remained committed to ideas of consumer orientated voluntarism' is not borne out by the Co-op's advocacy of state regulation of prices as a means to check monopolies in the consumer interest (Manton, 2009: 778). While both parties were united in their support for state regulation of the market, in the context of RPM the main source of division over the role of the State stemmed from the Co-op's opposition to state monopoly. The form of the Co-op's opposition to monopoly was fiercely contested during the formative and final stages of the RPM debate, revealing conflicting perspectives among the Wholesales and local retail societies over free trade and state-set prices. Although the Co-op's entry to politics had entailed tacit acceptance that the movement required the support of the State to overcome forms of anti-Co-op discrimination, such as RPM, the Co-op's adherence to independent voluntary alliance with the Labour Party proved divisive. Labour was unwilling to utilise the machinery established by the 1927 or 1946 agreements to coordinate RPM policy with the Co-op, and instead developed the short-sighted strategy of seeking to force national affiliation by limiting Co-op candidacies and denying the Co-op access to its policy-making sub-committees unless a reciprocal arrangement could be reached. Such a belligerent approach proved counter-productive as

it drove the Co-op to develop greater policy-making autonomy and to assert its role as an independent consumers' movement more forcefully. This meant that when compromises were struck in relation to RPM policy they only served to heighten misunderstanding in the alliance because neither the Co-op nor Labour fully appreciated each other's negotiating position.

Consequently, the Co-op Party came to play a crucial role in the RPM debate, performing a balancing act in maintaining the link with Labour, taking the initiative in Parliament while seeking to prove itself to a frequently sceptical Co-op movement. RPM emerged as the perfect issue for the Co-op Party to prove its credentials as an independent consumers' party. The agency that the party displayed in securing abolition of RPM in the midst of disintegrating Co-op unity has been underrated by historians. The party's unity of purpose on RPM stemmed from the policy-making autonomy facilitated by the Co-op's independent voluntary alliance with Labour and the tightly controlled internal Co-op structures which bound it to Congress policy. The Co-op Party's leading role in RPM abolition, however, led it to acquiesce with Labour's competitive anti-inflationary interpretation of prohibition, which resulted in the radical anti-monopolist alternative advocated by the Co-op being overlooked in favour of an approach that was slanted towards the interests of large multiple retailers. Labour's preference for measuring the value of co-operative association according to the Co-op's increasingly weakened trading performance reinforced this trend. Moreover, by refusing to recognise the Co-op and TUC's roles as consumers' and workers' representatives on equal terms, Labour denied the Co-op an influential corporatist role, further diminishing the salience of voluntary consumer cooperation in national policy-making.

Nonetheless, as Gurney suggests, 'any critical historical assessment of the movement must necessarily confront the fact that [it] contributed in significant measure to its own defeat' (Gurney, 1996: 231). Cripps's compromise proposal probably represented the best opportunity open to the movement during this period to advance its business interests through dividend-based trading while weakening the RPM system. The Co-op's rejection of the proposal in favour of general consumer legislation tied the achievement of the Co-op's anti-monopolist vision of RPM abolition to the movement's independent initiative when it was already apparent that it faced entrenched opposition from a range of powerful vested interests. This inadvertently aligned the movement with Labour advocates of RPM prohibition who promoted a model of competitive individual consumerism that threatened the Co-op's trading interests and the principle of voluntary consumer control. These errors of judgement bring into focus the limitations of the Co-op's internal decision-making. By justifying the rejection of the Cripps compromise and the subsequent dismissal of local retail societies' responses to the Board of Trade questionnaire on the basis of historic Congress decisions, the Co-op's leadership effectively closed down the possibility of reappraising RPM policy in light of changed trading and

political circumstances. This approach, which ran contrary to democratic member control, created the preconditions for internal Co-op divisions to fester, inhibiting the movement's ability to represent itself during the crucial concluding phase of the RPM debate. The chapter, therefore, reveals the limitations of analysing the Co-op–Labour alliance on the premise that the Co-op was a cohesive, unified movement. In doing so, it reinforces John Wilson, Tony Webster and Rachael Vorberg-Rugh's analysis that the Co-op 'developed a highly dysfunctional character, with the leadership of both the CWS and the retail societies failing to navigate opinion towards a mutually agreeable consensus on the best way forward' (Wilson, Webster and Vorberg-Rugh, 2013: 389). Co-op–Labour relations were shaped by this dysfunctionality, helping to consign the Co-op to junior status in the alliance of consumer and producer democracy.

Notes

1 'The people's main defence against monopoly' is a quotation of A. V. Alexander. See Gurney (2015: 239).
2 RPM took two forms: individual RPM enforced by individual manufacturers; and collective RPM enforced by groups of manufacturers.
3 The Co-op developed a loose federal structure built around autonomous local retail societies which collectively owned the Wholesales.
4 Watkins was a Plymouth Co-operator with first-hand experience of organised boycotts. The other representatives were Sidney Webb, Ernest Bevin and John Hobson.
5 The addendum was heavily influenced by Webb's ambitions for an alliance between the Co-op and the State 'to secure the full advantages of collectivism' (Manton, 2009: 758).
6 The Co-op Union, formed in 1869, operated as a coordinating body for the local retail societies, undertaking research on their behalf, organising campaigns and developing educational materials.
7 The Parliamentary Committee of the Co-operative Union was formed in 1880 to scrutinise legislation that affected co-operatives and lobby government on behalf of the movement. It was renamed the Joint Parliamentary Committee in 1900 after membership was extended to include representatives from the Wholesale Societies.
8 The annual Co-op Congress was the main democratic forum responsible for debating national strategy and policy, but its decisions were not binding on local retail societies.
9 RACS nationally affiliated to the Labour Party in 1921.
10 The Consumers' Council voted to dissolve itself in January 1921 in the wake of decontrol. It was replaced by an advisory Food Council in 1924, which did not contain any Co-op or organised consumer representation.
11 The National Co-operative Authority was established in 1932 to make decisions on co-operative movement policy in the period between annual Co-operative Congresses.
12 Given that a high proportion of National Union of Distributive and Allied Workers members were Co-op employees, its support for RPM was particularly damaging to the Co-op's case for outright prohibition.

References

Adams, T. (1987) 'The Formation of the Co-operative Party Re-considered', *International Review of Social History*, 32:1, pp. 48–68.

Bailey, Jack (1956) Letter to Carol Johnson, PLP Secretary, 18 June, General Secretary's Papers, GS/Co-op/415, Labour History Archive and Study Centre, Manchester (LHA).

Barnes, A. (1923) *The Co-operator in Politics*, London: Fabian Society.

Black, L. (2009) '"Trying to sell a parcel of politics with a parcel of groceries": The Co-operative Independent Commission (CIC) and Consumerism in Post-war Britain', in Black, L. and Robertson, N. (eds) *Consumerism and the Co-operative Movement in Modern British History: Taking Stock*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, pp. 33–50.

Black, L. (2010) *Redefining British Politics: Culture, Consumerism and Participation, 1954–1970*, Basingstoke: Palgrave.

Campbell, Harold (1947) *Wanting and Working*, Manchester: Co-operative Party, National Co-operative Archives, Manchester (NCA).

Carbery, T. F. (1969) *Consumers in Politics: A History and General Review of the Co-operative Party*, Manchester: Manchester University Press.

Co-op Party Monthly Newsletter (1964), April, NCA.

Co-operative Congress (1920) *Annual Report*, Manchester: Co-operative Union, NCA.

Co-operative Congress (1930) *Annual Report*, Manchester: Co-operative Union, NCA.

Co-operative Congress (1931) *Annual Reports*, Manchester: Co-operative Union, NCA.

Co-operative Congress (1948) *Annual Reports*, Manchester: Co-operative Union, NCA.

Co-operative Congress (1961) *Annual Report*, Manchester: Co-operative Union, NCA.

CUCEC (1960) Minutes, 14 December, NCA.

CUPC (1947) 'Memorandum of Evidence for Submission to the Committee on RPM', 14 November, uncatalogued CWS Grocery Department RPM papers, NCA.

CUPC (1950) Minutes, 20 July, NCA.

CUPC (1951) Minutes, 21 June, NCA.

CUPC (1960a) 'Resale Price Maintenance', 28 September, uncatalogued CWS Grocery Department RPM papers, NCA.

CUPC (1960b) Minutes, 28 July, NCA.

CUPC (1960c) Minutes, 22 September, NCA.

CUPC (1960d) Minutes, 27 October, NCA.

Cripps, Stafford (1946) 'Effect of RPM on Co-operative Societies', Memorandum, 11 July, BT 13/220A MM (46) 63, National Archives, London.

CWS Dry Goods Committee (1964) Minutes, 7 January, uncatalogued CWS Grocery Department RPM papers, NCA.

CWS Sub-committee on RPM (1948) Minutes, 18 May, uncatalogued CWS Grocery Department RPM papers, NCA.

CWS Sub-committee on RPM (undated) 'Report to the CWS Board', uncatalogued CWS Grocery Department RPM papers, NCA.

Findley, R. (2001) 'The Conservative Party and Defeat: The Significance of Resale Price Maintenance for the General Election of 1964', *Twentieth Century British History*, 12:3, pp. 327–53.

General Secretary's Policy and Publicity Sub-committee (1953) Minutes, 17 September, General Secretary's Papers, GS/Co-op/359i, LHA.

Gurney, P. (1996) *Co-operative Culture and the Politics of Consumption in England, 1870–1930*, Manchester: Manchester University Press.

Gurney, P. (2005) 'The Battle of the Consumer in Post-war Britain', *Journal of Modern History*, 77, pp. 956–87.
Gurney, P. (2012) 'Co-operation and the "New Consumerism" in Inter-war England', *Business History*, 54:6, pp. 905–24.
Gurney, P. (2015) 'A House Divided: The Organised Consumer and the British Labour Party, 1945–60', in Rappaport, E., Dawson, S. T. and Crowley, M. J. (eds) *Consuming Behaviours: Identity, Politics and Pleasure in Twentieth-Century Britain*, London: Bloomsbury, pp. 237–51.
Hansard (1919) *Report of the Committee on Trusts*, Cmd. 9236, London: HMSO.
Hansard (1939) (House of Commons) *Parliamentary Debates*, 10 February, London: HMSO.
Hansard (1949) *Report of the Committee on Resale Price Maintenance*, Cmd. 7696, London: HMSO.
Hansard (1951) *A Statement of Resale Price Maintenance being a Trade Practice which Prevents Shopkeepers from Reducing Certain Prices to the Public*, Cmd. 8274, London: HMSO.
Hansard (1955) *Collective Discrimination: A Report on Exclusive Dealing, Collective Boycotts, Aggregated Rebates and other Discriminatory Trade Practices*, Cmd. 9504, London: HMSO.
Harrison, R. (1971) 'The Workers Emergency War National Committee, 1914–1920', in Briggs, A. and Saville, J. (eds) *Essays in Labour History, 1886–1923*, London: Macmillan, pp. 212–15.
Hilton, M. (2003) *Consumerism in Twentieth Century Britain*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
Killingback, N. (1988) 'Limits to Mutuality: Economic and Political Attacks on Co-operation during the 1920s and 1930s', in Yeo, S. (ed.) *New Views of Co-operation*, London: Routledge, pp. 207–28.
Labour Party (1919) *Annual Report*, London: Labour Party, LHA.
Labour Party (1945) *Let Us Face the Future: A Declaration of Labour Policy for the Consideration of the Nation*, London: Labour Party, LHA.
Labour Party (1950) *Let Us Win Through Together: A Declaration of Labour Policy for the Consideration of the Nation*, London: Labour Party, LHA.
Labour Party (1952) *Annual Report*, London: Labour Party, LHA.
Labour Party (1957) 'Report of Labour Party-Co-operative Movement Meeting on 29 March 1957', uncatalogued box on relations with the Co-operative Party, LHA.
Labour Party (1958) *Plan for Progress*, London: Labour Party, LHA.
Labour Party (1964a) *Annual Report*, London: Labour Party, LHA.
Labour Party (1964b) *The New Britain*, London: Labour Party, LHA.
Lambert, Fred (undated) Memorandum for Mr Buckley, uncatalogued CWS Grocery Department RPM papers, NCA.
Manton, K. (2007) 'Playing Both Sides against the Middle: The Labour Party and the Wholesaling Industry, 1919–1951', *Twentieth Century British History*, 18:3, pp. 306–33.
Manton, K. (2008) 'The Labour Party and Retail Distribution, 1919–1951', *Labour History Review*, 73:3, pp. 269–86.
Manton, K. (2009) 'The Labour Party and the Co-op, 1918–1958', *Historical Research*, 82:218, pp. 756–78.
Mercer, H. (1995) *Constructing a Competitive Order: The Hidden History of British Anti-trust Policies*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
Mercer, H. (2013) 'Retailer–Supplier Relationships Before and After the Resale Prices Act, 1964: A Turning Point in British Economic History?', *Enterprise and Society: The International Journal of Business History*, 15:1, pp. 132–65.
Mitchell, S. (2005) 'Resale Price Maintenance and the Character of Resistance in the Conservative Party, 1949–64', *Canadian Journal of History*, 40:2, pp. 259–88.

National Co-operative Authority (1949) Minutes, 21 January, NCA.
NCL (1940a) Minutes, 26 June, LHA.
NCL (1940b) Minutes, 23 July, LHA.
NCL (1941) Minutes, 27 May, LHA.
NCL (1948a) Minutes, 26 October, 'Report of the Co-operative Union to the NCL', LHA.
NCL (1948b) Minutes, 27 July, 'Report of the Co-operative Union to the NCL', LHA.
NCL (1949) Minutes, 25 January, 'Report of the Co-operative Union to the NCL', LHA.
NEC Sub-committees (1946) TUC–Labour Party Joint Sub-Committee on Trusts and Cartels minutes, 29 May, Labour Party Archive, LHA.
NEC Sub-committees, Cost of Living Working Party, R.468/February 1955, Note by Chairman on Future Work and Timetable, Labour Party Archive, LHA.
NEC Sub-committees, Cost of Living Working Party, R.496/March 1955, Report to Policy Committee, Labour Party Archive, LHA.
NEC Sub-committees, Cost of Living Working Party minutes, 8 March 1955, Labour Party Archive, LHA.
NEC Sub-committees, Cost of Living Working Party, Notes on Joint Discussions with Representatives of the Co-op Union, 10 March 1955, Labour Party Archive, LHA.
PLP (1964a) 'The Labour Party and Resale Price Maintenance', Labour Party Research Department, Information Series No. 1, 1964.
PLP (1964b) Minutes, 4 March, LHA.
People's Year Book (1938) Manchester: Co-operative Union.
Phillips, Morgan (1956) Letter to Robert Southern, 2 July, General Secretary's Papers, GS/Co-op/416, LHA.
Pollard, S. (1971) 'The Foundation of the Co-operative Party', in Briggs, A. and Saville, J. (eds) *Essays in Labour History, 1886–1923*, London: Macmillan, pp. 185–210.
Rhodes, R. (1998) *An Arsenal for Labour: The Royal Arsenal Co-operative Society and Politics 1896–1996*, Manchester: Holyoake.
Robertson, N. (2009) '"A union of forces marching in the same direction"? The Relationship between the Co-operative and Labour Parties, 1918–39', in Worley, M. (ed.) *The Foundations of the British Labour Party: Identities, Cultures and Perspectives, 1900–39*, Aldershot: Ashgate.
Rosen, G. (2007) *Serving the People: Co-operative Party History from Fred Perry to Gordon Brown*, London: Co-operative Party.
Shaw, G. and Alexander, A. (2008) 'British Co-operative Societies as Retail Innovators: Interpreting the Early Stages of the Self-Service Revolution', *Business History*, 50:1, pp. 62–78.
'Transcript of Resale Price Maintenance Committee meeting at the Board of Trade on 30 January 1948', uncatalogued CWS Grocery Department RPM papers, NCA.
Trentmann, F. (2001) 'Bread, Milk and Democracy: Consumption and Citizenship in Twentieth Century Britain', in Daunton, M. and Hilton, M. (eds) *The Politics of Consumption: Material Culture and Citizenship in Europe and America*, London: Berg.
TUC (1956) *Annual Congress Report*, London: TUC, LHA.
TUC (1961) *Annual Congress Report*, London: TUC, LHA.
Whitecross, A. (2014) 'Co-operative Commonwealth or New Jerusalem? The Co-operative Party and the Labour Party, 1931–1951', unpublished PhD thesis, University of Central Lancashire.
Wilson, J. F., Webster, A. and Vorberg-Rugh, R. (2013) *Building Co-operation: A Business History of the Co-operative Group*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

7

The British left's attitude towards the Battle of Athens, December 1944–February 1945: commonalities and divisions

Anastasia Chartomatsidi

Introduction

The topic of this chapter is the British left's attitude towards the conflict in Greece from the December Events (*Dekemvriana*) (1944) to the Varkiza Agreement (February 1945). More specifically, it examines the attitudes of the Labour Party, the Communist Party of Great Britain (CPGB) and the newly founded Revolutionary Communist Party (RCP). This study presents the positions of these parties and explores how they unfolded during this period – thus focusing on the political branch of the British labour movement rather than on its trade-union and co-operative branches, which did not express the same degree of interest in those faraway matters (Chartomatsidi, 2015). The three parties' specific positions inside the British political landscape greatly influenced their attitudes towards the dramatic events in Greece. The Labour Party, of which four members held important positions in the Cabinet, was looking forward to the 1945 general election, and was trying to strike a balance between Churchill's official policy and the MPs who disagreed with this policy. The CPGB, a former member of the Comintern which was dissolved by Stalin in 1943 (Kennedy-Pipe, 1998: 62), was trying to support the communists in Greece, without exceeding the limits imposed at the time by the Kremlin, and without alienating the Labour Party with which it was seeking to form a partnership. The newly formed RCP was a party following Trotsky's prognosis that the Second World War, like the First, could lead to an international revolutionary wave; committed to the idea of a world revolution, its leaders saw the conflict in Greece as possibly the first episode in that global eruption.

The historiography in Great Britain concerning the political branch of the labour movement is, understandably, not evenly distributed. The Labour Party, as the major representative of the British left, has been the subject of a great number of publications. The much smaller CPGB has also been discussed among historians but, logically enough, not to the same extent. As for the RCP, it has garnered even less attention among academics, which can be explained by the fact that the RCP was a short-lived party, and that Trotskyism has played a minor role in British politics compared with the Labour Party and the CPGB – at least in the period examined in this chapter. Yet the studies devoted to all three parties now have something in common: the realisation that they cannot be understood outside a global context, and that their approaches to international questions were not peripheral to but part and parcel of their distinctive identities. In the case of the CPGB and the RCP, neglecting the connection with extra-British realities, in particular with the Russian-Soviet world, would make very little sense. But the Labour Party itself is being rediscovered through the transnational lens (Vickers, 2003). The exploration of those three parties' reactions to the conflict in Greece in 1944–1945 therefore constitutes an opportunity to get a better grasp of what united and divided them in a moment – the end of the Second World War – too often remembered as unequivocally glorious and consensual for Labour. Though all three parties demanded the withdrawal of British troops from Athens and the abandonment of the British government's interventionist policy, differences regarding analysis, rhetoric and strategy are apparent when one focuses on those turbulent years. This chapter will highlight these differences by a scrutiny of each party's public proclamations and internal debates, using sources written in both English and Greek.

The war in Greece from December 1944 to February 1945: a very British affair

The origins of the Greek Civil War can be traced to the anti-Nazi Resistance during the Second World War. Greece was already at war with Fascist Italy when the Nazi German invasion occurred on 6 April 1941. The occupation of Greece under Nazi German, Fascist Italian (until September 1943) and Bulgarian forces lasted until October 1944, when they withdrew (Mazower, 1993). The left- and right-wing resistance movements were involved in fratricidal in-fighting. The left-wing resistance movement – which was the larger and more powerful of the two – was represented by the National Liberation Front (EAM), a coalition of left-leaning organisations and parties, in which the Communist Party of Greece (KKE) played the major role. The military branch of EAM was the Greek People's Liberation Army (ELAS).

Churchill was aware of the vital role Greece played in British foreign policy. Initially, he supported the struggle of EAM/ELAS against Nazi

occupation. However, the steep growth in popularity of EAM/ELAS among the masses led the British prime minister to direct his support towards the right-wing resistance group, the National Republican Greek League. This choice guaranteed to Churchill that Greece would not enter the Soviet sphere of influence after the end of the Second World War. This precedent, along with the domestic situation in Greece, defined the relations between the two countries and the course of Churchill's foreign policy towards Greece and EAM (Sfikas, 1994: 16).

During the summer of 1944, Churchill managed to gain the support of both Stalin and Franklin D. Roosevelt in order to weaken EAM. In September 1944, the EAM leadership signed the Caserta Agreement, thus recognising the legitimacy of George Papandreou's exiled royalist government. In the meantime, General Ronald Scobie was placed as commander of ELAS's units. In October 1944, the 'Percentage Agreement' was signed (in secret) by Churchill and Stalin, a text whereby Greece was to be part of Great Britain's sphere of influence. It was not long before a British contingent was sent to Athens – an event followed, on 18 October, by the arrival of Papandreou's exiled government.

On 3 December, the Greek police and British troops opened fire against unarmed civilians who were protesting on Syntagma Square in Athens against the disarmament of ELAS, while the royalist groups, some of whom had collaborated with the Nazis, were not disarmed. After this provocation, the Battle of Athens began between ELAS units and British troops, lasting until January 1945. On 12 February 1945, the Varkiza Agreement was signed, signalling the defeat of EAM and the eventual disarmament and disbanding of ELAS. The Varkiza Agreement also signalled the beginning of the period of 'white terror', during which communists and socialists were prosecuted by the royalist forces (Rajak, 2010: 203–4). The British left's response to these events was far from unanimous. As will be shown below, divergences were observed inside as well as between parties.

The Labour Party: discordant voices

In 1940, after a five-year period of strategic renewal which increased its popularity among the British people, the Labour Party joined the Conservative Party in a wartime coalition government. Four Labour MPs held positions in the Cabinet, although its parliamentary representation was not as strong. Clement Attlee, the leader of the Labour Party, held the positions of lord privy seal and chair of the Food and Home Policy Committee. In 1943, he became lord president of the council and deputy prime minister. Arthur Greenwood was supervisor of the Production and Economic Policy Committee, and Herbert Morrison held the position of home secretary after October 1940.

Ernest Bevin, whose policies had the greatest impact throughout the Labour Party's presence in the Cabinet, was minister of labour and national service (Thorpe, 2001: 92–3). Regarding foreign policy, the Labour members of the Cabinet were in agreement with the decisions made by the Conservatives (Sfikas, 1994: 55).

The unprovoked shooting of unarmed civilians at Syntagma Square on 3 December shook the Labour Party. Many members and MPs were appalled by the direct, violent intervention of the British government in Greek affairs and were afraid of the humanitarian impact that this turn of events would have on Greek society (Thorpe, 2006: 1084). The crisis in Labour's ranks even led to the suggestion that the party should leave the Coalition government (Sfikas, 1994: 55).

On 6 December, the *Daily Herald* reported the electrified atmosphere in the House of Commons. Labour MPs persistently asked the prime minister about the development of events in Greece. More specifically, Dr Haden Guest (Labour MP for Islington North) asked Churchill about 'the shooting of children and youths by the Greek police on Sunday morning', to which Churchill replied that he was unable to comment on 'who started the fire which then took place'. Mr Petnick Lawrence (Labour MP for Edinburgh East) mentioned the growing anxiety among the British population concerning the grave situation in Greece ('MPs Worried About Greek Chaos. "Don't Use Our Men To Back Reaction"', *Daily Herald*, 6 December 1944). On 9 December, the *Daily Herald*'s political correspondent reported on a vote in the House of Commons in which MPs were called to vote on an amendment to the king's speech, allowing the government to use British troops in order to 'disarm the friends of democracy in Greece'. A total of 279 MPs voted in support of the government, and 30 against. The majority of the Labour MPs abstained ('The Labour Leaders Did Not Vote', *Daily Herald*, 9 December 1944).

The turmoil caused inside the party was apparent at the 44th Labour Party conference, the proceedings of which started on 11 December 1944 in London. The issues which preoccupied conference discussions were: the course of the war and the desirable victory over Germany; the character of the eventual armistice; the nature of the regimes established in the liberated countries; and the forthcoming general election in the summer of 1945. Greece was one of the topics which concerned most of the attendants of the conference.

During the first day of the conference, the chairman referred to the events in Greece, as the 'last thing that has blown up in the international field' (Labour Party, 1944: 114). He mentioned the debate which had taken place on the previous Friday: 'the Prime Minister gave vent to violent abuse' (Labour Party, 1944: 114). He went on to criticise Churchill as unsuitable to be the leader of a coalition government in which the Labour Party contributed greatly. The 13 December morning session, which was devoted to Greece,

opened with the emergency resolution of the National Executive Committee of the Labour Party, announced by Greenwood:

> This Conference deeply regrets the tragic situation which has arisen in Greece and calls upon the British Government most urgently to take all necessary steps to facilitate an armistice without delay, and to secure the resumption of conversations between all sections of the people who have resisted the Fascist and Nazi invaders, with a view to the establishment of a provisional national government, which would proceed to a free and fair general election as soon as practicable, in order that the will of the Greek people may be expressed. This Conference looks forward to the establishment of a strong democratic system which will bring peace, happiness and reconciliation to our generous and heroic Greek Allies. (Labour Party, 1944: 143–5)

While Greenwood continued to explain the seriousness of the situation in Greece, he reminded the audience of the sacrifices made by the Greek people and appealed for support for the resolution. The following speakers also highlighted the necessity for the Labour movement to act in support of the Greek people (Labour Party, 1944: 143–5).

Ernest Bevin, the minister of labour and national service, stating that he represented the point of view of both the government and the Labour MPs inside the Cabinet, called for realistic thinking on matters of foreign policy, instead of emotionalism. He spoke in support of the prime minister, stating that 'these steps taken in Greece are not the decision of Winston Churchill, they are the decision of the Cabinet' (Labour Party, 1944: 145–8). This made it crystal clear to the Labour audience that the Labour members of the Cabinet supported the decision for armed intervention. This declaration caused a certain numbness among the Labour audience, and the speakers who followed Bevin continued to accuse the National Executive Committee of adopting 'the tactics of the Prime Minister', calling eventually for a redrafting of their policy (Labour Party, 1944: 145–8).

Aneurin Bevan then unleashed a vitriolic attack against Ernest Bevin, stating that the only bodies of public opinion in support of Bevin's thesis were 'the Fascist Spain, the Fascist Portugal and the majority of the Tories in the House of Commons' (Labour Party, 1944: 148–9). He wondered if the government's policy would result in a desirable outcome and he questioned whether Bevin actually believed what was written in his speech. At the closing of his speech, Bevan stated that he did not desire the break-up of the coalition government, but he demanded a stronger Labour leadership to avoid being completely compromised by the Conservative agenda by the time of the election. At the end of the session devoted to the events in Greece, the emergency resolution proposed by the National Executive Committee was carried with 2,455,000 votes for the resolution and only 137,000 against (Labour Party, 1944: 150). Greece continued to preoccupy the Labour Party's policy-makers

even after the end of the annual conference. On 17 December, a demonstration took place in Trafalgar Square, where 10,000 people protested against the government's policy with the slogan 'Hands Off Greece'.

The Battle of Athens ended on 7 January 1945. ELAS was defeated and signed a truce with General Scobie on 11 January. A deputation from the Labour Party Executive visited Winston Churchill on 15 January. Under these new circumstances, the Labour members felt that the resolution of 13 December was no longer valid. According to the War Cabinet minutes of 15 January, the discussion was friendly and the points stressed by the deputation were considered minor issues. In the same document, it was announced that a non-political deputation of British trade unionists would be sent to Greece in order to represent the trade-union movement (War Cabinet, CAB 65/49/6: 26).

After the end of the Battle of Athens and the discussions between the Labour Party deputation and Winston Churchill on 15 January, the events in Greece were no longer at the top of the Labour Party's agenda. As the war was approaching its end, issues like the organisation of the post-war world, the relations between the Allies (and, more specifically, with the Soviet Union), and the role and character of post-war Germany came to overshadow Greece in the minds of the Labour Party's foreign policy-makers. On the domestic front, the forthcoming general election and the rebuilding of post-war Great Britain were at the centre of most discussions inside the party. This shift is already apparent in the minutes of the meeting of the International Sub-committee of the National Executive Committee, which took place on 16 January. By the time the Varkiza Agreement was signed on 12 February 1945, Greece was already being overshadowed by the Yalta Conference and the general election.

The Labour press showed great interest in the events in Greece throughout the period in question. The *Daily Herald* covered the Battle of Athens daily. Front-page reports of the tragic events informed the readers of the newspaper of what was happening. An effort to present an informed point of view can be seen in these reports, although subtle criticism of governmental policy was apparent. Moreover, coverage of the developments inside the Labour Party also showed the *Daily Herald*'s hostility towards Winston Churchill. More obvious criticism can be found in the articles which offered a commentary on the events. Articles like 'Now It May Be Civil War' by W. N. Ewer (*Daily Herald*, 5 December 1945) and 'Truth Of The Greek Tragedy: Left Fears A Right Plot' by Michael Foot (*Daily Herald*, 8 December 1945) condemned the British government for intervening in Greek politics and openly supporting George Papandreou. Reports from Greece remained on the front page until 20 January. After this date, coverage of the events and the efforts to reconcile the two warring sides continued. The signing of the Varkiza Agreement was covered; however, by this point, interest had shifted to the Yalta Conference. The weekly newspaper *Tribune* followed the same path. The front-page articles

openly criticised governmental policy and propaganda with titles such as 'The Plot That Fooled You' (*Tribune*, 12 January 1945) and 'Lies About Greece' (*Tribune*, 19 January 1945). The retrospectively rather optimistic title of the article which covered the Varkiza Agreement, 'Greek Civil War Ends', condemned the British government for not denouncing the '"bloodthirsty ruffians" of Colonel Zervas' E.D.E.S.' and the 'white terror' which had started taking place in Athens (*Tribune*, 16 February 1945).

The Labour Party's attitude towards Greece was to be expected given its role in government at the time. The War Cabinet members, not showing a comradely attitude towards the left's beliefs, followed the well-known path in British foreign policy of preserving British spheres of influence; thus, they supported the official governmental policy. Yet many members of the Labour Party did not embrace that attitude. Through their questions in the House of Commons, the discussions at the 44th annual conference and the articles in the Labour-leaning press, they expressed a dissenting point of view according to which the government's interventionist policy was incompatible with true support for the Greek people.

The Communist Party of Great Britain: a critical yet cautious stand

The history of the CPGB, which was founded in 1920, was connected to the strategies of the Comintern – until its dissolution in 1943 – and the demands of the Soviet Union's foreign policy. Based upon the principles of Marxism-Leninism, the CPGB was the British section of the Comintern from 1920 to 1943 and thus followed a revolutionary rhetoric and programme (CPGB, London Committee, 1944). During its early years, the CPGB endeavoured to collaborate with anti-colonial movements across the British Empire (Redfern, 2004: 117).

The beginning of the Second World War brought with it a substantial change of course in the CPGB's policy and character. The party witnessed a significant rise in membership and enjoyed unprecedented popularity among the masses, making it an essential part of the British left (Thorpe, 2000; Tranmer, 2014). The CPGB's strategic transformation can be traced through three main changes. First, following the instructions of both the Soviet Union and the Comintern, the CPGB started supporting the British war effort by hindering any attempt to strike on the part of factory workers, which would disrupt industrial production, and pushing for the opening of the Second Front (Laybourn and Murphy, 1999: 114–18). Secondly, the dissolution of the Comintern in 1943 brought an end to the vision of a world revolution. This was the product of the alliance between the West and the Soviet Union – an alliance which the latter did not want to jeopardise. Stalin had abandoned the promotion of revolutionary movements and had put his faith in the newly formed alliance with the West, resulting in the non-assistance of movements

which belonged to the sphere of influence of his Allies, such as Greece. Stalin wanted the other communist parties to pursue the same conciliatory policy (Sfikas, 1999: 212). Consequently, the CPGB abandoned its revolutionary rhetoric, reassessed the role of Parliament, supported the Coalition government and sought affiliation with the Labour Party (Sfikas, 1999: 124–5). Thirdly, in the context of its support of Great Britain's war effort and the change in its rhetoric from revolutionary to parliamentary-oriented, the CPGB stressed the importance of the defence of the Empire from outside and inside enemies. The CPGB's leadership believed that only a united British Empire could defeat Germany and, after the end of the war, colonial freedom would be achieved. However, towards the end of the war, for the majority of its members, the party's attitude towards the British colonies and spheres of influence was a secondary issue. The highest priority was a Labour Party victory at the general election and the implementation of its domestic policy (Redfern, 2004: 117).

The CPGB's profound transformation greatly affected its analysis of the events in Greece during the period examined. The core of the CPGB's attitude towards Greece, which matched the former Comintern's demands and the current line of Soviet foreign policy, was its participation in the anti-fascist resistance movement, developed during the Second World War. This was apparent even before December 1944. During the 17th CPGB Congress in October 1944, Harry Pollitt, the general secretary of the CPGB, made an extended comment on the new status quo in Europe, which emerged after the opening of the Second Front and would be established after the end of the war. Pollitt stated that the previous oppressive political system of 'feudal aristocracy, reactionary monarchy or Fascist dictatorship' was being defeated by the steep rise of democracy across Europe. According to him, 'progressive democratic governments with Communists in important positions [were] already established in France, Belgium, Czecho-Slovakia [sic], Yugo-Slavia [sic], Greece, Rumania [sic] and Bulgaria' (CPGB, 1944: 7). The centrality of parliamentary means to impose socialist policies is apparent in that last statement. However, when discussing Greece the phrase 'progressive democratic governments' was replaced in the next CPGB Congress, in November 1945, with the phrase 'brutal dictatorship' (CPGB, 1945).

The CPGB responded swiftly to the tragic events of December 1944 in Athens. On 10 December, demonstrations and speeches with the slogan 'Hands Off Greece' took place across London in support of the Greek anti-fascist movement's struggles (*Bulletin*, 1944). Furthermore, on 17 December the CPGB took part in the demonstration at Trafalgar Square along with members of the Labour Party (*Rizospastis*, 18 and 20 December 1944). The Executive Committee of the party and the local committees discussed the events in Greece during their meetings. The London Committee's report, in the section entitled 'International Solidarity Activities', listed a whole series of solidarity

initiatives, through articles in the newspapers, petitions, public meetings and demonstrations (CPGB, London Committee, 1944). In the meeting of the Executive Committee on 23 January 1945, Greece was among the issues discussed. The members of the Committee expressed their solidarity towards the anti-fascist movement and commented on the fast pace of the events' development. Moreover, the Committee stressed the necessity to 'intensify the demand for a general amnesty, a new democratic Government, and a free general election in Greece' (CPGB, Executive Committee, 1945: 4). The motif of pursuing governmental participation instead of a revolutionary path is once more visible.

However, as mentioned above, Greece was not the centre of interest in the CPGB, and the events between the December Events and the Varkiza Agreement did not spark the same amount of discussions and controversies inside the party as they did in the Labour Party. During the January 1945 meeting of the Executive Committee, although the situation in Greece was mentioned, the discussion was focused on other issues, such as domestic affairs and the situation in Poland (CPGB, Executive Committee, 1945). In the document issued by the Propaganda Department of the CPGB on 8 February 1945, it was stated that Greece had started discussions in order to achieve democracy, but this was a small comment, integrated in the extensive commentary on the much-desired democratisation of the liberated countries (CPGB, Propaganda Department, 1945a). After the signature of the Varkiza Agreement, the issue of fair elections, which would result in the representation of EAM in the Greek Parliament, continued to be part of the CPGB's rhetoric (CPGB, Propaganda Department, 1945b). The Varkiza Agreement and its negative ramifications would be extensively discussed the following year, in February 1946, when the CPGB issued a document which explained in detail the situation in Greece following the Caserta Agreement of September 1944 (CPGB, 1946). However, in February 1945 the fundamental discussion topics in CPGB circles were the progress of the war, the 1945 general election, and the desire for affiliation with the Labour Party, in order to further promote the Labour movement.

The *Daily Worker* newspaper – which was founded in 1930 and was the CPGB's mouthpiece – covered in detail the tragic events in Greece. The newspaper showed its support for the 'Greek patriots' and criticised Winston Churchill's interventionist policy. More specifically, in the article 'Liberated Greece', published in the 5 December issue, two days after the killings at Syntagma Square, it was stated that 'the British Government cannot escape direct responsibility for the consequences of the situation it has provoked' (*Daily Worker*, 5 December 1944). In the meantime, the *Daily Worker* praised the Labour Party's attitude, and the efforts of its MPs to alter the government's policy concerning Greece. Reports from protests and rallies in support of the

Greek anti-fascists' struggles – such as the protests of the Transport and Rail Unions, supported here and there by unionised workers in the mines, factories and workshops (*Daily Worker*, 8 December 1944), and the demonstration at Trafalgar Square on 17 December (*Daily Worker*, 18 December 1944) – were covered extensively. Moreover, the newspaper published letters of support from the public, among them letters from paratroopers, who considered the British intervention as a 'betrayal' (*Daily Worker*, 18 December 1944). The number of articles concerning Greece started decreasing after January 1945. In February, when the Varkiza Agreement was signed, the event was covered in a front-page article (*Daily Worker*, 13 February 1945). The Varkiza Agreement was welcomed as a step towards the democratisation of Greece, but without offering an analysis of the points of the Agreement. In addition, during this period the articles focused more on the Crimea Conference, the progress of the Second World War and the forthcoming general election in Britain.

The *Bulletin*, a weekly periodical issued by the CPGB's London District Committee, informed readers about the speeches and rallies in support of the struggle in Greece. However, in the issue dated 8 December, it did not expand upon or analyse the situation in Greece (*Bulletin*, 8 December 1944). In the January 1945 issue of *Labour Monthly*, Ivor Montagu wrote an insightful article describing the events which preceded the 3 December killing at Syntagma Square, and criticising Winston Churchill's attitude towards Greece (Montagu, 1945: 28–32). Furthermore, the London Committee of the CPGB issued 40,000 copies of a 'Greek Special' (CPGB, London Committee, 1945), of which no copies, unfortunately, have been kept.

The CPGB, throughout the period examined, moved within the limitations posed by Stalin's foreign policy. This policy demanded, on the one hand, the abandonment of the revolutionary rhetoric in order not to provoke the Soviet Union's Western Allies during the Second World War, and, on the other hand, the adjustment of the communist parties towards the parliamentary system. These changes affected the CPGB's policy-making and, in this case, its attitude towards the events in Greece between December 1944 and February 1945. Admittedly, the CPGB's propaganda on Greece, like the agitation from a number of Labour Party 'rebels', played an important part in making British people aware of the Battle of Athens and its aftermath. But the vision of events it offered to its working-class audience had its blind spots. Logically enough, the CPGB's leaders put all the blame of the defeat of the left-wing resistance movement on Churchill, underplaying Bevin's responsibilities and obliterating Stalin's completely. How aware the CPGB leaders were, at the time, of the 'Percentage Agreement' between Stalin and Churchill is uncertain. But ordinary members were certainly not aware of it, which limited the internal disputes that may have developed if they were, even inside the monolithic party to which they belonged.

The Revolutionary Communist Party: thorough analysis – or wishful thinking?

The RCP, founded in February 1944, followed a Trotskyist agenda. 'Trotskyism' was a term initially forged by Trotsky's opponents in order to discredit him. But a Trotskyist current did emerge in the late 1920s and 1930s, in the years following Lenin's death, in the fight for control over the Soviet Union's Communist Party (Callaghan, 1984: 1). The two main antagonists in 1924 were Stalin and Trotsky, each considering himself successor to Lenin's legacy. Stalin defeated Trotsky at the 13th Congress of the Communist Party in May 1924; the latter was banished from the Politburo in 1927 and then exiled to Alma-Ata in 1928, along with some of his followers. In 1929, he was exiled from Soviet soil, seeking refuge in several countries including Turkey, France and Mexico (Kennedy-Pipe, 1998: 29–30). The Trotskyists believed that they were the sole successors of the Leninist legacy, since the Soviet bureaucracy, according to them, had 'stained' the ideas of Lenin, Marx and Engels (Callaghan, 1984: 1).

The Trotskyist organisations were marginal in the left before the Second World War. The first Trotskyist groups in Great Britain were founded in 1932 and, before the establishment of the Fourth International in 1938, they did not have any significant impact. The Fourth International, which was established just a year before the start of the Second World War, served as a link between the Trotskyist groups and as a transmitter of Trotsky's vision on revolution (Callaghan, 1984: 2). Trotsky believed – until his assassination in 1940 – that the socialist revolution would be derived from a large-scale war. As a result, the wartime period was a crucial time for the Trotskyists, as they believed that the war would create the optimum conditions for a socialist revolution, and, thus, they should be prepared to support any movement which would head towards this path. In November 1944, the British Trotskyists claimed the 'first period of the European Revolution' was approaching (RCP, 1944: 4–5).

The RCP was the product of the union of the Revolutionary Socialist League – which, in 1939, became part of the Fourth International – and the Workers' International League. Although the RCP was marginal on the British political scene, its members were optimistic for two reasons. First, they believed that the Fourth International would play a leading part in the forthcoming European revolution, despite the fact that the Fourth International was too weak for such an endeavour (Callaghan, 1984: 42). Secondly, they considered that the transformation of the CPGB would eventually benefit the RCP. Indeed, the RCP's rhetoric had a certain appeal among industrial workers, but the situation was more favourable for the CPGB (Callaghan, 1984: 30). The RCP was active until 1949, when it was dissolved due to intra-party differences (Grant, 2002: 107).

The RCP showed great interest in the events in Greece between December 1944 and February 1945. According to their ideology, the Second World War could create the conditions for a socialist revolution, and they considered that the areas with mass resistance movements, like Yugoslavia and Greece, would be the starting points for the first phase of the revolution. The unprovoked killing of Greek unarmed civilians and the Battle of Athens were considered by many British Trotskyists as the beginning of the expected revolution. They were optimistic concerning the outcome, since the 'Greek reactionaries', as the Greek police and the royalist groups were called, were a minority in contrast with the 'overwhelming majority of the people headed by the most militant sections of the oppressed masses, the resistance movement' (RCP, 1945a: 1). They considered that the events in Greece could only be understood in the context of a class struggle. Thus, although their *Socialist Worker* newspaper used phrases such as 'Greek patriots' or 'Greek anti-fascists' – the vocabulary favoured in the Labour Party and CPGB press – they insisted on using the term 'Greek workers', highlighting the class-struggle character which they saw as inherent in this conflict. This is also apparent in the slight change of wording in the RCP's use of the popular Labour Party and CPGB protest slogan: from 'Hands Off Greece' to 'Hands Off the Greek Workers' (*Socialist Appeal*, mid-December 1944). The defeat of ELAS troops and the signing of the Varkiza Agreement were interpreted as a 'first defeat' on their road to revolution. This defeat was attributed to the absence of a revolutionary party in Greece – although there was a small Trotskyist group during that period in Greece (*Socialist Appeal*, mid-October 1944) – and the actions of the 'counter-revolutionists', who were aided by the British government (RCP, 1945b).

The RCP press covered the events in Greece throughout the period examined with great interest. In the mid-October issue, a meeting between the Trotskyist parties is mentioned, which was attended by Greek Trotskyists as well. Moreover, in the same issue, the newspaper mentions the execution of the founder of the Trotskyist movement in Greece, P. Pouliopoulos, 'together with two other members of the leadership' (*Socialist Appeal*, mid-October 1944).[1] These references reveal the existence of relations between the RCP and the Trotskyist organisations in Greece. However, the archives do not offer further details concerning the nature of these relations. The mid-December issue of the *Socialist Appeal* is very insightful regarding the RCP's attitude towards Greece. The headline on the front page was 'Hands Off the Greek Workers! Out With Churchill! Smash the government of Counter-Revolution'. The revolutionary and class-struggle character they attributed to *Dekemvriana* is apparent. Their criticism was not only directed towards Churchill. They also reproved the Labour Party's attitude and actions. Not only did they criticise Ernest Bevin's speech at the 44th Labour Party conference for supporting the actions of the British government, but they also blamed Aneurin Bevan for not calling for the immediate dissolution of the government – despite the

fact that Bevan had also criticised Bevin and expressed support for the Greek people (*Socialist Appeal*, mid-December 1944). This criticism continued until the mid-February issue, with an article by Ted Grant entitled 'British Labour Betrayed Greek Workers' (*Socialist Appeal*, mid-February 1945). Further commentary on the events is offered by Doris Miller in a two-part article in the periodical, 'On the Coming European Revolution', published in March and April 1945. In this article, it is clear that the British Trotskyists believed that Greece would be the starting point for the European socialist revolution, while the writer mentions that elements of class war could be traced in December Events (Miller, 1945).

The Trotskyist RCP had an original attitude towards Greece in the period between December 1944 and February 1945. In contrast to the Labour Party and the CPGB, it believed that the Second World War had created the conditions for a socialist revolution in Europe, and that the areas with strong and mass resistance movements would provide the first sparks for the expected revolution. Thus *Dekemvriana* was interpreted as a sign of a class war which would eventually expand throughout Europe. Contrary to the Labour Party and the CPGB, it did not hope for a 'democratic resolution' of the crisis. The defeat of EAM/ELAS at the Battle of Athens and the signing of the Varkiza Agreement were considered as a 'first defeat' on their road to revolution – a defeat that should and could be overcome. In retrospect, the RCP's interpretation of the Battle of Athens as essentially a class-based conflict may seem a little far-fetched. The armed forces defeated by a right-wing resistance movement were evidently composed mainly of urban and rural workers, but the direction in which the KKE channelled their fighting spirit was that of national independence, not of social revolution. The RCP's understanding of the conflict in Greece was thus coloured, to a certain extent, by wishful thinking and by an under-estimation of the question of leadership. In the heat of the moment, that over-optimistic analysis did not nurture any internal strife. But in the decades that followed, such 'triumphalism' – because of the disappointment it never failed to entail – became a recurrent plague of the Trotskyist far left.

Conclusion

The unprovoked shooting of unarmed civilians by the Greek police and British troops at Syntagma Square on 3 December 1944, the Battle of Athens between the EAM/ELAS forces and the British troops assisted by Greek royalist forces until January 1945, and the reconciliation between the warring parties on 12 February 1945, after the signing of the Varkiza Agreement, sparked a wide range of discussions in the United Kingdom. The British left participated in, and actively shaped, the public conversation on the events in Greece and on the role of the British government. On the surface, the three parties of the British left examined here called for the same thing: the withdrawal of British

troops from Greece, the end of the British government's interventionist policy in Greek political affairs, and the prosperity and sovereignty of the Greek people. Yet this chapter confirms what the other chapters in this book abundantly illustrate: that the political branch of the British labour movement – even in the 1944–1945 'days of hope' – was not a unanimous body, as marked differences existed on the ideological, rhetorical and practical levels.

Each party's policy can be related to its position in the British social and political system at the time. The Labour Party, the main representative of the British left, bound by its role in the War Cabinet and in the House of Commons, pressed the British government to rethink its policy towards Greece, without, however, jeopardising the government's unity and the party's future. The events in Greece sparked a heated discussion among MPs, some of whom openly questioned Winston Churchill's interventionist policy both in the House of Commons and at the party's annual conference, where there was an obvious gap between MPs such as Ernest Bevin who participated in the War Cabinet – and who supported the government's decisions on the Greek issue – and Aneurin Bevan and his comrades, who strongly opposed Bevin. The CPGB, always in line with Stalin's demands on foreign policy, abandoned its revolutionary argument and re-evaluated the role of Parliament. This transformation affected the CPGB's attitude towards the events in Greece and led to a rapprochement with the Labour Party, so that its focus was on free and fair elections. As for the RCP, its approach was distinctive – and marginal. It tried to explain the events in Greece through the Trotskyist prism. Believing the Second World War could lead to a worldwide revolution, it characterised the battles in Athens as a class struggle which would eventually lead to a European upheaval – in contrast with the Labour Party and the CPGB, which emphasised the value of patriotism, anti-fascism and the parliamentary road.

The course of events after the signing of the Varkiza Agreement failed the hopes of those labour activists who had demonstrated against British support for the Greek royalists in 1944. Indeed, Attlee's electoral victory over Churchill in the February 1945 general election did not bring about a U-turn in Britain's policy towards Greece. At the head of the Foreign Office, Bevin was to walk in Churchill's footsteps: as the civil war in Greece intensified, so did British support for Papandreou's authoritarian and reactionary regime. Through this case study we are reminded once again that the unity of the British labour movement cannot be considered as relying only or even primarily on domestic issues, but that international affairs have time and again produced, or revealed, divisions inside it – sometimes profound and lasting ones, as was the case with the Anglo-Boer War (1899–1902) and the First World War. Since then, the way the Labour Party governments, and thus the Labour Party itself, were shaken during the American-led wars in Korea, Afghanistan and Iraq is further proof – if need be – of that phenomenon.

Note

1 Pantelis Pouliopoulos was born in 1900, and, during 1924–1926, he was the general secretary of the Communist Party of Greece. Expelled from the Communist Party in 1927, he founded an opposition (Trotskyist) group which was aligned with the International Left Opposition. He was executed on 6 June 1943 by the Italian occupation forces.

References

Bulletin (1944) CP/LON/CIRC/02/08, 8 December, Labour History Archive and Study Centre, Manchester (LHA).

Callaghan, J. (1984) *British Trotskyism: Theory and Practice*, Oxford: Basil Blackwell.

Chartomatsidi, A. (2015) 'The British Left's Attitude towards the Conflict in Greece from the December Revolt (1944) to the Varkiza Agreement (February 1945)', unpublished Master's dissertation, London School of Economics and Political Science.

CPGB (1944) 'Victory, Peace, Security: Report of the 17th National Congress of the Communist Party', CP/CENT/CONG/4/15, LHA.

CPGB (1945) 'Communist Party 18th National Congress 24–25–26th November 1945', CP/CENT/CIRC/01/06, LHA.

CPGB (1946) 'Situation in Greece, 12 December 1946', CP/CENT/INT/33/04, LHA.

CPGB, Executive Committee (1945) 'Meeting of the E.C. January 1945', CP/CENT/CIRC/01/05, LHA.

CPGB, London Committee (1944) 'Report of the London Committee, Sept. 1943 – Dec. 1944', CP/CENT/SPU/1/5, LHA.

CPGB, London Committee (1945) 'Report of the London Committee', CP/LN/CONG/0/06, LHA.

CPGB, Propaganda Department (1945a) 'Information For Speakers, 8 February 1945', CP/CENT/SPN/1/3, LHA.

CPGB, Propaganda Department (1945b) 'Information For Speakers, 1st March 1945', CP/CENT/SPN/1/3, LHA.

Grant, T. (2002) *History of British Trotskyism,* London: Wellred Publications.

Kennedy-Pipe, C. (1998) *Russia and the World, 1917–1991*, London: Arnold Publishers.

Labour Party (1944) 'Annual Report', LHA.

Laybourn, K. and Murphy, D. (1999) *Under the Red Flag: A History of Communism in Britain, c. 1849–1991*, Gloucestershire: Sutton Publishing.

Mazower, M. (1993) *Inside Hitler's Greece*, Cumberland: Yale University Press.

Miller, Doris (1945) 'On the Coming European Revolution', *Socialist Appeal*, March and April, MSS/75/3/4/21, MRC.

Montagu, I. (1945) 'Greek Fire', *Labour Monthly*, January, pp. 28–32.

Rajak, S. (2010) 'The Cold War in the Balkans, 1945–1956', in Leffler, M. P. and Westad, O. A. (eds) *Cambridge History of the Cold War, Vol. 1*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 198–220.

Redfern, N. (2004) 'British Communists, the British Empire and the Second World War', *International Labor and Working-Class History*, 65, pp. 117–35.

RCP (1944) 'Internal Bulletin: The First Phases of the Coming European Revolution', MSS/75/3/4/8, Modern Records Centre, Coventry (MRC).

RCP (1945a) 'Internal Bulletin', MSS/75/3/4/14, MRC.

RCP (1945b) 'Main Resolution: To be Discussed at Annual Conference of RCP, 1945 August Bank Holiday', MSS/151/1/2/1, MRC.

Sfikas, T. D. (1994) *The British Labour Government and the Greek Civil War 1945–1949: The Imperialism of 'Non-intervention'*, Keele University: Ryburn Book Production.
Sfikas, T. D. (1999) 'Toward a Regional Study of the Origins of the Cold War in Southeastern Europe: British and Soviet Policies in the Balkans, 1945–1949', *Journal of Modern Greek Studies*, 17:2, pp. 209–27.
Thorpe, A. (2000) 'The Membership of the Communist Party of Great Britain, 1920–1945', *Historical Journal*, 43:3, pp. 777–800.
Thorpe, A. (2001) *A History of the British Labour Party*, Basingstoke: Palgrave.
Thorpe, A. (2006) '"In a rather emotional state"? The Labour Party and British Intervention in Greece, 1944–5', *English Historical Review*, 121:493, pp. 1075–1105.
Tranmer, J. (2014) 'Squaring the Circle: The Extreme Left and the Labour Party', *Revue LISA/LISA e-journal*, 12:8. Available at: http://lisa.revues.org/7110. Accessed 6 April 2017.
Vickers, R. (2003) *The Labour Party and the World. Volume 1: The Evolution of Labour's Foreign Policy, 1900–51*, Manchester: Manchester University Press.
War Cabinet, CAB 65/49/6, 'Conclusions of a Meeting of the War Cabinet Held in the Cabinet War Room, on Monday 15th January, 5.30 pm', National Archives, London.

8

The decline of revolutionary pragmatism and the splintering of British communism in the 1980s

Jeremy Tranmer

Introduction

The 1980s were a particularly difficult period for the British labour movement. Its political wing, the Labour Party, experienced a series of electoral reversals, while trade unions suffered significant industrial defeats. The labour movement as a whole faced falling membership. It was also a time of severe divisions. The internal ructions of the Labour Party in the 1980s have been well documented, but parties and groups to its left were also affected by high levels of disunity. The Communist Party of Great Britain (CPGB), for instance, experienced its own divisions and splits. Some of its difficulties were linked to elements that also concerned the Labour Party, such as the dominant political and ideological position of Margaret Thatcher's Conservatives and the rapid decline of traditional industries. Other factors were specific to the CPGB itself.

In this chapter it will be suggested that the questioning by many communists of the party's long-established 'revolutionary pragmatism' contributed strongly to its internal divisions. Revolutionary pragmatism is a concept developed by the late historian Nina Fishman to describe the framework within which communist trade unionists acted in the 1930s and 1940s. It shall be argued that a modified version of this concept can be applied to communist activities in general and can be used to shed light on events within the CPGB in later periods of its history such as the 1980s. First, the travails of the CPGB will be situated in the broader context of a disunited left, and then the party's revolutionary pragmatism will be examined in order to establish how it was challenged in the name of competing legitimacies.

Parties and groupings to the left of the Labour Party have received relatively little academic attention, although there have been signs of renewed interest in recent years (Smith and Worley, 2014). Considering the size of the CPGB, a significant number of serious studies have been published about various aspects of its history and development. Party membership peaked at 56,000 in 1942. However, by 1950 it had fallen to under 40,000, and by 1971 it had decreased to under 30,000. In 1981, it stood at just over 18,000, and the decline accelerated in the following years. At its final Congress in 1991, it claimed to have a mere 4,700 members (Thompson, 1992: 218). Most studies of the party deal with the period from its foundation in 1920 up to 1956, when it lost about a third of its members following the revelations about Stalin made at the Soviet Communist Party's 20th Congress and the Soviet invasion of Hungary (Bounds, 2012; Morgan, 1989; Worley, 2002). Far fewer deal with the second half of the CPGB's history (Callaghan, 2003). Only a very small number of works tackle the 1980s, the final decade before the party ceased to exist in 1991 (Andrews, 2004; Croft, 2012; Fishman, 1994: 145–77). The aforementioned books by Callaghan and Andrews are part of the multi-volume semi-official history of the CPGB. The party leadership asked James Klugmann and Noreen Branson to write the first volumes in the series (Branson, 1985, 1997; Klugmann, 1969a, 1969b), whereas Callaghan's and Andrews' works were written after the demise of the CPGB and make ample use of the party's archives, which were opened in the early 1990s. They are currently held at the People's History Museum in Manchester. The 1980s are also touched upon only relatively briefly in the overall histories of the CPGB (Beckett, 1995: 190–228; Thompson, 1992: 178–217). Party members who were active in the 1980s have received very little attention in works about communists (Green, 2014; McIlroy, Morgan and Campbell, 2001). Consequently, sections of this piece of work will be based mainly on primary sources, including articles from the communist press, and will reinterpret some of the existing work on the CPGB.

A divided CPGB within a divided left

The 1980s were a time of bitter divisions for much of the British left, from the dominant sections to the more marginal. Following its defeat in the 1979 general election, the Labour Party became engulfed in in-fighting between its right and left wings, both of which were far from being stable and homogeneous (Benn, 1991, 1994; Hayter, 2005). The election of Michael Foot as party leader in 1980 signalled a shift to the left, and the following year the so-called 'Gang of Four' (Roy Jenkins, David Owen, William Rodgers and Shirley Williams) left to create the Social Democratic Party, while other moderates remained within the Labour Party to fight their corner. The left, defending a radical agenda based on the Alternative Economic Strategy,

departure from the European Economic Community, unilateral nuclear disarmament and constitutional changes within the Labour Party, splintered during Tony Benn's deputy leadership challenge in 1981. Neil Kinnock and other left-wing MPs voted against Benn, splitting the Tribune group of Labour MPs and leading to the creation of the Socialist Campaign Group. These events, coupled with the 1983 election defeat, set in motion a realignment of the Labour left which pitted the 'soft left' of Kinnock against the 'hard left' of Benn, Ken Livingstone (the leader of the Greater London Council) and Arthur Scargill (the leader of the National Union of Mineworkers). The policies of the Greater London Council and the strategy of the miners' union during the strike of 1984–1985 caused friction between the new Labour leader and the 'hard left'. The miners' strike was particularly divisive as Scargill berated Kinnock for his lack of active support, contributing to the divisions within the Parliamentary Labour Party that Nick Randall highlights in his chapter of this volume.

Another source of conflict was Militant, a Trotskyist organisation engaged in entryism in the Labour Party (Taafe, 1995). Although it claimed to be a mere grouping of readers and supporters of the weekly *Militant* newspaper, its detractors stated that it was an actual party whose aim of revolutionary socialism was radically different from that of the Labour Party itself. Benn and others defended Militant's right to remain within Labour as it was a socialist organisation. Militant had established a power base in Liverpool, where it dominated the local council, setting it on a collision course with the Conservative government. While it received the support of Benn and Livingstone, it was roundly condemned for acting irresponsibly by the party leadership, most famously by Kinnock himself during his speech at the 1985 conference. Expulsions of Militant sympathisers, which had begun in 1983, gained in frequency.

Significant internal divergences had regularly existed throughout the history of the Labour Party, for example between Gaitskellites and Bevanites in the 1950s. Moreover, the dissension of the 1980s was, to a certain extent, the continuation of divisions which were already apparent in the previous decade when the party conference was frequently critical of the policies of the Labour government. However, the 1980s clearly saw a sharpening of the conflicts within the party, which had reached an unprecedented level. Some of the smaller parties to the left of Labour were also beset with internal problems. In the early 1980s, the Socialist Workers Party expelled a number of members who continued to advocate and be involved in violent opposition to the extreme right, while the Workers Revolutionary Party split several ways in 1985–1986 following accusations of sexual abuse and bullying against its leader, Gerry Healy. Divisions in the CPGB which had been brewing for several years burst out into the open (Andrews, 2004: 201–23; Laybourn, 2006: 114–48; Thompson, 1992: 163–209). In 1982, *Marxism Today*, the party's

monthly theoretical journal, published an article by the sociologist Tony Lane which criticised the behaviour and standards of some trade-union shop stewards (Lane, 1982: 6–10). Lane noted 'the creation of a new working-class elite which has the opportunity (and too often takes it) of sharing in the expense account syndrome' (Lane, 1982: 13). Although the rest of the article was not particularly controversial and concentrated on the difficulties facing trade unions in the unfavourable climate of the 1980s, it provoked an angry response from the *Morning Star* daily newspaper, which accused *Marxism Today* of undermining the trade-union movement at a time when it was under severe attack from the government (Anon, 1982: 1). A long, bitter internal struggle ensued, which entailed accusations of vote-rigging in internal elections and elections concerning the running of the *Morning Star.* Moreover, the London District Congress of 1984 was summarily closed by the party's general secretary Gordon MacLennan, members disobeyed party rules and engaged in factional activity, and a significant number of long-standing party members were expelled from 1983 onwards. The latter included high-profile figures such as Ken Gill, the first communist president of the Trades Union Congress (TUC).[1] The remaining members of the CPGB engaged in an ongoing war of words over the future direction of the party.

These divisions were highly public and were relatively unusual in the history of British communism.[2] The party was run according to the principles of democratic centralism. In other words, 'while a question was under discussion a free and open exchange of views was necessary, but … once a decision had been arrived at all members, even though they were in the minority, were bound by it and bound to fight for it' (Thompson, 1992: 36). Open criticism of the party's strategy and policies was only accepted in the run-up to its biennial Congress. However, factions and internal groupings were banned. Consequently, communists were not allowed to meet to elaborate alternatives to the party's official positions. Due to the way democratic centralism functioned (and to the culture and traditions of the communist movement in general), the leadership was in a very strong position and was able to control the framework within which debate took place. Articles and letters would not necessarily be published in the communist press if they were deemed to be too critical. Furthermore, the leadership presented itself as being monolithic. The decisions made by the Executive Committee, for example, were made public, but the details of the debates preceding the decisions were kept private. Consequently, ordinary members were not fully aware of the extent of divisions within the party's leading bodies or of the positions of individual leaders. As a result, open or organised dissent at any level of the organisation was very unusual. The economist Albert Hirschman's model of exit or voice can be applied to the CPGB (Hirschman, 1970). According to Hirschman, members of an organisation are faced with a basic choice when they are not satisfied with its general direction – they can either leave it (exit) or express discontent

and try to change it from within (voice). As communists had little possibility to voice opposition, the basic choice was between remaining loyal to the party or leaving it. Nevertheless, although membership of the CPGB fell regularly for most of the post-war period, only twice did significant numbers of members leave for political reasons. The first time was in 1956–1957, when significant numbers of activists resigned or were expelled,[3] and the second in 1977–1978 when over 700 members left to found the New Communist Party following disagreements over the new version of the CPGB's long-term programme, the *British Road to Socialism* (*BRS*).[4] In the 1980s there were more possibilities for expressing dissent within the party as a result of the changing relationship between the latter and its main publications, the *Morning Star* and *Marxism Today*. As they both became more autonomous and moved out of the party's orbit, they did not hesitate to publish letters and articles which were openly critical of various aspects of the party, its policies and its programme.

Given that open divisions in the CPGB were relatively unusual, the disputes of the 1980s attracted a certain amount of media attention (Benton, 1983: 10; Linton, 1985: 17; Morris, 1983: 2; Taylor, 1985: 258). Commentators, and many participants, tended to present a binary division in the party, although the names given to each side varied – moderates against hardliners, modernisers against traditionalists, Euros against Tankies (in other words, Eurocommunists against unconditional supporters of the Soviet Union),[5] social democrats against Stalinists, Gramscians against Marxist-Leninists, middle-class revisionists against working-class communists, and so on (Bellamy, 1986: 5–8; Bloomfield, 1984: 5–9; Cook, 1985: 25–9; Costello, 1983: 10–11; Jones, 1987: 2). More serious observers have noted that there were three basic groupings – a centrist block in favour of compromise between continuity and moderate change, a reforming wing and a traditionalist wing (Andrews, 2004: 205–8). Moreover, significant differences existed within each one. For instance, not all those associated with the reforming wing described themselves as Eurocommunists and based their views on interpretations of Gramsci's work.[6] Reformers included working-class trade unionists as well as intellectuals.

Revolutionary pragmatism and divisions in the CPGB

The divisions within the CPGB were clearly the consequence of a number of factors. Some of the CPGB's difficulties were linked to elements that also concerned the Labour Party, such as how to respond to the left's successive electoral defeats to Margaret Thatcher, how to develop an appropriate strategy to counter her governments' policies, and how to deal with the weakening of the trade-union movement due to the decline of traditional industries and the subsequent numerical decline of the industrial working class. The CPGB also had its own singularities. It was not simply a section of the British labour

movement but also a part of the international communist movement.[7] It remained so even though this movement was far from united and the CPGB's relationship with it was much less close than in earlier periods of its history. Nevertheless, the party's attitude to the Soviet Union and the other Warsaw Pact countries was a source of internal conflict. This was evidenced in 1976 by the reactions to former general secretary John Gollan's article in the January edition of *Marxism Today* (Gollan, 1976: 4–30). The article was intended to commemorate the twentieth anniversary of Khrushchev's revelations about Stalinism and sparked off a heated discussion throughout the party. Divergences also appeared when the Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan in December 1979 and martial law was imposed in Poland in December 1981. The CPGB officially condemned both these actions, but a significant minority of its members opposed the leadership and supported them. However, the *Morning Star* defended the leadership's position in both cases. The party's relationship with international communism was not therefore a decisive element in its travails in the 1980s.

John Callaghan and Willie Thompson have stressed the importance of long-term factors. For Callaghan, the CPGB had drifted since the adoption of the first version of the *BRS* in 1951 and only began to 'come to terms with its Leninist and Stalinist past' in the 1980s. This created huge tensions in the organisation, destroying the compromises of the previous decades (Callaghan, 1987: 186). According to Thompson, the CPGB paid the price in the 1980s for the decisions it had made in the aftermath of the events of 1956. The following year, it held a special Congress to discuss these events and their implications for the party. However, the leadership used bureaucratic measures to prevent a genuine debate from taking place and to marginalise dissidents. In the words of Thompson, who remained a member of the party until its dissolution, 'the choices made in 1956–7 were to be ultimately fatal, like a virus slowly multiplying in the organisation's bloodstream. It is not too fanciful to see the remainder of the Communist Party's history as representing the working out of the consequences of its 25th Congress' (Thompson, 1992: 112–13). It is thus quite obvious that there was a long-term dimension to the problems the CPGB encountered in the 1980s. Geoff Andrews has proposed an interesting analysis in his work on the final decades of the CPGB. His starting point is the late historian Nina Fishman's concept of 'revolutionary pragmatism'. The term was coined by Fishman in her book *The British Communist Party and the Trade Unions, 1933–45* to refer to the framework within which communist trade unionists worked in the 1930s and the 1940s (Fishman, 1995).[8] According to Fishman, it was composed of four elements – trade-union loyalism (communists did not try to establish alternative breakaway unions),[9] rank-and-filism (they attempted to organise ordinary workers on the shop floor and involve them in campaigns, partly in the hope of radicalising the trade-union movement), the united front (they sought unity with

the non-communist left) and the belief that 'life itself', as Fishman put it, would lead to a revolutionary situation appearing in the future (Fishman, 1995: 12). Acting within this framework, communists were able to reconcile their long-term revolutionary goals with reformist everyday action and to respond to events in a pragmatic and flexible manner. In Fishman's words, it was 'a guide to action in the real world of British trade union and workplace culture' (Fishman, 1995: 333).

For Andrews, this approach based on revolutionary pragmatism created a paradox for the CPGB as '[o]n the one hand, the party imbibed the main tenets of labourism, while on the other it sought a critique of, and attempted to articulate an alternative to, the labour movement mainstream' (Andrews, 2004: 85). He therefore described the CPGB's strategy as 'militant labourism' (Andrews, 2004: 85). According to Andrews, this strategy enabled the party to exert a significant influence over the labour movement in the 1970s and contribute to the leftward shift of the trade unions and the Labour Party. However, from the end of the decade onwards, militant labourism was in crisis as the CPGB and its left-wing allies in the trade-union movement split over the Labour government's plans to limit wage increases (Andrews, 2004: 131–2). This crisis, and how the party should react to it, was, according to Andrews, the main factor behind the divisions in the CPGB in the 1980s (Andrews, 2004: 201). It was deepened by the general decline of the party and external factors such as the electoral success of Margaret Thatcher and her appeal to sections of the working class.

This analysis is clearly thought-provoking. Moreover, Andrews links it to divisions over wages which had begun to emerge in the CPGB in the first part of the 1970s (Andrews, 2004: 128–9). The CPGB actively supported struggles for wage increases and argued that they did not have an impact on the high levels of inflation that the United Kingdom faced at the time. However, a number of communists including Bill Warren, Pat Devine, Mike Prior and Dave Purdy came to the conclusion that wage increases were fuelling inflation and advocated a socialist incomes policy. The split between the CPGB and the non-communist left in the trade unions thus took place against a backdrop of growing divisions over theory and practice among communists. Nevertheless, Andrews's approach underestimates the scale of the fundamental problems facing the party at the time and the extent of the search for solutions. This becomes apparent if a modified version of Fishman's revolutionary pragmatism is adopted and applied to the final years of the party's history. This unashamedly revisionist concept, which is clearly at odds with orthodox representations of the centralised, disciplined revolutionary party, has had its critics. John McIlroy, for example, has written that it leads to a vision of CPGB history from which the impact of Stalinism is largely absent (McIlroy, 2013: 599–622).[10] This is obviously an important point since Fishman's work covers the 1930s and 1940s, a time when the autonomy of sections of the international

communist movement was very limited. And for much of this period, communists throughout the world sought unity with reformist movements to their right. However, when revolutionary pragmatism is applied to later periods of the party's history, McIlroy's criticism becomes less significant, as there is no evidence that the Soviet Union intervened directly or indirectly in the CPGB's domestic affairs in the 1970s and 1980s (except to criticise coverage of the USSR in party publications), and communist parties increasingly adopted national visions of how radical social and political change could be brought about. Kevin Morgan has written that Fishman's approach runs the risk of reducing the complexities of communists' beliefs and actions 'to something like a platform' (Morgan, 2009: 14). It should therefore be stressed that Fishman used revolutionary pragmatism to describe the activities and beliefs of communists. It was not a position theorised by communists themselves.

It shall be suggested that a modified version of the concept of revolutionary pragmatism in which the four basic categories are redefined could be applied to the party's overall activities in other periods of its history. Trade-union loyalism can be broadened to loyalty to the labour movement as a whole. This was based on Marxist theory, according to which the working class was the only real revolutionary force in society because of its subordinate position due to its daily exploitation by the ruling class in capitalist society. The working class therefore had to play the leading role in attempts to defeat and overthrow capitalism. Since the labour movement was seen as representing the interests of the working class, it was at the heart of the different versions of the CPGB's programme *The British Road to Socialism* and central to its practical activities (Adereth, 1994). As the 1978 version of the *BRS* put it, 'The leading force in the alliance [of forces supporting change] will be the working class, whose interests are most directly opposed to those of the capitalist ruling class, and whose strength and capacity for organisation enables it to give leadership to all the democratic forces in society' (Communist Party of Great Britain, 1978: 18). Rank-and-filism can be seen as the importance given by the party to its grassroots campaigning role and to the active presence of its members at all levels of trade unions and various extra-parliamentary campaigns, as well as in communities. Ordinary communists were involved in a myriad of campaigns, but one of the most regular activities for many was selling the *Morning Star*, particularly at weekends. Standing and participating in elections were important activities for communists in some parts of the country. The united front can be enlarged to left unity. The CPGB sought not only to build alliances with the non-communist left in trade unions (the Broad Lefts of the 1960s and 1970s, for example), but it also attempted to create a close relationship with the left wing of the Labour Party. It was hoped that a powerful Labour left could change the balance of forces within Labour, obliging it to adopt more radical policies and paving the way for 'a new type of Labour government, which will begin to carry out a new type of left policy'

(Communist Party of Great Britain, 1978: 38). Left unity was therefore a constant theme developed in official documents and reflected in the party's activities in the 1970s (McKay, 1981: 167–71; McLennan, 1979: 163–7). Left-wing Labour MPs including Tony Benn, Stan Newens, Norman Atkinson and Joan Maynard were frequently invited to write articles in the *Morning Star* and to attend public events organised by the CPGB. Finally, although the term 'life itself' was not used in party circles, it was assumed that capitalism would at some point in the future be superseded by socialism and it was hoped that the party's constant activism would enable it to play a significant role in that process by becoming a larger, stronger force in society with a presence in Parliament (Communist Party of Great Britain, 1978: 26).

The four categories of this modified version of revolutionary pragmatism made up the framework within which communists acted, both individually and collectively, inside and outside the trade-union movement. However, from the late 1970s onwards these categories were increasingly questioned by various sections of the party, sometimes basing their arguments on conflicting forms of legitimacy. Complete loyalty to the labour movement was questioned by communists involved in and/or sympathetic to the new social movements. For instance, some communist feminists such as Tricia Davis believed that the fight against women's oppression was as important as the struggle against economic exploitation and that the party should allocate more human and financial resources to feminist struggles (Davis and Hall, 1980: 14–19). They were able to justify their position by referring to the 1978 version of the *BRS*, sections of which underlined the importance of attracting new forces such as the women's movement into a broad alliance opposed to exploitation and oppression of all sorts (Communist Party of Great Britain, 1978: 29).[11] This was fought bitterly by communists who, reasserting the centrality of class, wanted to focus predominantly on the labour movement, as the party had for most of its history, and who appealed to tradition and to orthodox Marxism (Fine et al., 1984; Kelly, 1989: 25–9).

The party's campaigning role was not challenged overall, although some aspects of it, such as its electoral activities, came under scrutiny. Although the CPGB only stood a limited number of candidates in local and national elections, some local branches had made it a priority, believing that it helped raise the party's profile, gave it valuable publicity and was an opportunity to recruit new members. Participating in election campaigns was therefore a regular part of these branches' activities. The party's electoral strategy had always been controversial. Communists who favoured concentrating the party's resources on its work in the labour movement saw it as a waste of time and energy. They also pointed to the contradiction involved in advocating and supporting the non-communist left in the labour movement and opposing it electorally. In the 1980s, this long-standing critique intersected with the implications of the party's analysis of Thatcherism. From the late 1970s onwards, contributors to

Marxism Today such as Stuart Hall, who had coined the term 'Thatcherism' (Hall, 1979: 16), suggested that it was a novel phenomenon and represented an exceptional danger for the labour movement. Between 1983 and 1985, this analysis was adopted officially by the party in Congress resolutions, which began to call for broad unity against the Conservatives. In 1989, the party published a pamphlet advocating an anti-Thatcher electoral alliance (McLennan, 1989).[12] However, given its poor election results, this implied that it should stop standing candidates and angered communists who had contested elections for many years.[13] Changes in the party's election strategy coincided with the loss of the *Morning Star*, which had thrown in its lot with the traditionalist grouping in the party. The CPGB encouraged its remaining members no longer to support the paper. Communists who had regularly participated in paper sales for many years were thus deprived of one of the main aspects of their public activity as communists.

The goal of left unity was increasingly criticised as the CPGB became caught up in the fall-out of the fracturing of the Labour left. Erstwhile allies such as Tony Benn came under attack from Communist reformers, including the historian Eric Hobsbawm, for their excessively optimistic evaluation of the state of the labour movement and their refusal to seek broad alliances against the Conservatives based on compromise programmes (Green, 1985: 41; Hobsbawm, 1984: 9). During and after the miners' strike, Arthur Scargill was criticised for the emphasis he had placed on traditional forms of struggle, such as mass picketing, which some communists saw as inappropriate and counter-productive (Carter, 1986). Reformers were also critical of the actions of the Militant-run local council in Liverpool (Jay, 1985: 5). Traditionalists, however, continued to support Benn, Scargill and left-wing Labour MPs, who maintained a close relationship with the *Morning Star* (Bastin, 1983: 3). Left unity disappeared completely from the party's final programme, the *Manifesto for New Times*, suggesting that it was no longer seen as realistic and desirable (Communist Party of Great Britain, 1990).

Finally, during the 1980s the CPGB increasingly concentrated on the short-term objective of defeating Margaret Thatcher. This culminated in its call for an electoral pact to defeat her. One of the consequences of this was that the party downgraded its long-term objective of revolutionary change. Revealingly, debates about the forms that a revolution in Britain would take played an important part in the period preceding the adoption of the *BRS* in 1977, whereas the issue of how voters could be convinced to accept moderate social change dominated debates over the *Manifesto for New Times* in the late 1980s. At the same time, Marxists associated with the reforming wing of the CPGB pondered over the very meaning of socialism and questioned its inevitability. This was the case of Stuart Hall, who advocated what he termed 'Marxism without guarantees' (Hall, 1983: 28–44). Towards the end of the decade, the growing crisis in Eastern Europe also led to more questioning of

what a radically different society would be like, and the party distanced itself further from the Soviet Union and its satellite states in Eastern Europe.[14] Although these changes were constantly resisted by communists who continued to believe in Marxism-Leninism and traditional perspectives concerning the inevitability of the replacement of capitalism by socialism (Murray, 1990: 9), many communists' belief in a radically different future had been severely dented.

Each of the four components of revolutionary pragmatism was thus challenged in the 1980s, and from the middle of the decade onwards the CPGB integrated aspects of these challenges into its official policy, disorienting many communists and contributing to the party's internal divisions. *Marxism Today* was at the heart of this process. Under the editorship of the reformer Martin Jacques, the review frequently questioned and weakened the elements which made up revolutionary pragmatism. Consequently, although its readership increased in the 1980s and it was often mentioned favourably in the mainstream press, it became the focus of intense controversy within the CPGB. Moreover, it was far from clear how the positions defended by *Marxism Today* could be translated into everyday political practice. It proved impossible to weld the new elements together into a relatively coherent whole, as by this time the party was rapidly falling apart and ceasing to function collectively in many parts of the country. Neither was it possible to establish the legitimacy of the new positions, as their adoption had only been possible due to administrative measures such as the expulsion of many long-standing members.

Conclusion

The Labour Party did not have a monopoly on disunity and disputed legitimacies in the 1980s. The CPGB's problems were linked to those of Labour but were in some ways distinct and corresponded to the specificities of the party's history, programme, strategy and activities. In the 1980s, the CPGB was no longer able to keep debate within the usual limits of the party's internal structures as unity had completely broken down, and it spilled out into the open. Fishman's concept of revolutionary pragmatism, when modified and applied to the final period of the party's history, can help understanding of the extent of the divisions within the CPGB, their absolutely fundamental nature and the impact of these divisions, since what was at stake was the framework within which communists had acted both as individuals and as an organisation for several decades. The use of revolutionary pragmatism sheds a different light on the turmoil of the 1980s, allowing it not simply to be seen as the final stage of difficulties which had existed for several decades, but also as a crisis whose immediate roots were to be found in the 1970s. It also makes it possible to go beyond the general statements of party programmes and Congress resolutions and to focus on elements which guided the everyday activities of members of

the CPGB. In 1991, the CPGB ceased to exist and transformed itself into Democratic Left (DL). DL clearly broke with the main tenets of revolutionary pragmatism. Although it encouraged its members to become involved in grassroots activities, it no longer saw itself predominantly as a part of the labour movement and sought to facilitate exchanges between parties of the centre-left. It adopted a critical but sympathetic approach to Tony Blair's attempts to rebrand the Labour Party and to redefine its politics. Nevertheless, DL continued to lose members. It subsequently changed its name to the New Times Network and later to the New Politics Network, before merging with Charter 88 to found Unlock Democracy in 2007. The other main organisation whose origins can be traced to the CPGB is the Communist Party of Britain (CPB). Created in 1988, the CPB recruited former members of the CPGB in the early to mid-1990s. Unlike DL, it saw itself as embodying the continuation of the British communist tradition, supporting the daily *Morning Star* newspaper and adopting the *British Road to Socialism* as its programme. Moreover, it views itself as an integral part of the labour movement, which it strongly defends, and has attempted to maintain close links with the left of the Labour Party, supporting the rise of Jeremy Corbyn. Although the CPB is much smaller than the CPGB, it has thus attempted to re-create the revolutionary pragmatism which characterised the CPGB for many years.

Notes

1 Some of those expelled went on in 1988 to form the rival Communist Party of Britain.
2 British communism was far less prone to splits than the Trotskyist movement, the numerous groupings of which have tended to subdivide regularly both nationally and internationally, as John Callaghan's history of it shows (Callaghan, 1984).
3 Significantly, two of the highest-profile dissidents, the historians Edward Thompson and John Saville, felt the wrath of the leadership for publishing their opinions outside the official party press in the *New Reasoner*, a publication that they had founded themselves. They were subsequently suspended from membership of the party but later resigned.
4 Although it has never managed to recruit significant numbers of new members, the New Communist Party still exists and continues to publish the weekly *New Worker*. It is currently one of the main British supporters of the North Korean regime.
5 Eurocommunism was a trend in international communism associated particularly with the Italian Communist Party (PCI). In the mid-1970s, the PCI had abandoned the aim of the dictatorship of the proletariat and accepted parliamentary democracy, marking a decisive break with traditional Marxism-Leninism. It also distanced itself from the Soviet Union, criticising the latter's attitude to dissent as well as its foreign policy.
6 The writings of Antonio Gramsci became widely available in the United Kingdom in the 1960s and began to influence sections of the CPGB, who used Gramscian concepts such as hegemony as the basis of an alternative to orthodox Marxism-Leninism. From the late 1970s onwards, Stuart Hall used hegemony in

his influential analyses of Thatcherism which were published in articles in *Marxism Today* (Hall, 1979: 14–20; 1987: 16–21).

7 As a result of the CPGB's links to the Soviet Union and its declared aim of the revolutionary transformation of society, it was targeted by the secret services. Its headquarters were bugged, its mail was opened and leading figures were subject to surveillance. This has led some former members to claim that the secret services had infiltrated the party and deliberately disrupted it from within by fomenting the disputes of the 1980s (Arnison, 1991: 123; Frow and Frow, 1996). Although the party had been infiltrated, there is no concrete evidence to support the claim that it had contributed in any way to the internal divisions of the 1980s.

8 Revolutionary pragmatism was also at the heart of her two-volume work on the miners' leader, Arthur Horner (Fishman, 2010a, 2010b).

9 This attitude to trade unions remained constant, even in the party's final years. David Evans points out in his chapter about breakaway unions (in this volume) that communists supported the creation of the Electrical and Plumbing Industries Union in 1988. However, they did so because the Electrical, Electronic, Telecommunications and Plumbing Union had been threatened with expulsion from the TUC. They hoped that the new breakaway union would remain within the TUC.

10 This point has also been made in Trotskyist publications (see, for example, Waterson, 1995).

11 They also received intellectual succour from outside the party. Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, for example, produced a reworked version of Gramsci's hegemony in which the struggle against economic exploitation was granted the same importance as the fight against oppression based on gender, race, sexuality, etc. (Laclau and Mouffe, 1985).

12 The communist historian Eric Hobsbawm had already called for an electoral pact of all progressive forces in the run-up to the 1987 general election.

13 This was the case of John Peck, who had frequently stood in elections in Nottingham and was finally elected to the local council in 1988. However, he resigned from the CPGB the following year, partly due to the latter's refusal to maintain a serious election strategy (Thompson, 1992: 200, 207).

14 Its final programme stated that the Russian Revolution had created 'a tarnished socialism' and that the Eastern European regimes had 'sought to justify their authoritarian and repressive nature by developing a rigid and dogmatic ideology which borrowed the language of Marxism, while distorting its essence' (Communist Party of Great Britain, 1990: 13–14).

References

Adereth, M. (1994) *Line of March: An Historical and Critical Analysis of British Communism and its Revolutionary Strategy*, London: Praxis Press.

Andrews, G. (2004) *Endgames and New Times: The Final Years of British Communism, 1964–1991*, London: Lawrence & Wishart.

Anon (1982) 'Communists Reject Attack on Shop Stewards', *Morning Star*, 26 September, p. 1.

Arnison, J. (1991) *Decades*, Salford: Self-published.

Bastin, B. (1983) 'Attacking Labour Harms Left Unity', *Morning Star*, 29 April, p. 3.

Beckett, F. (1995) *Enemy Within: The Rise and Fall of the British Communist Party*, London: John Murray.

Bellamy, R. (1986) 'Modern Revisionism – Its Theoretical and Social Roots', *Communist Campaign Review*, Autumn, pp. 5–8.
Benn, T. (1991, 1st ed.: 1990) *Conflicts of Interest: Diaries 1977–80*, London: Arrow Books.
Benn, T. (1994, 1st ed.: 1992) *The End of an Era: Diaries 1980–90*, London: Arrow Books.
Benton, S. (1983) 'Comrades at Arms', *New Statesman*, 11 November, p. 10.
Bloomfield, J. (1984) 'Crossed Lines: Communists in Search of an Identity', *Marxism Today*, April, pp. 5–9.
Bounds, P. (2012) *British Communism and the Politics of Literature, 1928–1939*, London: Merlin.
Branson, N. (1985) *History of the Communist Party of Great Britain: Volume Three, 1927–1941*, London: Lawrence & Wishart.
Branson, N. (1997) *History of the Communist Party of Great Britain: Volume Four, 1941–1951*, London: Lawrence & Wishart.
Callaghan, J. (1984) *British Trotskyism: Theory and Practice*, London: Basil Blackwell.
Callaghan, J. (1987) *The Far Left in British Politics*, London: Blackwell.
Callaghan, J. (2003) *Cold War, Crisis and Conflict: The CPGB 1951–1968*, London: Lawrence & Wishart.
Carter, P. (1986) *Trade Unions. The New Reality: The Communist View*, London: CPGB.
Communist Party of Great Britain (1978) *The British Road to Socialism*, London: CPGB.
Communist Party of Great Britain (1990) *Manifesto for New Times*, London: CPGB/ Lawrence & Wishart.
Cook, D. (1985) 'No Private Drama', *Marxism Today*, February, pp. 25–9.
Costello, M. (1983) 'The Festering Challenge of Reformism', *Communist Focus*, September, pp. 10–11.
Croft, A. (2012) *After the Party: Reflections on Life since the CPGB*, London: Lawrence & Wishart.
Davis, T. and Hall, C. (1980) 'The Forward Face of Feminism', *Marxism Today*, October, pp. 14–19.
Fine, B., Harris L., Mayo, M., Weir, A. and Wilson, E. (1984) *Class Politics: An Answer to its Critics*, London: Leftover Pamphlets.
Fishman, N. (1994) 'The British Road is Resurfaced for New Times: From the British Communist Party to the Democratic Left', in Bull, M. J. and Heywood, P. (eds) *West European Communist Parties after the Revolutions of 1989*, London: St Martin's Press, pp. 145–77.
Fishman, N. (1995) *The British Communist Party and the Trade Unions, 1933–45*, Aldershot: Scolar Press.
Fishman, N. (2010a) *Arthur Horner, 1894–1944. Volume 1: A Political Biography*, London: Lawrence & Wishart.
Fishman, N. (2010b) *Arthur Horner, 1844–1968. Volume 2: A Political Biography*, London: Lawrence & Wishart.
Frow, E. and Frow, R. (1996) *The Liquidation of the Communist Party of Great Britain*, Salford: Self-published.
Gollan, J. (1976) 'Socialist Democracy – Some Problems', *Marxism Today*, January, pp. 4–30.
Green, D. (1985) 'Who Dares Wins', *Marxism Today*, February, p. 41.
Green, J. (2014) *Britain's Communists: The Untold Story*, London: Artery Publications.
Hall, S. (1979) 'The Great Moving Right Show', *Marxism Today*, January, pp. 14–20.
Hall, S. (1987) 'Gramsci and Us', *Marxism Today*, June, pp. 16–21.
Hall, S. (1983) 'The Problem of Ideology: Marxism Without Guarantees', in Matthews, B. (ed.) *Marx: 100 Years On*, London: Lawrence & Wishart, pp. 28–44.

Hayter, D. (2005) *Fightback! Labour's Traditional Right in the 1970s and 1980s*, Manchester: Manchester University Press.
Hirschman, A. O. (1970) *Exit, Voice and Loyalty: Responses to Decline in Firms, Organizations and States*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
Hobsbawm, Eric (1984) 'Labour: Rump or Rebirth?', *Marxism Today*, March, p. 9.
Jay, A. (1985) 'Liverpool's Contrived Battle of Misjudged Tactics', 7 *Days*, 30 November, p. 5.
Jones, T. (1987) 'Tankies Set for a Communist Backlash', *The Times*, 7 January, p. 2.
Kelly, J. (1989) 'Class is Still the Central Issue', *Communist Campaign Review*, Spring, pp. 25–9.
Klugmann, J. (1969a) *History of the Communist Party of Great Britain. Volume One: Formation and Early Years, 1919–1924*, London: Lawrence & Wishart.
Klugmann, J. (1969b) *History of the Communist Party of Great Britain. Volume Two: The General Strike, 1925–1926*, London: Lawrence & Wishart.
Laclau, E. and Mouffe, C. (1985) *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics*, London: Verso.
Lane, T. (1982) 'The Unions: Caught on the Ebb Tide', *Marxism Today*, September, pp. 6–10.
Laybourn, K. (2006) *Marxism in Britain: Dissent, Decline and Re-emergence 1945–c.2000*, London: Routledge.
Linton, M. (1985) 'Watch Yet Another Party Tear Itself to Pieces', *Guardian*, 16 May, p. 17.
McIlroy, J. (2013) 'Restoring Stalinism to Communist History', *Critique*, 41:4, pp. 599–622.
McIlroy, J., Morgan, K. and Campbell, A. (eds) (2001) *Party People, Communist Livres: Explorations in Biography*, London: Lawrence & Wishart.
McKay, I. (1981) 'Leftwingers Utd. v Tory City: Unity of the Left against a Different Sort of Toryism', *Comment*, 8 August, pp. 167–71.
McLennan, G. (1979) 'Pulling the Left Together', *Comment*, 26 May, pp. 163–7.
McLennan, G. (1989) *British Politics in 1989: The Central Issue*, London: CPGB.
Morgan, K. (1989) *Against Fascism and War: Ruptures and Continuities in British Communist Politics 1935–1941*, Manchester: Manchester University Press.
Morgan, K. (2009) 'The Trouble with Revisionism: Or Communist History with the History Left In', *Labour/Le Travail*, 63, Spring, pp. 131–55.
Morris, R. (1983) 'Communists in Power Struggle', *The Times*, 12 January, p. 2.
Murray, A. (1990) 'Revolution or Reform', 7 *Days*, 10 February, p. 9.
Smith, E. and Worley, M. (2014) *Against the Grain: The British Far Left from 1956*, Manchester: Manchester University Press.
Taafe, P. (1995) *The Rise of Militant: Thirty Years of Militant*, London: Militant Publications.
Taylor, R. (1985) 'Comrades Up In Arms', *New Society*, 23 May, p. 258.
Thompson, W. (1992) *The Good Old Cause: British Communism 1920–1991*, London: Pluto Press.
Waterson, J. (1995) 'The Party at its Peak', *International Socialism Journal*, Winter. Available at: http://pubs.socialistreviewindex.org.uk/isj69/waterson.htm. Accessed 10 February 2016.
Worley, M. (2002) *Class Against Class: The Communist Party in Britain between the Wars*, London: I. B. Tauris.

9

Re-framing the debate on breakaway trade unions in an era of neoliberalism

David Evans

Introduction

Breakaway trade unions have been a feature of (dis)organised labour since the dawn of trade unionism. Like the unions that they break away from, they appear in many guises, and are triggered by different concerns and interests. Within the corridors of trade-union officialdom the term 'breakaway union' is used in a pejorative sense and applied to new unions set up for perceived sectarian or other divisive reasons. It carries assumptions of an inherent disloyalty, and, at a more idealistic level, strikes at the heart of working-class solidarity from which unions draw their strength. Breakaways are considered 'anathema' by established unions and are, in the words of one former Trades Union Congress (TUC) official, 'one of the worst sins on the trade union calendar' (Milne-Bailey, 1934: 107). This view informs the policy of the TUC, which regards breakaways as 'proscribed organisations' and refuses to accept the affiliation of any breakaway membership (TUC, *Annual Report*, 1929).

The phenomenon of breakaway unions is heterogeneous and straddles the boundaries of ideology and theoretical tradition. Unions that come under this rubric can be driven by reaction against the perceived militancy of the parent union or conversely can be more radical than the union from which they secede. In their different manifestations breakaways have attracted support from both right-wing business groups and left-wing, even revolutionary socialist bodies. In this sense, it is misleading to view breakaway unions as a distinct model or type of union, and their heterogeneity cannot be captured fully by any single theory. The common thread that binds these diverse unions together and distinguishes them from other labour organisations is that they

are emergent properties from a process of members seceding from a pre-existing union. It is this process of secession that sets the definitional parameters, rather than the structure of the union or the purpose and identity that it adopts.

The historiography of labour includes many case studies of individual breakaway unions of various descriptions (e.g. Bright, 1981; Clark, 2016; Temple, 2006), and some more general, if outdated, analyses of the phenomenon (Lerner, 1961). But the empiricist approach with which most of this work is laced struggles for coherence between observations and imbues precedent with explanatory powers for which it is ill-equipped. Greater insight into the creation of breakaway unions and the roles that they serve comes from looking beyond their manifestation and building from a theoretical understanding of the nature of trade unionism, in all its forms and guises. To paraphrase Hyman (1989: xi), understanding breakaway unions requires transcending the very idea of breakaway unions. The level of analysis needs to extend from a micro context to a broader totality, accommodating the social forces and dynamics which generate such developments within unions across place and time.

This study has grown partly from personal experience as a former activist in a public sector union during the 1980s, out of which a breakaway union was formed. It builds on previous research, letters and diary entries from that time. Additional primary data have been gathered from a broad range of sources, including oral history interviews with people involved in the setting up of breakaway unions and their supporting organisations, as well officials from established trade unions affected by these secessions. Archival data on the subject have also been uncovered, although at the time of writing some official archives dating from the 1980s are still deemed too politically sensitive for public viewing. These primary data are supported and complemented by a wealth of secondary-source material. However, as Miller found in an earlier study (2006), breakaway unions as an area of academic debate has been 'most sparsely covered'. The need for further research into the subject has been hinted at in previous works. For example, Hemmingway's study of trade-union government highlighted forty-four breakaway unions that had occurred in the post-war period up to the time he was conducting his research, a figure he suggested was merely the 'tip of the iceberg' (1978: 172). But despite the scale of the phenomenon and the continuing occurrence of breakaway unions, the mantle for further research has not been taken up and the mass of the 'iceberg' remains submerged and unexplored. It is hoped that the following discussion can make a contribution to filling this gap in academic knowledge.

The heterogeneity of breakaways

The term 'breakaway union' is ill-defined. It covers a range of impulses, inducements and alliances underlying the decision to secede from established

structures of representation and to set up a rival union. Breakaways emerge out of disparate sets of circumstances and are generated and guided by diverse motivations and ideological affiliations, both progressive and conservative. An example can be seen in developments within the National Union of Teachers (NUT) in the early 1920s. The National Union of Women Teachers was created out of a breakaway from the NUT in 1920, born out of frustration at the lack of progress the union was making in the campaign for equal pay and against prejudicial practices such as the marriage bar.[1] Conversely, the National Association of Schoolmasters was created in 1923 by male NUT members who broke away in opposition to the union's eventual adoption of a policy supporting equal pay for women teachers (Dawtrey et al., 1995: 46; Owen, 1988), an action later described by a general secretary of the merged National Association of Schoolmasters/Union of Women Teachers (NAS/UWT), Nigel de Gruchy, as placing the union 'on the wrong side of history' (Shaw, 2011; see also Beauvallet in this volume, and Clark's chapter for a perspective on social attitudes towards female trade unionists more generally).

Breakaways can result from conflict and tensions at different levels within a union's hierarchy. The Electrical and Plumbing Industrial Union was formed in 1988 from a split within the former Electrical Engineering, Telecommunications and Plumbing Union (EETPU), led by lay activists and supported by elements of the Communist Party, after the EETPU had been suspended from the TUC (see Tranmer's chapter on the splintering of the British Communist Party in the 1980s). They can also result from disputes among the higher echelons of a union's bureaucracy. For example, the Prison Service Union (PSU) was formed out of a leadership-based breakaway from the Prison Officers' Association in 1989 led by a former general secretary and four former assistant general secretaries who had been removed from office for taking strike action against the Prison Officers' Association in a dispute over their pay (Evans and Cohen, 2009: 171). Given the heterogeneity of the phenomenon, the force of any attempted generalisation is curtailed when based on evidence from a single case. In this light, Bright's claim that the Association of Polytechnic Teachers (APT), which broke away from the Association for Teachers in Technical Institutions (ATTI) in 1972, should be viewed as a 'textbook illustration' of a breakaway union (Bright, 1981: 1) is open to question.

The traditional view of breakaway unions within the trade-union movement is that they serve as catspaws for the employer, a conception deeply rooted in a long history of employers using 'divide and rule' tactics, taking advantage of fission within unions to play one body of workers off against another. But, although the line between an independent union and one serving the interests of the employer is sometimes made obfuscate, to view all breakaways as 'yellow unions'[2] ignores the fact that in many cases employers have colluded with the established union to put down such rebellions (Lerner, 1961:

195). As stated above, some breakaway unions can be more militant than the union from which they secede, making it less likely that employers would want them to be party to the negotiating machinery. An example can be seen in the United Mineworkers of Scotland, one of a number of attempted breakaways set up in the late 1920s inspired by revolutionary socialist ideas, and supported and guided by the National Minority Movement, an offshoot of the British Communist Party (Hinton, 1983: 138; Lerner, 1961: 105–6).

Despite, or perhaps because of, evidence of such militant breakaways, preconceived notions exist about the nature of unions born out of secession which cast doubt on their status as bone fide unions. This negative perception can be encouraged by the leaders of national unions who view such fragmentation as a depletion of union resources and in some cases use it to deflect criticism or to discredit any potential challenge to their regimes. For example, officials of the former National Union of Seamen accused members fighting for democratic reforms in the union in the 1960s of being 'communists' and 'breakaway trade unionists' (Hemmingway, 1978: 72). The stigma attached to the term also explains why many unions created out of a split from an existing union refute any allegation that they are a breakaway union. Leaders of the Offshore Industry Liaison Committee, set up following a union breakaway among North Sea oil rig workers in 1989, rejected the label on the grounds that it 'did not seek to adopt a pro-employer stance' (Woolfson, Foster and Beck, 1997: 498).

In contrast to the pejorative view of breakaway unions expressed by the TUC and its affiliated unions, academic debate on the subject frames these unions in a more positive light. Concern is centred on matters intrinsic to the union, posited either in a debate around the competing interests of democracy and bureaucracy, or perceived inadequate representation by the national union (Lane and Roberts, 1971; Woolfson, Foster and Beck, 1997). But although anecdotal evidence can be found to support such views, locating the emergence of breakaway unions solely within the parameters of a union's internal processes makes insufficient reference to broader external forces which can encourage division among union members. A fuller understanding of breakaway unions requires a more encompassing analytical framework which enables each example to be viewed in its historical and structural context, and builds from a theoretical understanding of trade unionism.

A socio-economic theory of unions

Trade unions are reflective and responsive organisations which are 'inseparable from the society in which they are created and recreated' (McIlroy, 1995: 2). It follows that as society evolves, the landscape trade unions inhabit changes and the pressures and influences on unions are manifested in different ways.

Therefore, any theory of trade-union organisation cannot be divorced from the dynamic economic, legal and political environments in which unions are embedded (Musson, 1974: 1). As Gramsci put it, 'the trade union is not a predetermined phenomenon. It becomes a determinate institution; it takes on a definite historical form to the extent that the strength and will of the workers who are its members impress a policy and propose an aim that define it' (Gramsci, 1977: 265). Unions act as barometers of the political and economic climate and reflect the shifting spheres of influence between employers and employees and between different groups of workers. They are shaped by the cultural forces around them to the extent that even the norms and customs of their actions are allied to expectations of behaviour imported from wider society (Sisson, 2008: 29). Thus, precedent set by the creation of a breakaway union in one historical epoch is inadequate as an explanatory model for the emergence of other breakaways in different times and contexts. There needs to be a more historically contingent approach which aligns such developments with the dynamics and structural influences on trade-union action.

Although Turner's (1962: 14) assertion that trade unions are 'repositories of history' overplays the influence of the past over the present, a fuller comprehension of trade unionism cannot be attained except against the backdrop of its origin and historical development. Unions emerged at a particular time and place for a particular reason. They were pre-dated by different forms of labour organisation and representation, such as workers' guilds and journeymen's associations, and therefore need to be viewed from a broader, evolutionary viewpoint. As Coates has pointed out, labour is a perennial presence in the human story, but the way it is structured, organised and represented reflects a particular epoch of economic development (Coates, 2007: 16). It was no accident that trade unionism was born in the postpartum period of capitalism. There is something about the social relations inherent in the capitalist mode of production and exchange which produces this form of organisational response from workers. In this sense, the rise of trade unionism can be seen as part of the normal expansion of capitalism (Cliff and Gluckstein, 1986: 33).

While there had always been a social division of labour in previous modes of production, capitalism effectively drove a wedge between the interests of employers and employees, and made it a more antagonistic relationship. This inherent conflict of interest between capital and labour is rooted in the profit motive, which is the lifeblood and defining force behind capitalist enterprise. The system is underpinned by divorcing one section of the population, the 'working class', from ownership of the means of production, forcing those without sufficient capital of their own to compete in a labour market to sell their capacity to work. Therefore, the employment relationship is, on one level, a market relationship governed by the demand for and supply of labour,

in its various forms. However, the process of exchange becomes political in the sense that it is set against the background of relative power relations (Hyman, 1989: 20). It is the asymmetry in the balance of power between capital and labour that provides trade unionism with its raison d'être, which is to combine workers into a unified force in order to render the power relations between employers and employees more equal (Kelly and Waddington, 1995: 422).

Trade unions in pre-industrial capitalism were exclusive organisations focused on preserving the elevated status of skilled workers in recognised trades. The power and influence of these local combinations came from monopolising access to requisite skills and their close proximity to the production process. But industrialisation and the consequent changes in the nature of work and the structure of labour markets greatly challenged and undermined the power base of these early unions. The diminution in their economic and organisational strength encouraged many to begin recruiting from a much broader constituency, amalgamating with other unions on a national basis and taking into membership previously unorganised groups of lesser-skilled workers. But industrial capitalism also heralded the emergence of new 'general unions', attempting to create a mass-based membership, using their collective strength to push for political reforms in the interests of working people, regardless of their professional status.

The Liberal hegemony which had prevailed over the trade unions almost since their inception was permeated by socialist ideas within which unions were perceived as part of a labour movement, carrying the potential to transcend the level of the workplace and challenge established power structures in society. Inspired by the ideas behind the French Revolution (1789–1799), and in the midst of the 'Long Depression' (1873–1896), unions began to be seen in the context of class conflict, fighting for the emancipation of labour from an exploitative system of production and economic exchange, and building on traditions of radical social movements, such as Owenism and Chartism (see Siméon's chapter in this volume). Engels enthused that these new unions were 'taking the lead of the working-class movement' and 'taking in tow the rich and proud old unions' (Engels, 1892: xix).

This broader-based 'new unionism', as it became known from the 1880s, and the political ideals it represented, contrasted markedly with the more exclusive, professional ethos of craft unionism. However, unlike developments in other national labour movements, trade unions in England and Wales[3] did not fragment into rival federations based on political affiliation. Opposing traditions and ideologies were absorbed, in diluted form, and brought under the mantel of a single trade-union confederation with the creation of the TUC in 1868. Alongside this, following the extension of male suffrage in 1867, the creation of the unions' own political party at the turn of the twentieth century to represent their interests in Parliament, segregated the political from the

industrial goals of the labour movement, setting in train a more reformist political outlook.

The dichotomy of trade unionism

The coexistence of the notion of social movement within organisations concerned with providing an economic service to their members in sections of the labour force, created a structural tension within trade unionism which has underlain its evolution and development since the epoch of industrial capitalism. In this contested terrain the ideological pathway steered by a union takes it broadly into one of two camps. The first focuses on the more immediate, vested interests of the membership seen at the level of the company, trade and industry. Unions in this model are sectional interest, professional associations in which broader political issues are considered a matter for the individual. This more business-like, service-based orientation contrasts with an alternative vision of organised labour which is cast in a wider political context and viewed alongside the antagonistic relationship between capital and labour. Within this framework unions are perceived as part of a social and historical movement defending workers' interests and wielding what Flanders labelled the 'sword of justice' (Flanders, 1975: 15), acting as a force for a more equitable and democratic society and as a vehicle for social recognition.

Which side of this political pendulum a union swings is the result of internal power struggles, framed in political and ideological differences and influenced by legacy and tradition. It also carries implications for underlying issues of union identity, purpose and organisational structure (Connolly, 2012: 132). As agents of wider social and political change unions require a mobilised and engaged membership. This, in turn, requires a more transparent and transformative form of leadership, helping to generate a greater collective consciousness. Such developments run against the grain of a model of trade unionism based around notions of representativeness and bureaucratic efficiency, in which a passive rank-and-file is served by a more transactional style of leadership (Cregan, Bartram and Stanton, 2009: 705).

The balance of power between these rival camps within a union is tied to wider socio-economic and political conditions (Clements, 1977: 328). A recurring pattern can be identified in which, during periods of sustained economic growth, associated with favourable labour market conditions and greater employer cooperation, there is a tendency within unions towards short-term economic goals (Bacharach, Bamberger and Sonnenstuhl, 2001: 815). Idealistic tendencies become submerged under a reinforced instrumental rationality which finds organisational expression through more service-based models of unionism. In such a climate any breakaways that emerge are more likely to be generated by immediate economic concerns in which one section of the union feels it is not getting as good a deal as other sections, and new members

are sought on the premise of being able to extract greater concessions from the employer.

Conversely, in periods of economic downturn, amid employer concerns over reduced profits, the wedge between the interests of employers and employees becomes more evident. This fosters a more hostile approach to unions that try to block policies aimed at restoring profit levels by devaluing their members' terms and conditions of employment. These confrontations become the loci of heated ideological battles, as union leaders try to close ranks against these attacks and forge a greater solidarity and 'them and us' attitude among their members. Such a harsh economic climate is not conducive to a form of unionism whose primary role is to obtain tangible benefits for its members (Marathe and Balasubramanian, 2013: 664). Therefore, within this more defensive mode, any breakaways that emerge are less likely to appeal for new members on this basis. This has been evident since the 1980s, under a neoliberal regime of capital accumulation, accompanied by an ideological onslaught against 'militant' unions. In this climate, breakaways generally justify their actions citing political differences and promote a more 'responsible' and employer-friendly approach. However, it should also be realised that the impact of economic recession is never applied uniformly across all groups of workers. This heterogeneity in the objective situation of different groups of employees can inform subjective interpretations and attributions, which may generate division between working people (Offe, 1985: 154).

The organisational dynamic within unions

There is a further component to the emergence of breakaway unions, and to comprehend this requires making the distinction between unions as organisations and the combination of workers they are set up to represent, something Ross (1947: 568) described as 'the beginning of wisdom in the study of industrial relations'. It is not contended here that trade unions are stand-alone organisations. As Hyman and Fryer argue, to view them in that way would reduce any analysis of trade unionism to one of problems of administration and control (1975: 171). But it should be acknowledged that trade unions have institutional needs and develop ambitions distinct from those of their rank-and-file members, and this can influence the agreements they enter into with employers.

Trade-union organisations consist of hierarchical structures containing positions of status and authority. Behind this bureaucratic veil lies a contested terrain consisting of various factional groups and constituencies of interest vying for control over the aims and direction of the union. It should also be recognised that, at this micro-political level, the driving force of human agency can be guided as much by the personal ambition of trade-union leaders as their belief in or ideological support for a particular model of trade

unionism. In addition to formal processes, informal relationships such as friendships, loyalties and enmities among union officials can all play a part in the policy and direction a union adopts (Blissett, 2013: 4). These feed into a complex array of social relations involving factions and pressure groups based around such variables as occupation, geography and political affiliation. The leaders of these various factional groupings may establish coalitions to consolidate their position within the union bureaucracy and this may encourage personal ambitions and careerist motivations distinct from any wider policy objectives. Within this context, union leaders are governed largely by their own survival needs and ambitions, and it is not unknown for trade-union leaders whose survival or ambition has been thwarted to attempt to 'wreck' the organisation in pursuit of personal advantage (Ross, 1947: 571). As in the example of the PSU cited above, many former officials of trade unions who have been removed from office or have been prevented from attaining their desired position in the union have been involved in setting up rival breakaway unions, perhaps viewing this as another opportunity to attain such positions of status and authority.

Shifting paradigms

Lerner's (1961) study of breakaway unions continues to be the seminal text on the subject, and one which has shaped academic debate on these unions for over half a century. Her historical and descriptive account is based on data from several case studies of breakaways which occurred between 1898 and 1949. Although Lerner's work provides some valuable insights into the potential causes and influences behind the emergence of particular breakaways, as with all such studies it has to be seen as reflective of the era in which it was written. The economic and political circumstances prevalent at the time Lerner was carrying out her research differ significantly from the situation post-1980, and therefore many of the assumptions underpinning her work need to be revisited.

The so-called 'golden age' of capitalism in the 1950s and 1960s was characterised by strong and sustained economic growth, providing the material basis for a social democratic ideology which underpinned a political consensus across all major parties. Trade-union leaders were brought into the structures of economic management and accepted as an institutional component of the industrial relations system, performing a 'bureaucratic conservative' function, serving to pacify rank-and-file militancy (Mannheim, 1960: 105). Industrial relations during this period was synonymous with a pluralist 'frame of reference' (Fox, 1966) which appeared tailored to fit the voluntarist, pragmatic and immediate problem-solving approach and gelled with the needs of public policy. However, the seams of this approach began to come apart as the economic conditions worsened. The consequent restructuring of the economy

threw established social relations into flux and social and economic antagonisms sharpened (Hyman, 1989: 87). This process accelerated with the election of a Conservative government in 1979 intent on deregulating markets and suppressing the power and influence of organised labour in an effort to lift the economy onto a higher pathway of capital accumulation. Underlying anti-union attitudes held by many employers were given opportunities for expression and managerial prerogative began to be reasserted through a more direct unitary approach to managing employees, or 'human resources' as they are sometimes referred to in academic literature.

These changes in the structural trends within society since the 1980s require some remapping of the environment which trade unions inhabit which need to take account of shifting reference points (Sisson, 2007: 27). But the functionalist roots of the pluralist approach, which informed Lerner's analysis, render it conceptually and theoretically ill-equipped to accommodate the economic and political restructuring of this period and the shifts in capital–labour relations which accompanied it. Pluralism's focus on the subsystem level of institutional relations obscures its analytical vision of developments in the larger system of which they are a part. In Tawney's analogy, it is 'more interested in the state of the roads than their place on the map' (1920: 1). There is a need, as Fox (1974) observed in a later version of his thesis, for a more radical frame of reference, which can provide greater insight into the broader dynamics which shape the institutional arrangements governing the employment relationship within capitalist society and the role of unions within it.

'Non-political' breakaway unions

The politically turbulent years of the early 1980s witnessed an increase in the incidence of breakaway unions (McIlroy, 1983: 14). Although the developments which triggered these splits and secessions were meshed in circumstances specific to each union's internal governance, there were some similarities between them. They generally took place among unions in the public sector and invariably emerged in the wake of industrial action to which the members breaking away from the union had been actively opposed. Also, on an ideological level, they all marched behind a 'non-political' clarion call and argued that the union they were leaving had been taken over by politically motivated cliques using the union to further their own narrow left-wing agenda.

Discussion around these unions was sometimes posited in the relationship between 'professionalism' and 'militancy' and asserted that unions with political aims are incompatible with the maintenance of professional standards (Bryant and Leicester, 1991). In this way, the notion of professionalism becomes conflated with 'responsible' trade unionism, which can be contrasted against 'irresponsible' militant unionism (Bright, 1981: 28). This perspective was

reflected in the names of some of these breakaway unions, such as the Association of Professional Ambulance Personnel, the Federation of Professional Railway Staff (FPRS) and the Professional Association of Nursery Nurses. In addition, many received advice and support from the Professional Association of Teachers (PAT; called Voice since 2008), a union set up in 1970 by former members of recognised teaching unions, such as the NUT and NAS/UWT (on the relationship between English teaching unions today, see Beauvallet in this volume). And, towards the end of the decade, many unions formed out of breakaways merged into the Federation of Professional Associations, a section of the EETPU.

But the view that unions should confine their activities to economic concerns carries an ideological connotation which informs a political point of view about the 'proper' role of trade unions (Fox, 1974: 150). As Dickens (1975: 6) contends, what is really meant by 'political' in this context is 'partisan' and in particular a concern about partisanship towards the Labour Party. She adds that it is generally the case that the political affiliations of leaders or supporters of 'non-political' unions are with the Conservative Party. This would appear to be borne out in the example of the 'non-political' breakaways of the 1980s whose ideological stance strongly echoed that of the incumbent Conservative government, led by Margaret Thatcher. Much political capital had been gained by the Conservatives from the disruptive strikes and industrial militancy of the 1970s, and the view that union leaders had become 'too powerful and too political' had become common currency among the general public, including many trade unionists.

The symbiotic relationship between these breakaway unions and the government suggests that they need to be viewed in a wider context than the activities of a few disenchanted union members. Dorey's (1990) work on the relationship between the Conservative Party and the trade unions leading up to its election in 1979 offers some insight. Of particular relevance is the cultivation of the Conservative Trade Unionists (CTU) organisation (Dorey, 1990: 218–19). This was 're-activated' in 1974 following the electoral defeat of the previous Conservative government, which was blamed largely on the trade unions and in particular the National Union of Mineworkers (NUM). The aim of the organisation was to encourage more Conservative Party voters to become involved in their trade unions in order to 'democratise' and 'depoliticise' them, as summed up in this quote from a speech to the CTU given by Margaret Thatcher in 1975:

> It is that very reasonableness and moderation of the majority, coupled sometimes with lack of action, which allows determined, fanatical, minority groups to manipulate events, not for the good of the unions or their members, nor of the community as a whole—but in the interests of extreme political cults. It is not just for the benefit of this Party—it is for the benefit of the trades union

> movement and of the whole country, that those of reason and moderation should be as active and determined in union affairs as are the extremists. (Thatcher, 1975)

Hundreds of CTU groups were established in various unions across industries and public services (Tyler, 1976: 1). These served as conduits between the party and sympathetic union members, providing them with ideological and material support. In this way this policy can be seen as laying the foundations for many of the splits and dissensions among trade unionists that were to materialise in the 1980s and beyond.

Following its election in 1979, the Conservative government exerted its influence on public sector employers to concede bargaining rights to some of these moderate breakaway unions. Consequently a number were recognised for collective bargaining, including the Ministry of Defence Staff Association, set up in 1981 following industrial action by the Civil Service unions (McIlroy, 1983: 14). Also, the Union of Democratic Mineworkers (UDM), which broke away from the NUM following the protracted strike in the coal industry in 1984–1985, became recognised by the National Coal Board (later British Coal) as the representative union for its employees in the Nottinghamshire, and later South Derbyshire, coalfields. Given the vanguard role the miners' union had played historically in political struggles, breaking the power of the NUM was of symbolic as well as practical importance to the government. Breakaway unions played a part in its defeat, with members of the FPRS helping to keep coal trains moving throughout the dispute, and the leadership of the PAT was brought in later to help set up the UDM.

The government's championing of these more moderate, 'non-political' unions was aimed at fragmenting and weakening union opposition to its neoliberal reforms. But it was also a means of promoting a particular approach to trade unionism more in harmony with the economic liberalism which underpinned its political outlook. Within these redefined boundaries of legitimacy, unions were shorn of traditional collectivist values and ideologically detached from any notion of a solidaristic labour movement (McIlroy, 1995: 189). A quote from David Hart, who advised the Conservative government during the miners' strike, including the setting up of the breakaway UDM, is indicative of the thinking behind the encouragement given to these unions: 'if we could nudge a new and sensible union into being, a union that would generally cooperate with management rather than always insist on confronting it, it could set a precedent for other unions and for a general reform from within of the attitudes of union leaders throughout the economy' (Hart, 1992: 19).

The government's support for these unions was also drawn from their perceived value as an information resource on trade-union reform. Informed by the lessons learned from the miners' strike, and the need to close potential loopholes in extant employment law, the government was keen to introduce

further legislation covering trade-union organisation and the rights of individual trade-members (McKendrick, 1988: 141). To this end the leaders of some of the non-political breakaway unions were contacted by government officials and asked to draw up a Code of Practice on individual employment rights for consideration by the Department of Employment (Bassett, 1986). There is evidence to suggest that meetings were held to discuss their suggestions, and that some were incorporated into the Employment Act 1988. These included a clause outlawing attempts to 'unjustifiably discipline' members for failure to take part in or support official industrial action, which became familiarly known in union circles as 'the scab's charter'.

But breakaway unions of the 'non-political' variety were not just a creation of the Thatcher years. A similar spate of such breakaways emerged in the wake of the General Strike in 1926, most notably the so-called 'Spencer Union' in the Nottinghamshire coalfield, led by Labour Member of Parliament, George Spencer. Whether these unions can legitimately be regarded as breakaway unions or as 'yellow unions' reliant on employer support has been a topic of debate (Smith, 1978). But the fact that they were fostered, to varying degrees, by different employers whose commercial interests did not necessarily coincide suggests that they were part of a bigger picture and need to be viewed alongside wider socio-economic and class relations (Griffin, 1978: 13).

Many comparisons can be made between the economic and political circumstances of the late 1920s and the early 1980s, and the fact that both periods threw up this particular type of breakaway union warrants further investigation. Each episode coincided with a period of economic downturn and trade-union militancy. As the economic pressures became more pronounced the disputes took a more political slant, reaching their respective tipping points in the General Strike of 1926 and the 'Winter of Discontent' in 1978–1979. Both ended in defeat for the unions and were followed by a 'counter mobilization' (Kelly, 1998: 86) by forces hostile to trade unions, taking advantage of the relative weakness of organised labour to redraw the frontier of control in favour of employers and to take back many of the concessions gained by unions in the preceding years. The changes in the economic and political environment, which saw the balance in class forces altered and unions' ability to organise severely circumscribed, led to a general move by unions to a more moderate, employer-friendly approach, exemplified in the 'Mond–Turner' talks in the late 1920s and the 'New Realist' initiatives from the 1980s. The 'non-political' breakaway unions emerged at the cusp of this transition. As Gramsci observed of such situations: 'The crisis consists precisely in the fact that the old is dying and the new cannot be born; in this interregnum a great variety of morbid symptoms appear' (Gramsci, 1971: 275–6).

Non-political trade unionism is a subjective concept which resonates between some trade unionists in varying intensity over time. In this sense, breakaway unions whose ideological justification is premised on opposition to

the political activities of trade unions, such as those that transpired in the 1920s and 1980s, need to be viewed through a historically contingent lens accommodating the wider structural forces which can foster such division. But, as highlighted earlier, given the inter-relationship between economic and political developments, pure non-political unionism is not possible, even if employers and politicians, and some union leaders, wish it could be (Crouch, 1979: 169). It is the ideological content inherent within that model of unionism and its potential to encourage a more moderate form of trade unionism that arouses the interest of employers and governments.

Conclusion

The two faces of trade unionism – social movement and vested interest – are evident in the different manifestations of breakaway unions. The relative power relations between parties espousing these competing approaches are entwined with their economic and political environment. Periods of sustained economic growth foster a more instrumental affiliation between workers and their union, which is reflected in the kind of splits and breakaways that emerge. However, during such times breakaways generally find themselves out of sympathy with employers and governments as they are perceived as a threat to the stability of industrial relations, and consequently to the accumulation of capital. The position is reversed during periods of economic recession, when trade unions and the living standards of their members come under attack. This encourages a more collective affiliation between members and their union, and a more open and transformative form of union leadership. During such periods unions are confronted by powerful ideological forces, encouraging division within their ranks, and the breakaways that emerge give voice to more 'moderate' viewpoints, sometimes couched in a 'non-political' narrative.

The pluralist approach which coloured Lerner's portrayal of breakaway unions and has subsequently framed academic debate on the subject can accommodate some of the breakaways generated by sectional interest or matters intrinsic to a union's organisational governance. However, its theoretical architecture was designed for a different historical and structural context and cannot account adequately for breakaways generated and sustained by wider extrinsic forces, of the kind that emerged in the more politically turbulent years of the late 1920s and early 1980s. The intra-union conflict and fragmentation manifested in these 'non-political' breakaways need to be seen within the broader macro-level contours of economic and political development, which fall outside of pluralism's analytical focus.

Any analysis of breakaway unions also needs to understand the institutional concerns and ambitions of trade unions, and trade-union officials, which at times may run counter to the interests of their members. Employer recognition is key to a union's financial and organisational well-being and the pursuit or

maintenance of recognised status is paramount. This can lead to a frustration and potential breakaway by members who perceive that their union is not doing enough for them and that their interests would be better served outside of the established structures of representation. Also within this organisational context, a key driver in the setting up of many breakaway unions has been the thwarted careerist aspiration or ambition of union representatives. It is not unknown for some former union officials to encourage members' disenchantment with their union for their own personal advantage.

Therefore the conclusion can be made that a breakaway union is a complex and malleable concept that changes its shape and appearance according to the circumstances and political forces around it. The emergence of such bodies is compositional of different motivations and interests, generated by various structural influences and by human agency. Although not mutually exclusive, these fall broadly into one of three categories, in varying degrees. The first can be seen as a reaction against developments intrinsic to the union, and is motivated primarily by sectional interest. The second is a reaction against extrinsic developments, motivated or guided by ideological differences tied to external forces. The third category of breakaway can be seen in an organisational context, as a response to actions taken by a union in furtherance of its own institutional ambition, or motivated by the entrepreneurial ambition of union representatives. These categories should be considered ideal types, as generally they will be an admixture of two of the three key drivers. But ultimately, each breakaway union needs to be understood in its own structural and historical context and from the social relations in which its leaders are engaged.

The phenomenon of breakaway unions remains a relatively unexplored area of trade unionism. This chapter has highlighted the link between the economic and political environment and the emergence of these unions, and has stressed the need to understand breakaways within this broader totality. It has been viewed exclusively from a British context although it is recognised that such developments differ significantly within the institutional structures and practices of other national settings. However, it continues to be a fruitful area for future research and shines a light on aspects of union organisation which are seldom exposed to scrutiny.

Notes

1 A custom and practice common in the teaching profession in which a woman's employment was terminated on her marriage.
2 Categorised by the International Labour Organization (1949) as 'workers' organisations under the domination of employers or employers' organisations'.
3 A separate union confederation was set up for Scotland in 1897, due to constitutional/political issues, but this was never in competition with the TUC and a close working relationship prevailed between the two bodies.

References

Bacharach, S., Bamberger, P. and Sonnenstuhl, W. (2001) *Mutual Aid and Union Renewal: Cycles of Logics of Action*, Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.

Bassett, P. (1986) 'Breakaway Unions Asked to Compile Employee Code', *Financial Times*, 13 August.

Blissett, E. (2013) 'Inside the Unions: A Comparative Analysis of Policy-Making in Australian and British Printing and Telecommunication Trade Unions', PhD thesis, Cardiff University.

Bright, D. (1981) 'The Early Years of a Breakaway Union: The APT and the Polytechnic Lecturers', *Industrial Relations Journal*, 12:6, pp. 20–33.

Bryant, R. V. and Leicester, C. R. (1991) *The Professional Association of Teachers: The Early Years*, London: Buckland Publications Limited.

Clark, I. (2016) 'Financialisation, Ownership and Employee Interests under Private Equity at the AA, Part Two', *Industrial Relations Journal*, 47:3, pp. 238–52.

Clements, L. (1977) 'Reference Groups and Trade Union Consciousness', in Clarke, T. and Clements, L. (eds) *Trade Unions under Capitalism*, Glasgow: Fontana, pp. 309–32.

Cliff, T. and Gluckstein, D. (1986) *Marxism and Trade Union Struggle*, London: Bookmarks.

Coates, D. (2007) 'Hard Labour? The Future of Work and the Role of Public Policy', in Hassan, G. (ed.) *After Blair: Politics after the New Labour Decade*, London: Lawrence & Wishart.

Connolly, H. (2012) 'Union Renewal in France and Hyman's Universal Dualism', *Capital and Class*, 36:1, pp. 117–34.

Cregan, C., Bartram, T. and Stanton, P. (2009) 'Union Organizing as a Mobilizing Strategy: The Impact of Social Identity and Transformational Leadership on the Collectivism of Union Members', *British Journal of Industrial Relations*, 47:4, pp. 701–22.

Crouch, C. (1979) *The Politics of Industrial Relations*, Glasgow: Fontana.

Dawtrey, E., Holland, J., Hammer, M. and Sheldon, S. (1995) *Equality and Inequality in Education Policy (Equality and Difference: Gender Issues in Education)*, Buckingham: Open University Press/Multilingual Matters.

Dickens, L. (1975) 'Staff Associations and the Industrial Relations Act: The Effect on Union Growth', *Industrial Relations Journal*, 6:3, pp. 29–41.

Dorey, P. (1990) 'Dissent and Disagreement in the Conservative Party over the Issue of Trade Union and Industrial Relations Reform, 1960–1984', unpublished PhD thesis, University of Hull.

Engels, F. (1892) 'Condition of the Working Class', reproduced in Larson, S. and Nissen, B. (eds) (1987) *Theories of the Labor Movement*, Detroit: Wayne State University Press.

Evans, D. and Cohen, C. (2009) *The Everlasting Staircase: A History of the Prison Officers' Association 1939–2009*, London: Pluto Press.

Flanders, A. (1975) *Management and Unions: The Theory and Reform of Industrial Relations*, London: Faber & Faber.

Fox, A. (1966) *Industrial Sociology and Industrial Relations*, London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office.

Fox, A. (1974) *Beyond Contract: Power, Work and Trust Relations*, London: Faber & Faber.

Gramsci, A. (1971) *Selections from Prison Notebooks*, New York: International Publishers.

Gramsci, A. (1977) 'Unions and Councils', *Selections from Political Writings 1910–1920*, London: Lawrence & Wishart.

Griffin, A. R. (1978) 'Non-political or Company Unionism?', *Bulletin – Society for the Study of Labour History*, Autumn, p. 13.

Hart, D. (1992) 'Lions Betrayed By Donkeys', *Spectator*, October, p. 9.

Hemmingway, J. (1978) *Conflict and Democracy: Studies in Trade Union Government*, Oxford: Clarendon Press.
Hinton, J. (1983) *Labour and Socialism: A History of the British Labour Movement 1867–1974*, Brighton: Wheatsheaf Books Limited.
Hyman, R. (1989) *The Political Economy of Industrial Relations: Theory and Practice in a Cold Climate*, London: Macmillan Press.
Hyman, R. and Fryer, B. (1975) 'Trade Unions – Sociology and Political Economy', in McKinlay, J. (ed.) *Processing People: Cases in Organizational Behaviour*, London: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, pp. 150–213.
International Labour Organization (1949) 'CO98 – Right to Organise and Collective Bargaining Convention' (No. 98), article 2, pt. 2.
Kelly, J. (1998) *Rethinking Industrial Relations: Mobilisation, Collectivism and Long Waves*, London: Routledge Studies in Employment Relations.
Kelly, J. and Waddington, J. (1995) 'New Prospects for British Labour', *Organization*, 2:3, pp. 415–26.
Lane, T. and Roberts, K. (1971) *Strike at Pilkingtons*, London: Fontana.
Lerner, S. (1961) *Breakaway Unions and the Small Trade Union*, London: George Allen & Unwin.
Mannheim, K. (1960) *Ideology and Utopia*, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.
Marathe, G. and Balasubramanian, G. (2013) 'Two Pathways of Union Membership for Participation', *Indian Journal of Industrial Relations*, 47:4, pp. 663–78.
McIlroy, J. (1983) 'Chips off the block', *New Statesman*, April, p. 14.
McIlroy, J. (1995) *Trade Unions in Britain Today*, Manchester: Manchester University Press.
McKendrick, E. (1988) 'The Rights of Trade Union Members – Part 1 of the Employment Act 1988', *Industrial Law Journal*, 17, pp. 141–61.
Miller, J. (2006) '"We still don't want to frighten the horses": Lessons from the 1975 Stable Lads' Strike', paper presented at the European Social Science History conference, Amsterdam, 1 March.
Milne-Bailey, W. (1934) *Trade Unions and the State*, London: Allen & Unwin.
Musson, A. E. (1974) *Trade Union and Social Studies*, Oxon: Routledge.
Offe, C. (1985) 'Interest Diversity and Trade Union Unity', in Offe, C. (ed.) *Disorganized Capitalism: Contemporary Transformations of Work and Politics (Social and Political Theory)*, Cambridge: Polity Press.
Owen, P. (1988) '"Who would be free, herself must strike the blow": The National Union of Women Teachers, Equal Pay and Women within the Teaching Profession', *History of Education*, 17:1, pp. 88–99.
Ross, A. (1947) 'The Trade Union as a Wage-Fixing Institution', *American Economic Review*, 37:4, pp. 566–88.
Shaw, M. (2011) '100 Years of Unions', *Times Educational Supplement*, May.
Sisson, K. (2007) 'Revitalising Industrial Relations: Making the Most of the "Institutional Turn"', *Warwick Papers in Industrial Relations*, July, 85.
Sisson, K. (2008) 'Putting the Record Straight: Industrial Relations and the Employment Relationship', *Warwick Papers in Industrial Relations*, April, 88.
Smith, D. (1978) 'Non-political or Company Unionism?', *Bulletin – Society for the Study of Labour History*, 36, Spring, pp. 22–3.
Tawney, R. (1920) *Acquisitive Society*, New York: Harcourt, Brace & Company.
Temple, R. (2006) 'A Union for Busmen! The National Busworkers' Association, 1950–1955', *Labour History Review*, 71:3, p. 235.
Thatcher, M. (1975) Speech to Conservative Trade Unionists Conference, 3 March 1975. Available at: Margaret Thatcher Foundation website, www.margaretthatcher.org. Accessed 26 May 2014.

Turner, H. A. (1962) *Trade Union Growth, Structure and Policy: A Comparative Study of the Cotton Unions*, London: Allen & Unwin.

Tyler, C. (1976) 'Tory Plan for a Network of Activists in Trade Unions', *Financial Times*, 29 March.

Woolfson, C., Foster, J. and Beck, M. (1997) *Paying for the Piper: Capital and Labour in Britain's Offshore Oil Industry* (Routledge Studies in Employment and Work Relations in Context Series), Warwick University: Mansell.

10

English teachers' unions since 2010: 'a teachers' lobby divided against itself'?[1]

Anne Beauvallet

Introduction

Teaching unions in England[2] today present a range of features which makes them an interesting case to include in the study of labour unity and division presented in this volume. A first distinctive feature is that the teaching profession in England is not represented by one single union, but by a variety of unions whose objectives and means of action often come into conflict. A second very interesting feature is that, although trade-union density in state schools has followed the general decline observed in the wider British labour movement (Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, 2016: 32), compared with other sectors, the teachers' unions' membership rates are still remarkably high. Indeed, a 2013 survey carried out by the National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER) showed that 97 per cent of respondents belonged to a union, with 67 per cent belonging to the National Union of Teachers (NUT) or the National Association of Schoolmasters Union of Women Teachers (NASUWT) (Ager and Pyle, 2013: 6). In addition to these, the Association of Teachers and Lecturers (ATL) and Voice – an independent union whose cardinal rule states that its members 'shall not go on strike in any circumstances' (Voice, 2017) – are respectively the third- and fourth-largest organisations (Certification Officer, 2014). Such high membership rates can be essentially accounted for by the support teaching unions offer if there is 'a problem at work' (Ager and Pyle, 2013: 8) as well as by the provision of key services such as legal protection and financial services.

Another remarkable feature of teachers' unions is that their demands have changed very little over the past decades, regardless of the deep transformations

the English education system has undergone. Howard Stevenson, for example, has analysed the 'workforce remodeling' experienced by teachers, which has resulted in 'de-skilling', 'intensification' and 'substitutability', longer working hours and the rising numbers of teaching assistants (Stevenson, 2007: 235). Yet, while Norman Morris highlighted in the 1960s that the aims of the NUT were 'to improve the standing of teachers in the community', 'to obtain salaries and conditions of service which will enable teachers to enjoy a professional standard of life', 'to unite the teaching profession' and 'to establish teaching as a self-governing profession' (Morris, 1969: 49), the NUT's webpage dedicated to the union's campaigns in January 2016 focused on the comparable themes of 'workload', 'pay' and 'professional unity', as well as on more topical issues such as free schools, academies or primary assessment (NUT, 2016b). Such continuity in goals in a period of upheaval needs to be assessed in terms of the efficiency of teachers' unions' means of action.

This chapter therefore proposes to examine the reasons for the paradoxical resilience of teachers' unions, more specifically since the end of the New Labour years, when a new framework was put in place with the Conservatives returning to power and the Labour Party to opposition. What does the analysis of the three largest teachers' unions in England – the NUT, the NASUWT and the ATL – since 2010 reveal regarding inter-organisational tensions in the wider labour movement? Such tensions will be examined first from the perspective of the relationship of these three unions with the Labour Party, and then, crucially, from that of the interactions of these unions with each other in terms of activism and policies. The two sections of the analysis will be underpinned by the four issues which are central to the profession as they affect its work directly: pay, pensions and working conditions; inspections; the curriculum and tests; and school reforms. The academic literature on teachers' unions in the time frame covered in this chapter being rather limited, the analysis will be mainly based on official documents produced by teachers' unions themselves, the Labour Party and the government, as well as a selection of newspaper articles which offer, at a first level, illustrations of both the short- and long-term trends under study and, at a second level, an idea of the debates between the range of actors involved as they have been expressed in the public eye via the media.

The NUT, the NASUWT, the ATL and their relations with the Labour Party

Before turning to the relations of the three largest teachers' unions with the Labour Party, their respective approaches to politics and political activism must be briefly outlined (for a more detailed account of the origin and growth of English teachers' unions see Beauvallet, 2014). The NUT was founded in June 1870. In 1919, some NUT members formed the National Association of Men

Teachers, which became the National Association of Schoolmasters in 1920. In 1922, the National Association of Schoolmasters seceded from the NUT to become an independent union. In 1976, it merged with the Union of Women Teachers to form the NAS/UWT, later to be called the NASUWT. The Association of Assistant Mistresses (AAM) and the Assistant Masters' Association (AMA) worked together with two other unions (the Association of Head Mistresses and the Incorporated Association of Head Masters), and together they were known as the Joint Four until the AAM and AMA merged in 1978. The Assistant Masters and Mistresses Association became the Association of Teachers and Lecturers in 1993. ATL's membership is thus different from those of the NUT and the NASUWT as it comprises grammar and independent school teachers. The ATL has steered clear of parties, and this appears explicitly in its constitution, as the fourth and last 'object' of the union is 'to affirm the independence of the Association from any political party' (ATL, 2014: 3). Thus, contrary to the NASUWT and the NUT, the ATL is not directly involved in politics and does not have a political fund, which may well change as it is about to merge with the NUT.

The NUT has long and strong links with the left in Britain. In *Teacher Militancy: A History of Teacher Strikes 1896–1987*, Seifert points out the communist influence and the activities of far-left groups such as Rank and File in the 1970s (Seifert, 1987: 4). More recently, the 2012 NUT conference witnessed the foundation of the Local Associations National Action Campaign (LANAC) through members of the Socialist Party and of the Alliance for Workers' Liberty (AWL) 'in response to the failure to maintain national strike action to defend pensions', in the words of Martin Powell-Davies, a teacher, NUT activist and socialist blogger (2013). The AWL is a Trotskyite group which has been active in Britain since the mid-1960s and whose confrontational tactics have been inseparable from LANAC's strategy. President of Wandsworth NUT Andy Stone published an article about the 2015 NUT conference on the *Revolutionary Socialism in the 21st Century* website (*RS21*), thus describing LANAC's impact on the two key issues of workload and school funding: 'In each case LANAC called for escalating strike action, found an echo with speeches that criticised the leadership, and received around forty per cent of votes' (Stone, 2015). Although such policies did not carry the day, they cannot be dismissed lightly as they show LANAC's influence within the NUT.

Contrary to the ATL, which has avoided ties with political parties, the NUT and the NASUWT have long been involved with the Labour Party. This has not taken place through the Trade Union and Labour Party Liaison Organisation (TULO), which has acted since 1994 as the formal channel of communication between the Labour Party and trade unions directly affiliated to the party (previous incarnations of TULO only gathered union support at election time). Those links have relied on fringe meetings at the annual

conference, such as the one organised by the NASUWT in 2016 (NASUWT, 2016b); on submissions to the National Policy Forum like that of the NUT in 2016 (Labour Party, 2016a); and on 'financial support' – for example the help the NUT gave to Compass, a left-wing pressure group which has worked closely with Labour since 2003, in its 2015 *Inquiry into a New System of Education* (Compass, 2015: 5). This ideological proximity was reflected in a 2014 YouGov poll for the NUT which showed that just 12 per cent of its members would vote Conservative in a general election, compared with 43 per cent for Labour.[3]

To fully understand the current relations of the largest teachers' unions with the Labour Party, it is vital to look at the attitudes they adopted while Labour was in office from 1997 to 2010. New Labour advocated a very different education policy from what the party had promoted in the 1980s, as was made clear in 1995 with the publication of *Excellence and Diversity: Labour's Crusade to Raise Standards*. New Labour's Social Partnership, which was set up in 2003, signalled a different tack for government policy decision-making, with regular negotiations instead of strife. It was based on a national agreement which the ATL and the NASUWT (among others) agreed to sign, contrary to the NUT which refused to endorse it. In their 2010 study on *Industrial Relations in Education*, Bob Carter, Howard Stevenson and Rowena Passy contrast unions' strategies of 'rapprochement' (ATL and NASUWT) or 'resistance' (NUT) and conclude that both attitudes only managed to secure 'marginal gains' (Carter, Stevenson and Passy, 2010: 64). The Social Partnership, whether it was genuinely beneficial to teachers or not, was phased out in 2010 by the Conservative–Liberal Democrat coalition government, which turned it into an ineffectual Education Partnership with vague terms of reference (Barker, 2010).

When it comes to assessing teacher unions' attitudes to the Labour Party in the context of the 2015 general election, the manifesto is a useful source to turn to. Although the manifesto does not reflect the party's diversity of opinions, it is indeed crucial, as it puts forward the party's official message, from which unions' grassroots members will take their cues. During the campaign, the NUT and the ATL issued their own manifestos (ATL's *Education Matters* and NUT's *Stand up for Education: A Manifesto for Our Children's Education*), unlike the NASUWT (which, however, campaigned on a number of themes through its website, social media and letters to teachers and the public). Comparing the unions' demands on the four key issues identified in the introduction (pay, pensions and working conditions; inspections; curriculum and tests; school reforms) to the proposals put forward in the Labour Party manifesto yields revealing gaps. Indeed, the 2015 Labour manifesto, *Britain Can Be Better*, made no mention of teachers' pay, pensions or working conditions. It offered nothing on the curriculum, tests, private sector involvement or academies. The only point which might have pleased the three main

teaching unions was the promise to 'end' free schools (Labour Party, 2015: 51). In April 2015, *The Guardian*'s education editor Richard Adams asked the question: 'Teachers Don't Like the Tories – So Why Isn't Labour Benefiting?' (Adams, 2015a). The answer lies in a Labour manifesto which took little notice of the largest teaching unions' demands.

The election of left-winger Jeremy Corbyn as the new Labour leader in September 2015 could have been expected to usher in a new relationship with the main teachers' unions. As a candidate to the party leadership in July 2015, Corbyn denounced 'discouraging league tables' and advocated 'fewer tests' (Millar, 2015). Shadow Education Secretary Lucy Powell seemed to echo the complaints of teachers' unions in September 2015: 'The Conservatives … think teachers are a static workforce with nowhere else to go, so they can treat them badly, cut their pay, change the goalposts constantly over curriculum and exams' (Adams, 2015b). Yet, Lucy Powell's interview in *The Guardian* in December 2015 proved disappointing, at least for the NUT. Tests, for example, would be kept in place under a Labour government: 'the framework of testing has hugely improved standards over the past 20 years. My 11-year-old got a great deal out of working towards his Sats last year' (Wilby, 2015). In December 2015, the NUT publication *Privatisation Update: Academies, Free Schools and Privatisation Issues* noted that the shadow education secretary would not take part in an anti-academy campaign at the secondary school she attended (Parrs Wood High School in Manchester): 'Powell responded saying that, while the Government's focus on "academisation at all costs" was "wrong-headed", she respected Parrs Wood governors' decision to convert to academy status' (NUT, 2015b: 6).

In March 2016, Corbyn was the first Labour leader ever to address the NUT conference, but his speech, although it won him a standing ovation, did little to make Labour education policies clearer. He did condemn Conservative policies on academies, stating that 'George Osborne used the budget to announce the forced academisation of all schools. This is an ideological attack on teachers and on local and parental accountability' (Asthana and Adams, 2016). However, he failed to mention New Labour's legacy on academies, which did not help delineate his own stance on school diversification. The only education document issued by the party's National Policy Forum in 2016 emanated from the Early Years Education and Skills Policy Commission. It insisted the Conservative government was wrong to focus on 'school structures' at the expense of 'the things that really do improve standards in education: excellent teaching and exceptional school leadership' (Labour Party, 2016b). Although it confirmed the party's commitment to 'a National Education Service', this was not defined and, at the time of writing, this early pledge remains vague (Labour Party, 2016b).

Theresa May's plans to end the ban on the creation of new grammar schools was met with fierce opposition from Angela Rayner, who was appointed

Labour shadow education secretary in July 2016. Rayner undoubtedly stands out among her predecessors as she, in her own words, 'was a NEET – not in education, employment or training – and [she] had no GCSEs at grade A to C; and [she] had a baby at 16' (Milne, 2016). Stating her opposition to grammar schools at the Labour Party conference in September 2016, she said: 'But if Theresa May is talking about meritocracy, let me tell her that every child has merit. That is why I will fight, with every breath in my body, against her new grammar schools' (Rayner, 2016). In the wake of the 2016 annual conference the party launched the 'Education Not Segregation' campaign as well as an online petition (Labour Party, 2016c).

The National Association of Labour Teachers, which was renamed the Socialist Educational Association (SEA) in 1961, is 'the only educational organisation affiliated to the Labour Party and can be described as its critical friend' (SEA, 2016a). At the 2016 Labour Party conference, SEA's delegate Sarah Williams put forward a resolution – an amended version of which was passed – calling not only for a halt to the further expansion of, but also for the end of existing, academic selection. Does it mean, as Sarah Williams argued in the December 2016 issue of *Education Politics*, that the Labour Party is now again committed to a fully comprehensive secondary school system (Williams, 2016: 6)? The three largest teachers' unions certainly hope that the SEA will further influence Labour education policies, since the *Statement of SEA Principles* meets most of the demands made by the NUT, the NASUWT and the ATL on the four key issues. The SEA has, for instance, advocated 'an inspection system' to be 'based on school self-evaluation and credible peer review', the end of 'high stakes testing and league tables' and 'a broad and balanced curriculum', phasing out 'creeping privatisation of our public education service and the profiteering of academy chains' (SEA, 2016b).

Corbyn's historic address at the NUT conference signals a strengthening of the link between the Labour Party and teachers' unions and indicates that Labour's approach to education policy and campaigning is aligning with that of the unions. On the other hand, although it is too early to draw definitive conclusions on the party's educational stance under Corbyn's leadership, the fact that the SEA's list of demands does not yet feature in Labour's education policies can be taken as a sign that the Labour leader is not yet fully prepared to formulate a distinctive narrative on education and to readjust his party's relations with the three largest teachers' unions. Their relative lack of influence on the Labour Party in spite of their close links with it has compounded the difficulties they have been facing at an inter-organisational level.

The NUT, the NASUWT and the ATL since 2010: converging or diverging?

Education policies since 2010 have been predominantly designed and implemented by the successive Conservative education secretaries, first by Michael

Gove until July 2014, then by Nicky Morgan until July 2016 and recently by Justine Greening. It must be noted that the Liberal Democrats were also for a time part and parcel of such measures, since David Laws, as schools minister in the Conservative–Lib Dem coalition government from September 2012 to May 2015, was aligned with the Conservatives' austerity policy, which is not surprising since he had co-edited the 2004 *Orange Book: Reclaiming Liberalism* (Marshall and Laws, 2004).[4]

This political context accounts for the fact that the period since 2010 has been marked by greater activism on the part of teachers' unions. The trend began when the ATL, for the first time in its history, joined the NUT in strikes over pensions in June and November 2011 (the NASUWT also took part in the dispute). The ATL's secretary general Mary Bousted thus justified this decision: 'I am not surprised that ATL members have reached the limits of reasonableness. When reason fails, what is left?' (ATL, 2011). In January 2012, however, the union endorsed a deal with the government on pensions, marking the end of a short-lived united front. Despite the fact that the NUT and the NASUWT opposed the proposed plans through strikes in June and in October 2013, the Teachers' Pension Scheme was reformed in April 2015: pensions are now based on average income instead of the final salary, average retirement age is up and monthly contributions have risen (Osborne, 2013).

The decision by the NUT and the NASUWT to resort to industrial action was also motivated by pay and workload. Indeed, the coalition government, having immediately asserted that its main objective was to tackle the budget deficit, had embarked on a series of spending cuts. From 2010 to 2012, English teachers experienced a pay freeze (Prince, 2010). This was followed by a 1 per cent annual increase until, in September 2014, performance-related pay was phased in: 'Annual incremental pay rises for teachers on the main scale will be abolished under the new system, with schools legally required to demonstrate that increases are tied to performance' (Exley, 2013).

On 10 July 2014, the NUT alone staged a strike on pay, pensions and conditions. Industrial action was used by Education Secretary Michael Gove to attack striking teachers as 'ideologically motivated': 'The union leadership need to put their ideology to one side and put children and parents first' (Wintour, 2013). In December 2011, the NASUWT initiated a work-to-rule campaign on pay, pensions and workload; and in September 2012 the NUT decided to follow suit. This fight is still ongoing although, according to an NFER study published by the Department for Education in January 2013, it has had little impact on schools (Ager and Pyle, 2013: 13). It must also be noted that in October 2014 Education Secretary Nicky Morgan launched the 'Workload Challenge' in an article published in the *Times Educational Supplement*: 'We're calling on you, and all your colleagues, to have your say on how to reduce unsustainable workload' (Morgan, 2014).

The latest strike to date was called by the NUT on 4 July 2016 on school funding (Coughlan, 2016), but industrial action ballots were also held at the

three unions' conferences on similar grounds in 2016, namely school status. Since 2010, the education system has been reformed, with the introduction of free schools and a growing number of academies, particularly at secondary-school level, with the Academies Act 2010. The 'revolution' promised in 2010 (Harrison, 2010) was to be completed with the 2016 Education for All Bill as 'every school [was] to become an academy' (Cook, 2016). This is what the NUT and the ATL decided to fight, and the NASUWT also 'voted to consider strike action if forced academisation affect[ed] members' pay and conditions' (Burns, 2016). Such attitudes stem from the fact that academies and free schools may set their own pay and working conditions, making the unions' jobs harder nationally. The period since June 2010 has thus been characterised by the activism of the NUT and the NASUWT, which have long used industrial action, but also by that of the ATL which, although the action was short-lived, is unusual.

Having looked at the rise in activism, we now need to analyse the approaches of the three main unions to their four key issues (pay, pensions and working conditions; inspections; the curriculum and tests; school reforms) so as to determine what their approaches have in common. On pensions, the NUT, the NASUWT and the ATL are split, the latter having sided with the government in January 2012. They all support, however, the return to a 'national system of pay and conditions' (NUT, 2011: 5) and their reactions to measures on working conditions are quite similar. In February 2015, for example, the NUT and the ATL (together with the National Association of Head Teachers) wrote to the secretary of state and to the deputy prime minister to criticise Nicky Morgan's inability to meet teachers' demands: 'The failure of the response to the Workload Challenge to robustly address these problems is certainly a missed opportunity' (Vaughan, 2015).

The attitude of Ofsted, the Office for Standards in Education responsible for inspecting schools, has not been conciliatory. Its head from 2012 to December 2016, Sir Michael Wilshaw, famously asserted that 'if anyone says to you that "staff morale is at an all-time low" you will know you are doing something right' (Stewart, 2011). In May 2012, he rejected the argument that teachers were stressed by defining stress as the experience of his father and that of those currently unemployed: 'We need to learn from this and challenge those who have power invested in them to make the difference, but too often make excuses for poor performance – it's just too hard, the children are too difficult, the families are too unsupportive, this job is far too stressful' (Richardson, 2012). The three main teaching unions feel teachers are constantly monitored, as the following excerpt from ATL's pamphlet 'A New Vision for Inspection in Schools' bears out: 'the inspectorate can say "however well you think you're doing, we'll come and tell you otherwise", which disempowers teachers and leaders' (ATL, 2015a: 5). Yet only the NUT and the ATL have set out an alternative vision – that is, for the NUT, Ofsted's

'abolition' and 'school self-evaluation' (NUT, 2015a) and for the ATL an accountability scheme based on cooperation between local and national levels (ATL, 2015a).

The adjective the three main teaching unions keep ascribing to the curriculum is 'narrow'. As the NUT's secretary general told the annual conference in 2015, 'the range of what is taught is narrowed' (NUT, 2015a). The main factor behind such a 'narrow' curriculum is, as stated by the ATL, the 'barrage of national tests and exams' pupils face 'throughout their school careers' (ATL, 2008). Among the key reforms of the curriculum and exams since 2010 are the linear assessment of A Levels since 2015 (Paton, 2013) and the introduction of baseline tests for reception-aged children which was supposed to take place in September 2016 (Adams, 2016). Although the three main unions agree on the problem, their solutions differ. The NUT has been asking for the end of tests (2010) and this has been rejected by the NASUWT and the ATL: 'We believe (along with the National Association of Schoolmasters/Union of Women Teachers) that abolishing SATs is reckless and will increase workload, and that the issue is much more complex' (Ellis, 2010: 8).

Regarding league or performance tables, the government introduced in January 2011 the English Baccalaureate (EBacc), which measures pupils with GCSEs in five subjects (proportion of GCSE students gaining 5 A*–C passes including maths, English, two science qualifications, a language and geography or history), officially to increase the take-up of core academic qualifications regarded as better equipping pupils for their further study or work. National curriculum attainment levels have been dropped and Progress 8, that is, attainment across eight qualifications from Key Stage 2 to Key Stage 4, has been phased in (Garner, 2013). The three main teaching unions condemn league tables and their use, as was expressed in January 2015 by NASUWT General Secretary Chris Keates, who lamented the fact that 'every year the Coalition Government has changed the basis on which school performance is measured. It's unacceptable that schools, teachers, parents and children are subject to this negative annual ritual'(Richardson and Sellgren, 2015). On the latest league tables reform, however, the three unions are split. As can be seen under the 'Assessment' tab of its 'A Curriculum that Counts' webpage, the ATL has approved of one change in particular, which is that from September 2015 'national curriculum levels will no longer be used for statutory assessment'. The idea is that such policy change 'has given schools the opportunity to develop their own approaches which simplify assessment and focus on teaching and learning' (ATL, 2016a). In contrast, the three unions have been critical of Progress 8. The NASUWT and the ATL have described it as a partial indicator which is thus not entirely reliable (ATL, 2017; NASUWT, 2017) and the NUT was the most scathing, equating it with quantifiable data: 'The Union is concerned that in Progress 8 the DfE has introduced another measure that simplifies learning, boils down progress to a single number, and

prevails upon teachers and the school leaders to organise their work around it' (NUT, 2017).

On government reforms of schools, the three main teaching unions share broadly similar perspectives. Michael Gove in 2012 and Nicky Morgan in 2014 refused to rule out profit-making in education (Vasagar, 2012; Vaughan, 2014). The NUT, the NASUWT and the ATL condemn any further involvement of the private sector in state schools and they all took part in the Trade Union Congress (TUC) 'Education Not for Sale' campaign launched in 2014: 'There should be a commitment by all political parties that no school should be allowed to be run for profit directly or indirectly and this should be enshrined in legislation' (TUC, 2014).

Just as has been seen regarding the 2016 Education for All Bill and its emphasis on academies (discussed above), the NUT, the NASUWT and the ATL have opposed school diversification – free schools and academies – on the same grounds. Indeed, in their view such schools are 'unaccountable to their local communities' (NUT, 2016c), do not guarantee higher standards, 'undermine' teachers' pay and working conditions, and prevent fair admissions (NUT, 2016a). The attitude of the NASUWT on the subject is paradoxical: the union has consistently opposed academies, but in 2012 it signed an agreement with the Schools Co-operative Society which manages co-operative schools, including some academies. The 'Statement of Joint Principles: Schools Co-operative Society and NASUWT' contained the explanation that 'Whilst the NASUWT remains opposed in principle to academies, where schools are consulting on conversion to academies, with the intention to convert, the NASUWT will press such schools to use the co-operative model to safeguard stakeholder sovereignty in governance and public and community accountability' (NASUWT, 2012, para. 4.5). This is why Education Secretary Justine Greening's decision to drop the Education for All Bill in October 2016 was welcomed by the three unions, the ATL calling it 'a victory for common sense' (2016b).

In October 2015, Education Secretary Nicky Morgan announced she would authorise the opening of a grammar school site in Sevenoaks, Kent, insisting that it was a genuine expansion and not really a new selective school (Harley, 2015). While the NASUWT remained silent on the issue, the NUT and the ATL criticised the education secretary's decision in the strongest terms: 'A Government which was serious about social mobility would not allow the expansion of selective education' (ATL, 2015b). What may have seemed an isolated measure on the part of a Conservative government hit the headlines almost as soon as Theresa May became prime minister in July 2016. She justified this return to academic selection as the solution to the current 'selection by house price, selection by wealth' (*Times Educational Supplement*, 2016). The September 2016 Green Paper *Schools that Work for Everyone* also insisted the cap on faith schools' selection on religious grounds should be removed and

universities and independent schools should sponsor state schools (Department for Education, 2016). Justine Greening's policies on grammar schools have elicited the same reaction from the three largest teachers' unions, which have all rejected those plans as a 'distraction' and on grounds of principle. NASUWT Deputy General Secretary Dr Patrick Roach, for instance, told the TUC Congress on 28 September 2016 that 'the Government's proposals to remove barriers to selection of pupils on the basis of ability, aptitude and religion are a distraction from the real challenges and crises in our education system' (NASUWT, 2016a). The ATL even submitted 'an emergency motion opposing the expansion of pupil selection, whether through more grammar schools or allowing selection in free schools' to the same TUC Congress, which passed it (ATL, 2016b).

Therefore, even if perceptions of education policies since 2010 by the three largest teaching unions have been comparable (on pay, working conditions, Ofsted, the curriculum, tests, performance tables and school reforms), notable differences cannot be ignored, notably on pensions, alternative inspection and the reform of tests. An interesting indication of the unions' diverging strategies was given in January 2012 by ATL President Alice Robinson when she commented on the ballot of ATL members approving the government deal on pensions (91.6 per cent): 'ATL members are realists. They recognise how tough times are and that the Government is determined not to give any further ground. Although the Government's final offer does not give us everything we wanted, it is the best deal we could get in the current economic climate' (ATL, 2012). Although the ATL fundamentally agreed with the other two unions, it adopted what it considered a pragmatic approach while the latter chose to use industrial action on the issue. The NUT seems the most radical of the three unions and this is reflected in the policies it advocates on inspections (to be based on 'self-evaluation') and tests (phasing them out). Such a stance may be accounted for by the union's long-standing relations with the far left which were mentioned in the first section of this chapter.

Lastly, the goal of 'professional unity' seems to have come within closer reach since the NUT and the ATL confirmed in March 2016 that they had been considering a merger, a prospect which was again rejected by NASUWT General Secretary Chris Keates, who 'cautioned against the impact of professional unity, claiming that it was "better" for ministers to receive six letters from unions on issues such as pay, rather than one with six signatures' (Busby, 2016). NUT and ATL delegates to special conferences in November 2016 accepted the amalgamation of the two unions in order to form a National Education Union. They considered the two organisations as complementary: 'The NUT is the largest teachers' union in state schools in England and Wales while ATL has influence in every sector', including teachers, lecturers and teaching assistants, not just in England and Wales but also in Scotland and Northern Ireland (NUT, 2016d). This National Education Union intends to

be 'the voice of education professionals' and NUT and ATL members approved it in a vote held between 27 February and 21 March 2017 (NUT, 2016d).

In keeping with a long-term trend observed in the wider trade-union movement, the thinking is that such an amalgamation will generate a powerful organisation with a wider reach and a stronger voice, as 'size itself is regarded as an advantage in the trade union world' (Elias, 1973: 125). But it will also entail a somewhat different strategy, as the new National Education Union will have to take sides in disputes – as was the case in the dispute over Durham Council's plans to move 2,700 classroom assistants onto term-time contracts from January 2017 – instead of focusing solely on the teaching profession. Although the documents issued by the two unions on the amalgamation evade such issues, tensions between the activism of the NUT as opposed to the emphasis laid on negotiations by the ATL are also bound to arise. The National Education Union will also have to define its policies, and the NUT and the ATL have not always seen eye to eye on points like pensions, inspections and tests. As the NUT/ATL merger is proceeding, 'professional unity' may seem closer than ever before but is still some way off, particularly considering the NASUWT's isolationist stance.

Conclusion

Writing at the time of the 2013 strikes, Stevenson stated that 'if the teachers' unions are able to maintain their unity and their momentum, and thereby sustain their campaign, there is every possibility that education will emerge as a major political issue' (Stevenson, 2013: 426). Yet, the analysis of England's largest teachers' unions since 2010 through their four key issues (pay, pensions and working conditions; inspections; the curriculum and examinations; school reforms) has shown that, although the level of activism has been growing, involving the NUT, the NASUWT and even the generally moderate ATL in industrial action in 2011, this cannot hide the lack of consensus among the three unions, particularly on pensions, alternative inspections and the reform of tests. Besides, although the goal of professional unity may seem closer than ever before with the September 2017 amalgamation between the NUT and the ATL, the isolationist strategy pursued by the NASUWT may jeopardise the collective endeavour. The ATL, in spite of its merger with the NUT, has so far steered clear of political struggles, contrary to the NASUWT and the NUT, which have long been linked to the left and to the Labour Party. Although the leadership of Jeremy Corbyn since September 2015 has offered some hope after the disappointment of the 2015 election Labour manifesto, in terms of policies as regards grammar schools, it cannot be argued to date that it has inaugurated a new era in teacher unions' relations with the party. When it comes to the English education system, the three main teachers' unions' record since 2010 has been characterised by inter-organisational

Table 10.1 NUT, ATL and NASUWT Positions on Key Issues from 2010 to 2017

	NUT (until September 2017)	*ATL (until September 2017)*	*NASUWT*	*In short*
Pay	Work-to-rule campaign since September 2012; advocates 'national system of pay and conditions' (NUT, 2011: 5)	Advocates 'national system of pay and conditions' (NUT, 2011: 5)	Work-to-rule campaign since December 2011; advocates 'national system of pay and conditions' (NUT, 2011: 5)	All agree on pay
Pensions	Against reforms: strikes in 2011 (June and November), in 2013 (June and October) and in July 2014; work-to-rule campaign since September 2012	Strikes in June and November 2011; deal signed with government in January 2012	Against reforms: strikes in 2011 (June and November) and in 2013 (June and October); work-to-rule campaign since December 2011	Only the ATL accepted reforms in 2012
Working conditions (in particular, workload)	Work-to-rule campaign since September 2012; negative reaction to Morgan's (2014) 'Workload Challenge'	Negative reaction to Morgan's (2014) 'Workload Challenge'	Work-to-rule campaign since December 2011; negative reaction to Morgan's (2014) 'Workload Challenge'	All agree workload is excessive
Inspections	Considered as excessive; alternative is 'school self-evaluation' (NUT, 2015a)	Considered as excessive; alternative is cooperation between local and national levels (ATL, 2015a)	Considered as excessive	All agree current inspection regime is excessive but disagree on alternative provision

Table 10.1 NUT, ATL and NASUWT Positions on Key Issues from 2010 to 2017 (Continued)

	NUT (until September 2017)	*ATL (until September 2017)*	*NASUWT*	*In short*
Curriculum	Considered as narrow	Considered as narrow	Considered as narrow	All agree on 'narrow' curriculum
Tests	Considered as excessive; NUT advocates the end of tests (NUT, 2010)	Considered as excessive but ATL rejects abolition of tests	Considered as excessive but NASUWT rejects abolition of tests	All agree tests are excessive but disagree on alternative provision
Performance tables	Considered as harmful; Progress 8 condemned as quantifiable data only (NUT, 2017)	Considered as harmful; Progress 8 criticised as unreliable (ATL, 2017)	Considered as harmful; Progress 8 criticised as unreliable (NASUWT, 2017)	All agree to reject current use of performance tables
Private sector intervention	Took part in TUC 'Education Not for Sale' campaign in 2014	Took part in TUC 'Education Not for Sale' campaign in 2014	Took part in TUC 'Education Not for Sale' campaign in 2014	All agree to reject private sector intervention
Academies/free schools	Opposed to them	Opposed to them	Opposed to them with a caveat (signed agreement with Schools Co-operative Society which manages academies)	All reject academies and free schools
Grammar schools	Opposed to grammar schools and further selection	Opposed to grammar schools and further selection	Opposed to grammar schools and further selection	All reject the opening of more grammar schools

tensions, thus renewing calls for and genuine attempts at unity. But how a satisfactory and productive degree of unity can be achieved is a contested issue.

Indeed, there is room for saying that, as in the wider trade-union movement, the strategy of amalgamations pursued by education union leaders, illustrated by the latest ATL–NUT merger, adds up to little more than attempts to manage long-term decline rather than to a strategy able to reinvigorate the movement by re-engaging the members. Therefore the concept of 'social movement unionism' may well provide fruitful insights into the short-term and long-term future developments of the largest teachers' unions in England, especially as a similar transfer of social movement tools and technique is also at work in the Labour Party (see Avril in this volume). Could what Stevenson and Little have identified in the NUT as 'an embryonic form of "social movement unionism" characterised by grassroots organising, community coalition building and mobilisation around an alternative vision of education' (Stevenson and Little, 2015: 87; see also Kelly, 2005) provide a credible alternative route towards education union growth and renewal?

Notes

1 The phrase is borrowed from R. D. Coates (1972: 58).
2 Education in the UK being a devolved matter, with separate systems for each of the countries (although the Early Years Foundation Stage and the National Curriculum apply to children in both England and Wales), this study will focus specifically on England, whose education system is overseen by the UK government.
3 Results available at https://yougov.co.uk/news/2014/01/02/teachers-vote-labour-lead-41/. Accessed 1 March 2018.
4 The *Orange Book* had marked a return to classical liberal stance advocating market- rather than state-based solutions to societal problems.

References

Adams, R. (2015a) 'Teachers Don't Like the Tories – So Why Isn't Labour Benefiting?', *The Guardian*, 2 April. Available at: www.theguardian.com/education/2015/apr/02/teachers-dont-like-the-tories-so-why-isnt-labour-benefiting. Accessed 5 December 2017.

Adams, R (2015b) 'Labour's Lucy Powell: We Will Fight any Tory Revival of Selective Schools', *The Guardian*, 25 September. Available at: www.theguardian.com/education/2015/sep/25/labour-lucy-powell-tories-selective-schools-education. Accessed 5 December 2017.

Adams, R. (2016) 'Baseline Tests Dropped for Reception Pupils', *The Guardian*, 7 April. Available at: www.theguardian.com/education/2016/apr/07/baseline-tests-dropped-for-reception-pupils-education-primary-school. Accessed 5 December 2017.

Ager, R. and Pyle, K. (2013) *NFER Teacher Voice Omnibus November 2012 Survey: Understanding Union Membership and Activity*, London: DfE.

Asthana, A. and Adams, R. (2016) 'Jeremy Corbyn: Tories are Asset Stripping the Education System', *The Guardian*, 25 March. Available at: www.theguardian.com/politics/2016/

mar/25/jeremy-corbyn-tories-asset-stripping-education-nut-conference. Accessed 5 December 2017.
ATL (2008) 'Assessing to Learn: Teachers at the Heart of Assessment'. Available at: www.atl.org.uk/Images/Assessing to learn PS 2008.pdf. Accessed 10 December 2015.
ATL (2011) 'Secretary General Mary Bousted's Speech to ATL Conference', Liverpool, 20 April. Available at: www.atl.org.uk/media-office/2012–2008/bousted-conference-2011.asp. Accessed 25 February 2016.
ATL (2012) 'ATL Votes to Accept the Pensions Deal for Teachers', 30 January. Available at: www.atl.org.uk/latest/press-release/atl-votes-accept-pensions-deal-teachers. Accessed 15 December 2016.
ATL (2014) 'ATL Rules and Constitution'. Available at: www.atl.org.uk/Images/rules-and-constitution-september-2014.pdf. Accessed 15 January 2017.
ATL (2015a) 'A New Vision for Inspection in Schools', February. Available at: https://issuu.com/atlunion/docs/vision_for_inspection_2015. Accessed 12 December 2015.
ATL (2015b) 'ATL Comment on Reports that Nicky Morgan has Approved a New Grammar School in Kent', 15 October. Available at: www.atl.org.uk/media-office/2015/ATL-comment-on-reports-that-Nicky-Morgan-has-approved-a-new-grammar-school-in-Kent.asp. Accessed 18 January 2016.
ATL (2016a) 'Assessment Without Levels'. Available at: http://acurriculumthatcounts.org.uk/assessment/. Accessed 15 February 2016.
ATL (2016b) 'Relief that Government has Abandoned its Education Bill', 28 October. Available at: www.atl.org.uk/latest/relief-government-has-abandoned-its-education-bill. Accessed 5 December 2016.
ATL (2017) 'ATL Comment on Secondary School Performance Tables', 19 January. Available at: www.atl.org.uk/latest/atl-comment-secondary-school-performance-tables. Accessed 25 January 2017.
Barker, I. (2010) 'Union Influence on the Wane as Social Partnership is Scrapped by Gove', *Times Educational Supplement*, 2 July.
Beauvallet, A. (2014) 'English Teachers' Unions in the Early 21st Century: What Role in a Fragmented World?', *LISA*, 12:8. Available at: https://lisa.revues.org/7108. Accessed 18 March 2017.
Burns, J. (2016) BBC News Online, 'Moderate Union Votes for Industrial Action on Academy Plan', 15 April. Available at: www.bbc.com/news/education-35937341. Accessed 15 December 2016.
Busby, E. (2016) 'NUT and ATL Merger Talks Confirmed but Chris Keates Wary of Professional Unity', *Times Educational Supplement*, 18 March.
Carter, B., Stevenson, H. and Passy, R. (2010) *Industrial Relations in Education: Transforming the School Workforce*, New York and Abingdon: Routledge.
Certification Officer (2014) *Corporate Report, Trade Unions: The Current List and Schedule*, 14 October. Available at: www.gov.uk/government/publications/public-list-of-active-trade-unions-official-list-and-schedule/trade-unions-the-current-list-and-schedule. Accessed 25 October 2015.
Coates, R. D. (1972) *Teachers' Unions and Interest Group Politics: A Study in the Behaviour of Organised Teachers in England and Wales*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
Compass (2015) *Big Education, Learning for the 21st Century: The Final Report of the Compass Inquiry into a New System of Education*. Available at: http://socialwelfare.bl.uk/subject-areas/services-activity/education-skills/compass/174145Compass-BIG-Education-DIGITAL-Final.pdf. Accessed 20 December 2016.
Cook, C. (2016) 'Every School to Become an Academy, Ministers to Announce', BBC News Online, 15 March. Available at: www.bbc.com/news/education-35814215. Accessed 17 March 2016.

Coughlan, S. (2016) 'Morgan Says Teachers' Strike "Unnecessary"', BBC News Online, 4 July. Available at: www.bbc.com/news/education-36703783. Accessed 27 December 2016.

Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (2016), *Trade Union Membership 2015: Statistical Bulletin*, London: Department for Business, Innovation and Skills.

Department for Education (2016) *Schools that Work for Everyone*. Available at https://consult.education.gov.uk/school-frameworks/schools-that-work-for-everyone/supporting_documents/SCHOOLS THAT WORK FOR EVERYONE FINAL.PDF. Accessed 12 October 2016.

Elias, P. (1973) 'Trade Union Amalgamations: Patterns and Procedures', *Industrial Law Journal*, 2:1, pp. 125–36.

Ellis, N. (2010) 'The SATs Boycott', *ELM, Education Leader and Manager*, June, pp. 8–9. Available at: https://amie.atl.org.uk/Images/elm-2010.06.pdf. Accessed 15 December 2015.

Exley, S. (2013) 'Performance Pay Teeters on the Brink of Chaos', *Times Educational Supplement*, 30 August.

Garner, R. (2013) 'Controversial GCSE Ranking System to be Overhauled', *The Independent*, 14 October. Available at: www.independent.co.uk/news/education/education-news/controversial-gcse-ranking-system-to-be-overhauled-8879785.html. Accessed 5 December 2017.

Harley, N. (2015) 'First Grammar School in 50 Years to be Approved', *Daily Telegraph*, 14 October. Available at: www.telegraph.co.uk/education/educationnews/11932527/First-grammar-school-in-50-years-to-be-approved.html. Accessed 5 December 2017.

Harrison, A. (2010) 'Schools are Promised an Academies' "Revolution"', BBC News Online, 26 May. Available at: www.bbc.com/news/10159448. Accessed 28 May 2010.

Kelly, J. (2005) 'Social Movement Theory and Union Revitalization', in Fernie, S. and Metcalf, D. (eds) *Trade Unions: Resurgence or Demise?* London: Routledge, pp. 62–83.

Labour Party (1995) *Excellence and Diversity: Labour's Crusade to Raise Standards*, London: Labour Party.

Labour Party (2015) *Britain Can Be Better*, general election manifesto, London: Labour Party.

Labour Party (2016a) *National Policy Forum Report 2016*. Available at: www.huntingdonlabourparty.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/08/NPF-Report-2016-.pdf. Accessed 15 December 2016.

Labour Party (2016b) *Early Years Education and Skills Policy Commission Discussion Paper*, National Policy Forum. Available at: www.policyforum.labour.org.uk/uploads/editor/files/Early_Years_Education_and_Skills.pdf. Accessed 2 January 2017.

Labour Party (2016c) 'Education Not Segregation Petition'. Available at: www.labour.org.uk/content/grammar-schools-petition. Accessed 20 December 2016.

Marshall, P. and Laws, D. (eds) (2004) *The Orange Book: Reclaiming Liberalism*, London: Profile Books.

Millar, F. (2015) 'All Four Labour Leadership Candidates on their Visions for Education', *The Guardian*, 7 July. Available at: www.theguardian.com/education/2015/jul/07/labour-leadership-candidates-education-interviews-burnham-cooper-corbyn-kendall-schools. Accessed 5 December 2017.

Milne, O. (2016) 'A Quick Guide to Shadow Education Secretary, Angela Rayner, for Teachers', *The Guardian*, 5 July. Available at: www.theguardian.com/teacher-network/2016/jul/05/quick-guide-shadow-education-secretary-angela-rayner-teachers. Accessed 5 December 2017.

Morgan, N. (2014) 'I Want to Build a New Deal for Teacher Workload – and I Need Your Help', *Times Educational Supplement*, 21 October.
Morris, N. (1969) 'England', in Blum, A. (ed.) *Teacher Unions and Associations: A Comparative Study*, Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, pp. 44–82.
NASUWT (2012) 'Statement of Joint Principles: Schools Co-operative Society and NASUWT', 18 July. Available at: www.nasuwt.org.uk/consum/groups/public/@journalist/documents/nas_download/nasuwt_010378.pdf. Accessed 15 January 2016.
NASUWT (2016a) 'Grammar Schools "a Distraction" from Solving the Crises in Education', 28 September. Available at: www.nasuwt.org.uk/article-listing/grammar-schools-a-distraction.html. Accessed 15 November 2016.
NASUWT (2016b) 'Schools Policy: Where Next for Labour? – NASUWT Fringe at Labour Party Conference', 15 August. Available at: www.nasuwt.org.uk/article-listing/schools-policy-nasuwt-fringe-at-labour-conference.html. Accessed 10 January 2017.
NASUWT (2017) 'NASUWT Comments on Secondary School Performance Tables', 19 January. Available at: www.nasuwt.org.uk/article-listing/nasuwt-comment-secondary-school-performance-tables.html. Accessed 25 January 2017.
NUT (2010) 'General Secretary Christine Blower's Speech to NUT Annual Conference', Liverpool, 7 April. Available at: www.teachers.org.uk/files/GS-SPEECH-2010.doc. Accessed 1 October 2010.
NUT (2011) 'Academies Toolkit: Defending State Education'. Available at: www.teachers.org.uk/sites/default/files2014/academies-toolkit-v3–7724.pdf. Accessed 25 November 2015.
NUT (2015a) 'General Secretary Christine Blower's Speech to NUT Annual Conference', Harrogate, 7 April. Available at: www.teachers.org.uk/…/general-secretary-speech-to-nut-annual-conference-2015_doc. Accessed 18 October 2015.
NUT (2015b) *Privatisation Update: Academies, Free Schools and Privatisation Issues*, No. 56, December. Available at: www.teachers.org.uk/files/privatisation-update-56-dec-2015.pdf. Accessed 15 January 2016.
NUT (2016a) 'Academy Status, Pupil Attainment and School Improvement'. Available at: www.teachers.org.uk/campaigns/academies. Accessed 2 January 2016.
NUT (2016b) 'Campaigns'. Available at: www.teachers.org.uk/campaigns. Accessed 2 January 2016.
NUT (2016c) 'Free Schools'. Available at: www.teachers.org.uk/freeschools. Accessed 21 January 2016.
NUT (2016d) 'NUT and ATL Amalgamation: A New Union for Education Professionals and their Learners'. Available at: www.teachers.org.uk/sites/default/files2014/nov-new-union-faqs1.pdf. Accessed 20 December 2016.
NUT (2017) 'League Tables', 19 January. Available at: www.teachers.org.uk/news-events/press-releases-england/league-tables-19–1–17. Accessed 25 January 2017.
Osborne, H. (2013) 'Public Sector Pensions "Will be Reduced by a Third" under Reforms', *The Guardian*, 17 May. Available at: www.theguardian.com/money/2013/may/17/public-sector-pensions-reduced-third. Accessed 5 December 2017.
Paton, G. (2013) 'A-Level Overhaul: Return of End-of-Course Exams', *Daily Telegraph*, 22 January. Available at: www.telegraph.co.uk/education/educationnews/9819257/A-level-overhaul-return-of-end-of-course-exams.html. Accessed 5 December 2017.
Powell-Davies, M. (2013) 'LANAC – Organising for National Action', 22 September. Available at: www.mpdnut.com/2013/09/lanac-organsing-for-national-action.html. Accessed 15 November 2016.
Prince, R. (2010) 'Budget 2010: Two Year Pay Freeze for Public Sector', *Daily Telegraph*, 22 June. Available at: www.telegraph.co.uk/news/politics/7847040/

Budget-2010-two-year-pay-freeze-for-public-sector.html. Accessed 5 December 2017.
Rayner, A. (2016) 'Speech to Labour Party Conference', 27 September. Available at: http://schoolsweek.co.uk/angela-rayner-full-text-of-labour-conference-2016-speech/. Accessed 10 December 2016.
Richardson, H. (2012) 'Ofsted Chief Sir Michael Wilshaw: Teachers Not Stressed', BBC News Online, 10 May. Available at: www.bbc.com/news/education-18025202. Accessed 14 May 2012.
Richardson, H. and Sellgren, K. (2015) 'School League Tables Branded a "Nonsense" Amid Changes', BBC News Online, 29 January. Available at: www.bbc.com/news/education-31023685. Accessed 30 January 2015.
SEA (2016a) 'About Us'. Available at: https://socialisteducationalassociation.org/about-us/. Accessed 2 January 2016.
SEA (2016b) 'What We Stand For: A Statement of SEA Principles'. Available at: https://socedassoc.files.wordpress.com/2016/12/what-we-stand-for.pdf. Accessed 15 December 2016.
Seifert, R. (1987) *Teacher Militancy: A History of Teacher Strikes 1896–1987*, Brighton: Falmer Press.
Stevenson, H. (2007) 'Restructuring Teachers' Work and Trade Union Responses in England: Bargaining for Change', *American Education Research Journal*, 44:2, pp. 224–51.
Stevenson, H. (2013) 'Teachers on Strike: A Struggle for the Future of Teaching?', *Forum*, 55:3, pp. 415–28.
Stevenson, H. and Little, G. (2015) 'From Resistance to Renewal: The Emergence of Social Movement Unionism in England', in Little, G. (ed.) *Global Education 'Reform': Building Resistance and Solidarity*, Manifesto Press. Available at: www.periglobal.org/sites/periglobal.org/files/Global%20Education%20Reform.pdf. Accessed 18 March 2017.
Stewart, W. (2011) 'New Ofsted Chief Fires Warning Shots', *Times Educational Supplement*, 13 December.
Stone, A. (2015) 'NUT Conference 2015 Report: Why are Teachers Always Complaining?', *Revolutionary Socialism in the 21st Century*, 14 April. Available at: https://rs21.org.uk/2015/04/14/nut-conference-2015-report-why-are-teachers-always-complaining/. Accessed 10 January 2017.
Times Educational Supplement (2016) 'PM: New Wave of Grammar Schools to Tackle "Unfair" Selection by Wealth', 9 September. Available at: www.tes.com/news/school-news/breaking-news/pm-new-wave-grammar-schools-tackle-unfair-selection-wealth. Accessed 10 January 2017.
TUC (2014) 'Education Not for Sale: A TUC Campaign Report', March. Available at: www.tuc.org.uk/sites/default/files/Education_Not_For_Sale.pdf. Accessed 2 January 2016.
Vasagar, J. (2012) 'Michael Gove Open-Minded over State Schools being Run for Profit', *The Guardian*, 29 May. Available at: www.theguardian.com/politics/2012/may/29/michael-gove-open-state-schools-profit. Accessed 5 December 2017.
Vaughan, R. (2014) 'Nicky Morgan on For-Profit Schools: "Most People Wouldn't Like It, but I'd Have to Think Carefully About It"', *Times Educational Supplement*, 3 September.
Vaughan, R. (2015) 'Unions Join Forces to Criticise Ministers' Proposals', *Times Educational Supplement*, 10 February.
Voice (2017) 'Industrial Action Advice'. Available at: www.voicetheunion.org.uk/index.cfm?cid=234. Accessed 12 May 2017.

Wilby, P. (2015) 'Lucy Powell: "We Shouldn't Just Sit in My Office Saying Scrap This, Scrap That"', *The Guardian*, 8 December. Available at: www.theguardian.com/education/2015/dec/08/lucy-powell-labour-shadow-education-secretary-schools. Accessed 5 December 2017.

Williams, S. (2016), 'How Labour Conference Voted Unanimously for the End of Secondary School Selection', *Education Politics, Journal of the Socialist Educational Association*, 130, December, pp. 5–6.

Wintour, P. (2013) 'Gove Urges "Ideologically Motivated" Teachers' Unions to Abandon Strikes', *The Guardian*, 24 July. Available at: www.theguardian.com/politics/2013/jul/24/michael-gove-teachers-union-strikes. Accessed 5 December 2017.

PART III

The Labour Party today: fragmentation or mutation?

11

Dissent in the Parliamentary Labour Party, 1945–2015

Nick Randall

Introduction

Intra-party dissent matters in British politics. British government is party government. In exceptional circumstances, such as those at the Carlton Club in 1922, divisions within a parliamentary party have proven terminal for governments. More typically, governments with divided supporters have encountered difficulties in delivering their legislative agenda. As the downfall of several party leaders has demonstrated, intra-party divisions are destabilising for those leading parties. And, since voters regard divided parties with disdain, dissent has electoral consequences too. Yet, British parties are coalitions within which varied interests and policy preferences coexist. Intra-party dissent is, to some extent, inevitable although its scale, character and management remain subject to variation and agency. Even if dissent is effectively managed within the parliamentary party, parliamentarians may still find themselves at odds with their extra-parliamentary counterparts (May, 1973).

This chapter focuses upon dissent within the post-war Parliamentary Labour Party (PLP) and makes several contributions. First, whereas the most prolific scholars of this subject have often taken an episodic focus (see, for example, Cowley, 2002, 2005; Norton, 2004; Shaw, 1988, 2006), this chapter follows Bale (2000) and Heffernan (2000) in presenting a long-term analysis of dissent. It recognises the many forms of dissenting behaviour and, by combining existing datasets with original data after 2009, identifies the changing frequency, depth and extent of dissent in the division lobbies. Secondly, by employing John et al.'s (2013) coding scheme for UK policy issues, it systematically categorises the issues which led rebels to the division lobbies. In

addition, the PLP's role in destabilising and removing Labour leaders is considered, as is the willingness of dissidents to depart the PLP. The second section of the chapter uses a combination of division data and archival sources to analyse the role played by parliamentary factions in organising dissent. The chapter then identifies the strategies employed by the party's leaders to manage parliamentary dissent. Finally, the circumstances in which the PLP has become a focus for division within the wider party are considered. The chapter argues that these dimensions of dissent cohere into a sequence of three broad regimes, each characterised by its own patterns of dissent and factionalism.

The PLP as a site of division

The Labour Party has long been regarded as particularly prone to intra-party divisions. Figure 11.1 explores these perceptions using time series survey data from Gallup and Ipsos-Mori. Given differences in methodology between the two companies, these two series are not directly comparable but they nevertheless clearly illustrate the general trend. Public perceptions have varied, but from the mid-1960s until the late 1980s a consistent majority viewed Labour as divided. Under New Labour such perceptions of disunity gradually returned. Given the voice and public visibility of parliamentarians within the party, dissent within the PLP is likely to have played a significant role in shaping these perceptions.

Dissent within a British parliamentary party takes various forms. It can find expression via internal party mechanisms including backbench policy groups, delegations to frontbenchers and meetings of the parliamentary party. Parliamentary mechanisms such as motions, amendments, abstention, votes against the party and the resignation of the whip can be used to publicly dissent. Outside Westminster, criticisms voiced to constituency members, public meetings and the media serve as means to express disagreement. Since reviewing all these manifestations of dissent is clearly beyond the scope of this chapter, analysis will focus upon dissenting votes, efforts to destabilise and remove party leaders, and departure from the party.

The dissent of Labour's parliamentarians in the division lobbies 'represents only the tip of an iceberg; but, like the tip of an iceberg, it represents the part that is visible' (Norton, 1975: ix). This is not unproblematic. Whipped votes are not publicly declared. Also, MPs cannot formally register abstentions; it is impossible to differentiate deliberate abstention and absence for other reasons from division lists. This is significant because abstention *en masse* has been a tactic employed by PLP dissidents, most famously on the amendment to the King's Speech in 1947, on defence in March of 1955, 1960 and 1967, and spending cuts in January 1968.

While comparing dissent in periods of government and opposition requires caution given that opposition parties can both tolerate and avoid dissent more

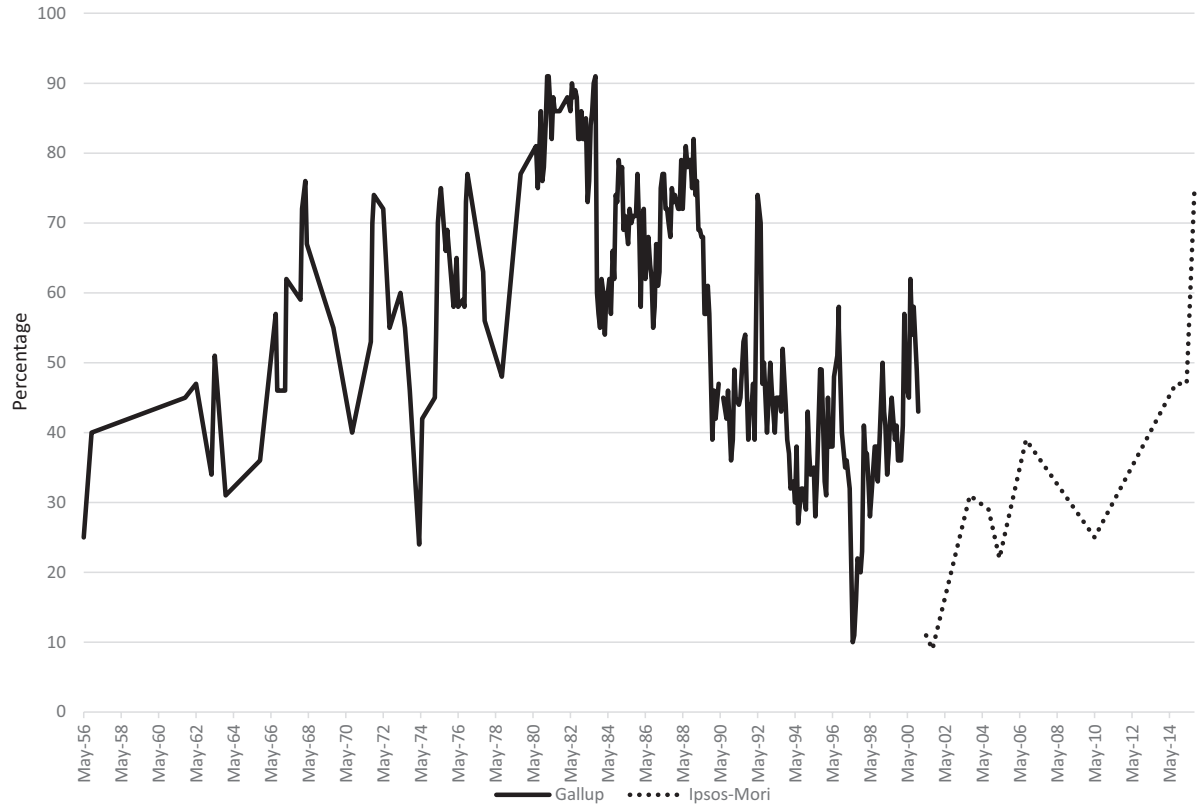


Figure 11.1 Public perceptions of Labour disunity: percentage saying the Labour Party is divided

Sources: May 1956–December 2000, Gallup; May 2001–September 2015, Ipsos-MORI

easily (Cowley and Stuart, 2011), it is nevertheless possible to identify long-run trends. Between 1945 and 2015 Labour MPs rebelled in over 2,000 divisions. Following Kam (2009), figure 11.2 presents three measures of this dissent. The frequency of dissent is identified by the percentage of divisions where at least one PLP member voted against the whips' instructions. However, there is considerable variation in the size of rebellions, from single rebels to the 139 Labour MPs who opposed military action in Iraq. Accordingly, the mean percentage of Labour MPs rebelling indicates the depth of dissent. Finally, rebellion may be the property of 'the usual suspects' or generated by a wider and changing cast of dissidents. This is measured by the percentage of the PLP casting at least one dissenting vote.

Figure 11.2 shows the 1964–1966 Parliament to be an outlier but also a turning point. Just one rebellion, involving one Labour MP (on the National Insurance Bill) took place. Thereafter the pattern of dissent within the PLP shifted. Dissent, clearly, was not unknown before 1966. However, with 5.8 per cent (1945–1950) and 2.9 per cent (1950–1951) of divisions witnessing rebellions, these governments encountered a lower frequency of dissent than later Labour administrations. Although 57.7 per cent of the PLP rebelled at least once between 1945 and 1950, rebellions tended to be small. Rebellions remained infrequent during the following thirteen years of opposition although the mean size of rebellions did increase to 8.2 per cent between 1951 and 1955. Here Bevanite rebellions in 1951 and 1952 and the issues of National Service and manufacture of British nuclear weapons were largely responsible. Despite Gaitskell's controversial leadership, only nuclear defence and defence expenditure generated significant cross-voting in the division lobbies.

The 1966 Parliament marked a step-change, with dissent becoming more frequent (8.4 per cent of divisions), deeper (4.8 per cent of the PLP on average) and more widespread (56.6 per cent of the PLP rebelled at least once). Following Labour's second electoral victory in 1974, this escalation in dissent resumed. During the 1974–1979 Parliament, a fifth of divisions witnessed Labour rebellions. The mean size of rebellions grew to 6.7 per cent of the PLP, and, with 84 per cent of the PLP rebelling at least once, dissent became even more pervasive. These levels of rebellion took time to diminish in opposition. Although dissent abated after the 1983 election, there was no return to the relative quiescence of the years of opposition between 1955 and 1964.

The 1997–2001 Parliament was remarkable. The frequency (7.3 per cent of divisions), depth (an average rebellion of 3.6 per cent of the PLP) and breadth (31.7 per cent of the PLP rebelled at least once) of rebellions were the lowest of any Labour government after 1966. However, the Labour governments formed after 2001 saw levels of dissent which, if not exceptional in their depth and breadth, were in their frequency. In the 2001–2005 Parliament 20.2 per cent of divisions saw Labour rebellions. The following Parliament broke post-war records, however, with 28.4 per cent of divisions involving revolts.

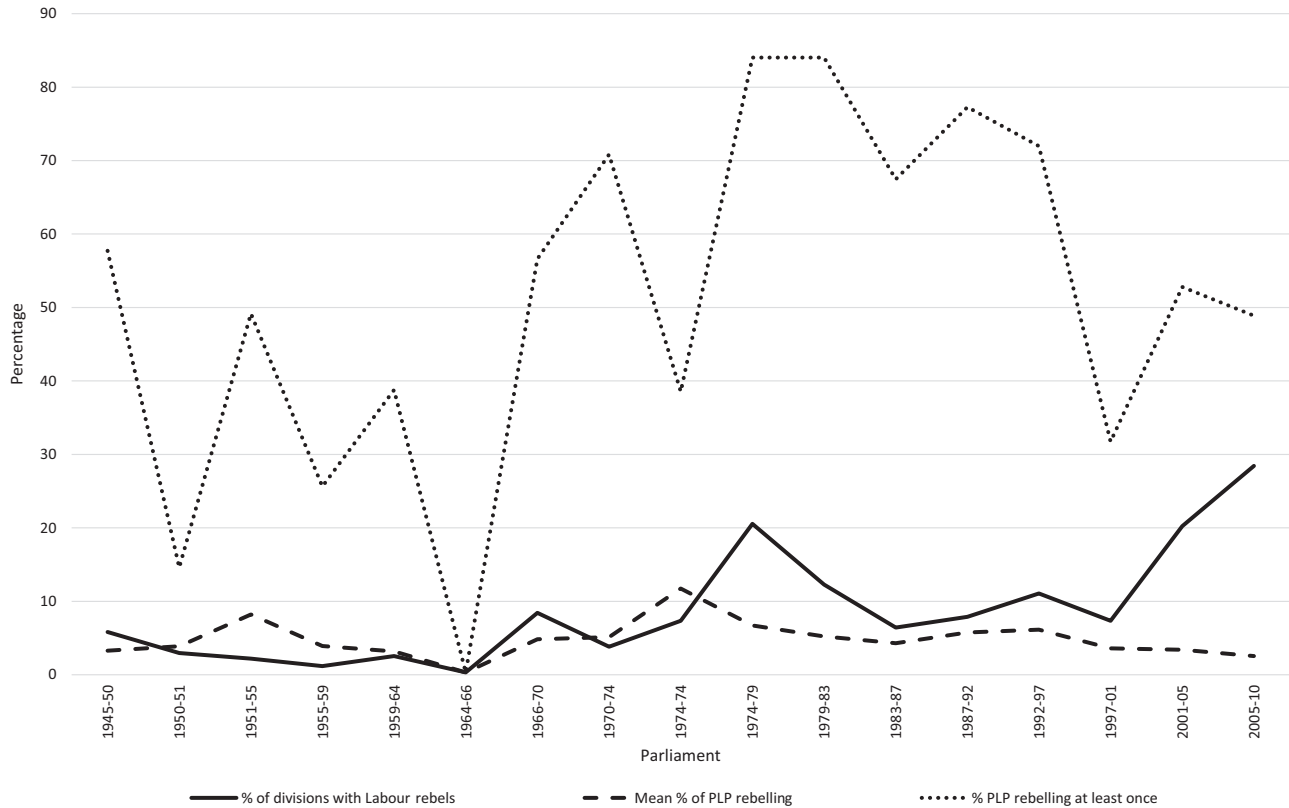


Figure 11.2 Dissenting votes in House of Commons by PLP members, 1945–2010

Sources: Norton (1975, 1980, 1998, 1999); Cowley (2002); Cowley and Stuart (2005, 2006, 2007, 2008, 2009)

On returning to opposition with a new leader, Ed Miliband, who consciously sought to avoid conflict (Bale, 2015), the percentage of divisions where PLP members rebelled (14.6 per cent) and the average size of rebellions (2.5 per cent of the PLP) fell, even if the cast of rebels remained broad (55.9 per cent of the PLP rebelled at least once).

If such patterns have received attention elsewhere (see, for example, Cowley 2002, 2005; Kam, 2009; Norton, 1975) what has received less attention are the policy issues related to this dissent. With the development of a UK-specific coding scheme of policy topics (John et al., 2013) it is possible to examine this on a systematic basis. Coding of approximately two-thirds of the rebellions was taken directly from John et al.'s (2015) Acts of Parliament dataset. The remaining 746 rebellions were coded by the author using the same coding scheme. The percentage of rebellions associated with each major policy area was then calculated for each Parliament.

As figure 11.3 shows, some issues (environment, technology and communications, foreign trade) rarely incited revolt. Other concerns, such as decolonisation, faded after a focused period of dissent. However, several issues reveal a persistent capacity to divide the PLP. Across the 1945–2015 period, external policy was the most frequent topic of intra-party dissent. Defence (12.7 per cent) and international affairs (12.8 per cent) together accounted for a quarter of all rebellions. Defence expenditure and nuclear weapons proved extremely frequent sources of dissent but anti-terrorist measures were the pre-eminent source of division in defence policy. In international affairs, one issue was predominant: European policy. This comprised 88 per cent of rebellions in this category. At 11.3 per cent of all rebellions it was also the single issue to have most frequently divided the PLP.

In domestic policy, the greatest number of rebellions (24 per cent) are coded under the 'government operations' category. Three broad policy areas accounted for most dissent here: intergovernmental relations (particularly the governance of Northern Ireland and relations with local authorities), constitutional reform (especially devolution and parliamentary reform) and the regulation of politics (principally the administration and reform of elections, and the regulation of parties and campaigns). Rebellions coded under 'law, crime and family issues', chiefly relating to the operation of courts and prisons and police powers, accounted for 10.8 per cent of rebellions. Macroeconomic policy was responsible for 9.1 per cent of PLP rebellions. Taxation policy triggered over two-thirds of rebellions in this category. Finally, 'civil rights, minority issues, immigration and civil liberties' (7 per cent) was the only other category to account for more than 5 per cent of rebellions. Of rebellions here, half concerned immigration.

Figure 11.3 also testifies to a shifting issue basis of dissent over time. Between 1945 and 1964, defence was the pre-eminent focus for dissent. The issue then returned as a focus for revolt as New Labour fought 'wars of choice'

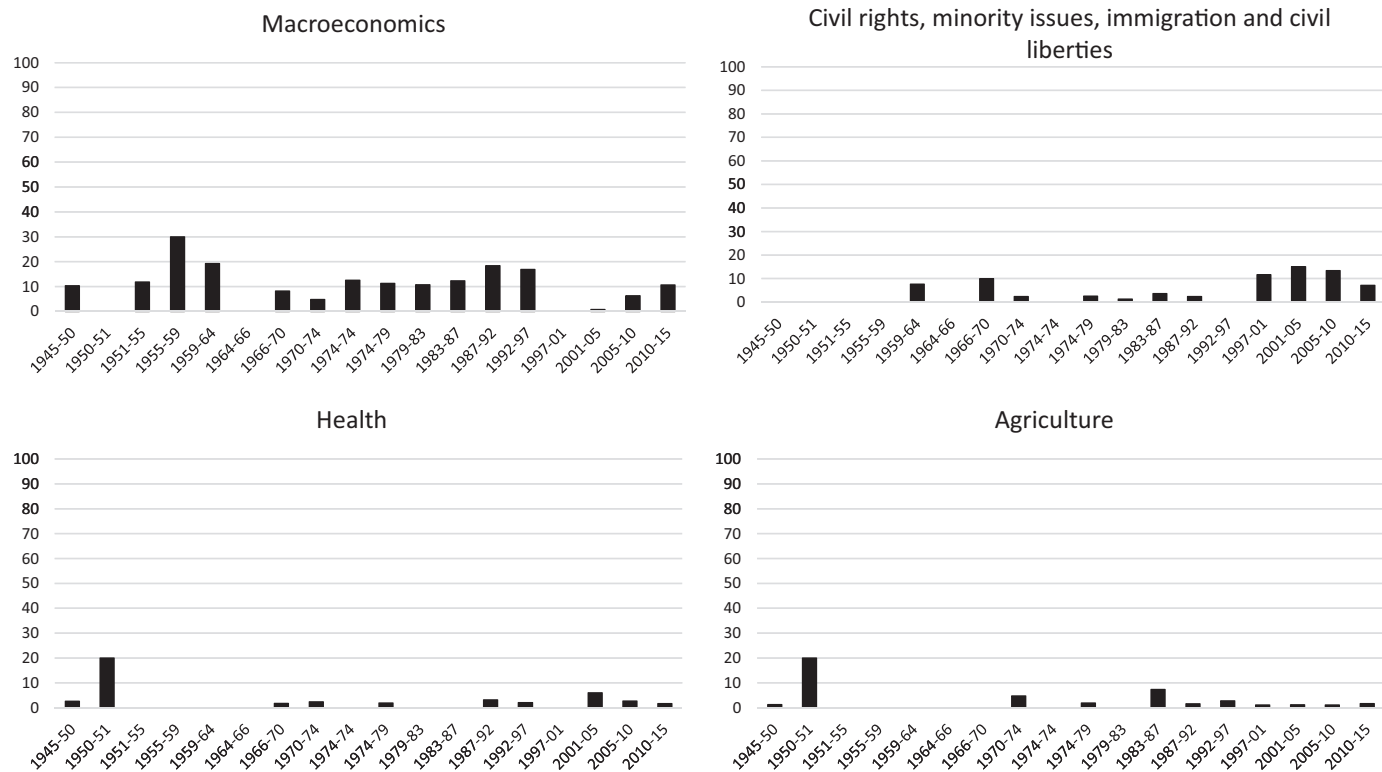
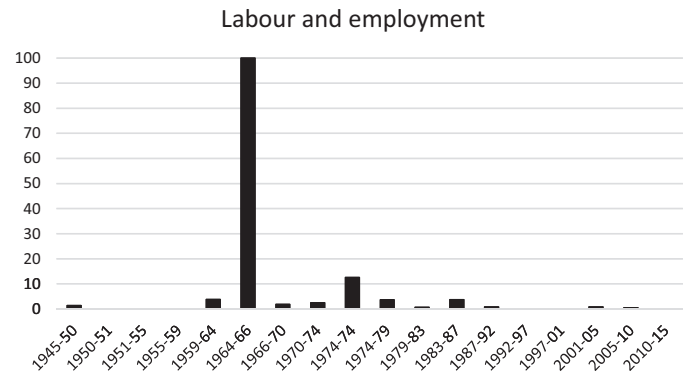
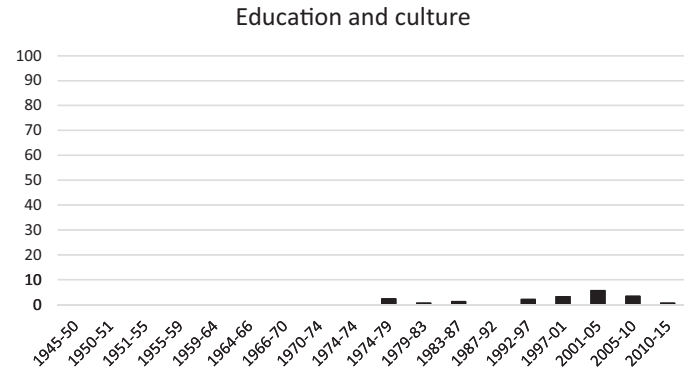
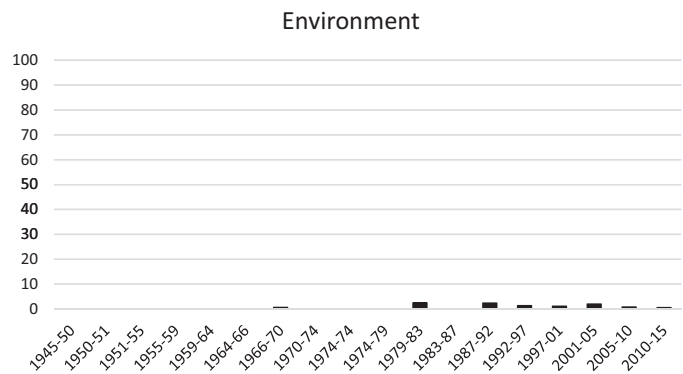


Figure 11.3 Percentage of rebellions in the PLP by issue







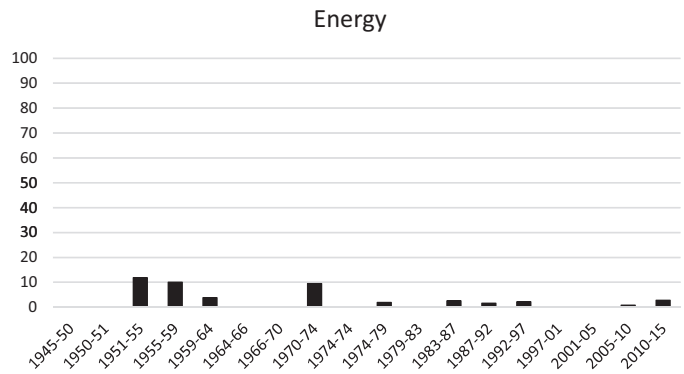
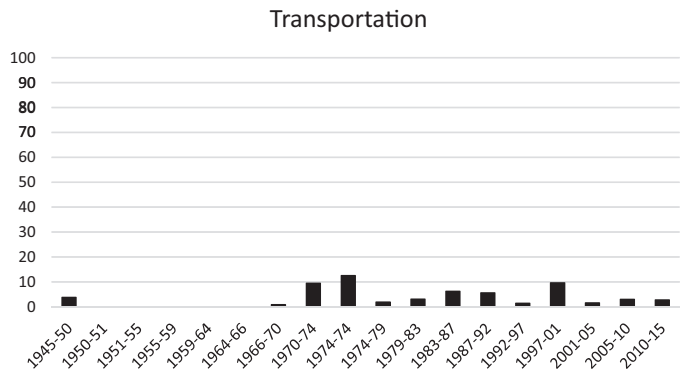
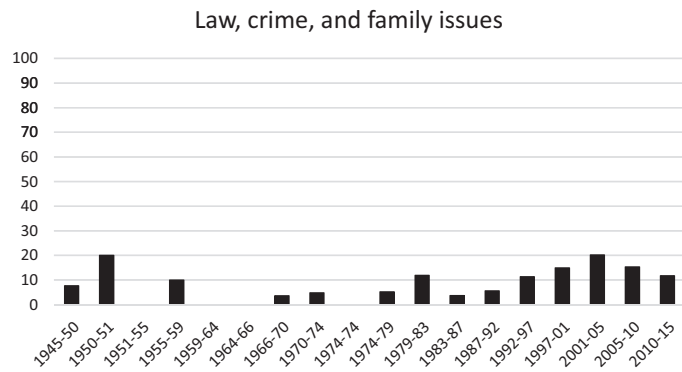
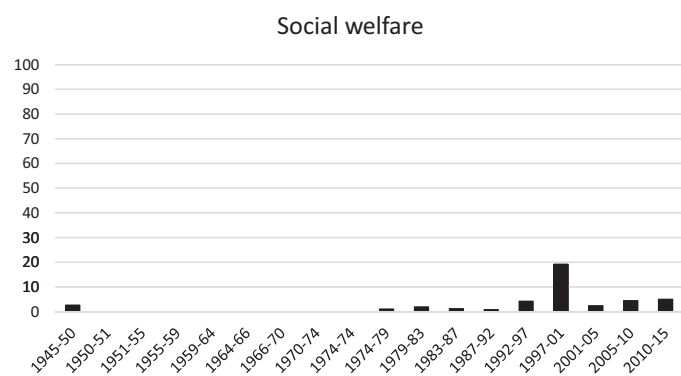


Figure 11.3 (Continued)







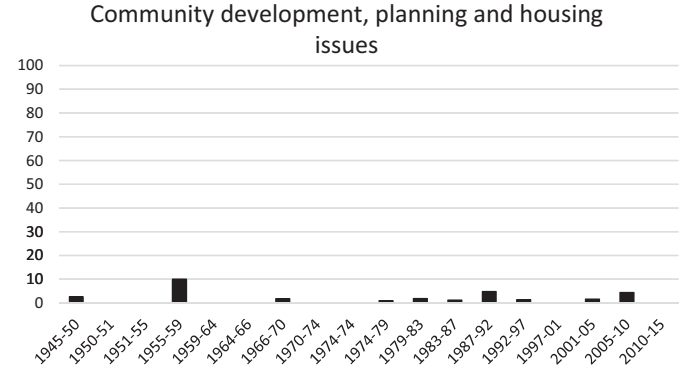
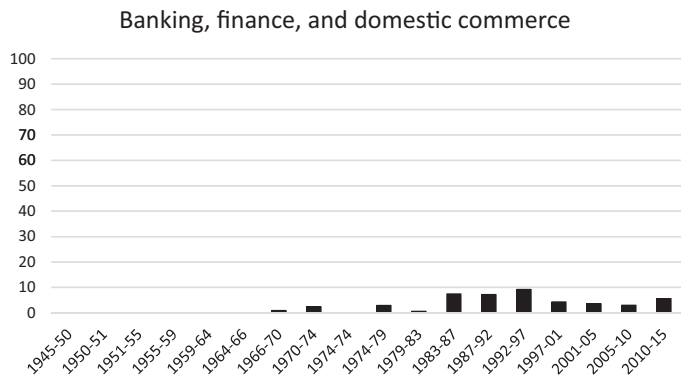
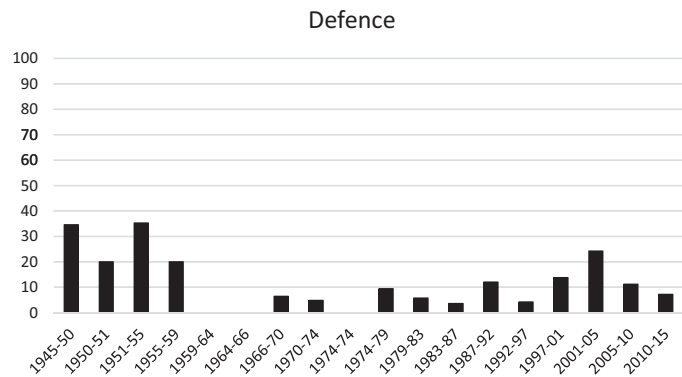
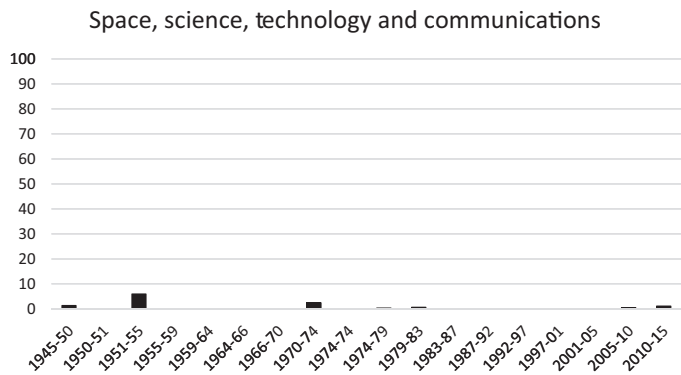


Figure 11.3 (Continued)







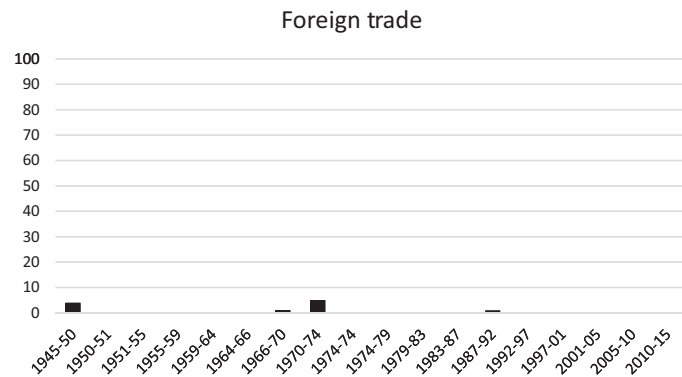
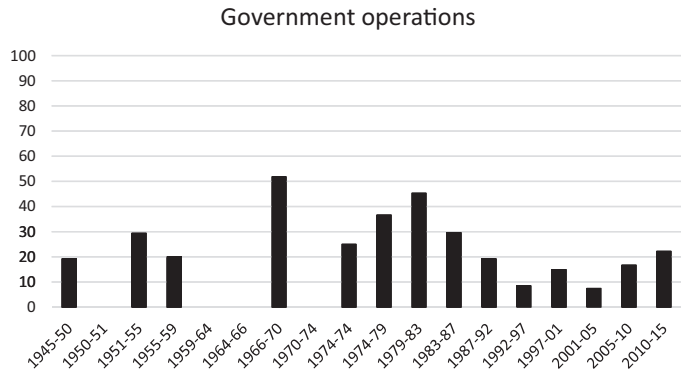
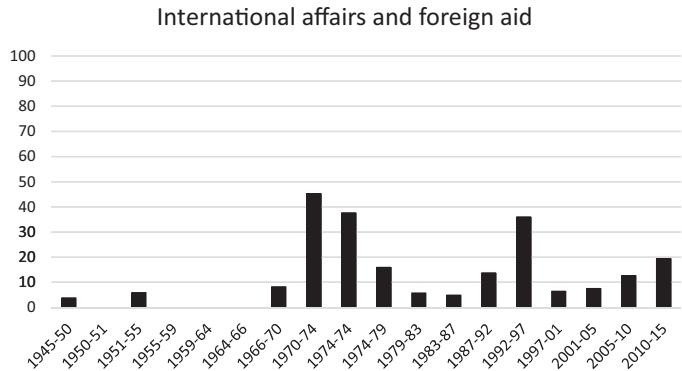


Figure 11.3 (Continued)





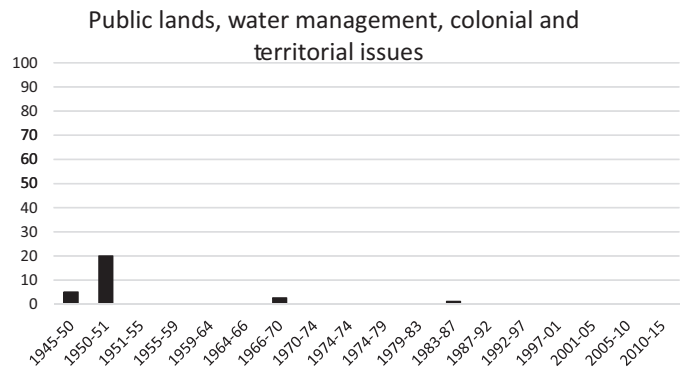


Figure 11.3 (Continued)

and pursued controversial anti-terrorism measures. Given the controversies associated with House of Lords reform and devolution, it is not surprising that government operations were a much more conspicuous source of dissent for Wilson and Callaghan. Yet, when New Labour returned to this constitutional reform agenda, it encountered considerably less dissent. Indeed, it is striking how distinctive the pattern of rebellion against New Labour was. Law and order, which had generated little dissent since capital punishment troubled Attlee's governments, now became the most frequent source of rebellion. Similarly, civil liberties and immigration became sources of frequent dissidence.

If parliamentary rebellions have been a consistent issue for Labour leaders, the willingness of the PLP to destabilise and challenge them has been more intermittent. The observation that 'The Labour Party changes leader infrequently. Once it selects a man it is very reluctant to dispose of him against his will' (Drucker, 1979: 1) held for a long time. Although no party leader has been without critics in the PLP, serious efforts to destabilise or depose them from within the PLP were rare. In 1947 George Brown and Patrick Gordon Walker sought to mobilise backbenchers in support of Dalton and Cripps's misjudged plot to replace Attlee. Amid the controversies over unilateralism, Gaitskell rebuffed Wilson's 1960 leadership challenge by a two-to-one majority. Anthony Greenwood's challenge the following year was even more emphatically dismissed. With the events of 1960 unforgiven, Gaitskellites canvassed PLP members for a challenge against Wilson in 1968. A further plot developed during the *In Place of Strife* controversy. Both evaporated when the plotters failed to mobilise sufficient PLP support. In 1988 Tony Benn challenged Neil Kinnock for the party leadership. Benn was decisively defeated, winning 11.4 per cent of the electoral college overall and just 17.2 per cent of PLP votes. The open challenge, as in 1960 and 1961, strengthened Kinnock, who used the mandate to increase the nomination threshold for future challengers from 5 per cent to 20 per cent of the PLP.

However, in the new century the PLP became more assertive in challenging the leadership. From 2001 Gordon Brown's supporters within the PLP were the ground troops in a prolonged campaign to destabilise Blair's leadership. With Blair's authority in the PLP eroded, particularly over the 2006 Lebanon War and the 'cash for honours' scandal, Brown's supporters organised a series of resignations and letters calling upon Blair to step down. The result was that Blair departed No. 10 within the year, much earlier than he had wished. Brown then became the victim of efforts from within the PLP to depose him. In September 2008, a succession of MPs demanded nomination papers for a leadership contest. In June 2009, the 'Hotmail' plotters used an anonymous email address to solicit backbench support to unseat Brown. In January 2010 Patricia Hewitt wrote to PLP members demanding a confidence

vote on Brown's leadership. Paralleling the attempts to depose Wilson, these plots collapsed for lack of sufficient support within the PLP.

As Hirschman (1970) recognised, the discontented are not confined to such exercises of voice. Dissidents can also seek exit, by resigning the party whip or defecting to other parties. However, since such forms of dissent incur the greatest costs they have been rarely employed. Table 11.1 lists the resignations of the Labour whip and defections from the PLP. Notwithstanding the actions of a handful of idiosyncratic MPs, it shows deteriorating relations with local parties were often a factor. Yet, most of those departing chose to do so on the basis of policy and strategic disagreements. The most remarkable use of exit was the 1981–1982 defection of twenty-eight Labour MPs to the Social Democratic Party (SDP). This represented the largest departure from any parliamentary party during the twentieth century. But, as Crewe and King (1997) observed, many within the PLP shared the same misgivings about the party's trajectory. The majority, however, for reasons of emotion, ties to the labour movement or strategic calculation chose to remain within the PLP.

The organisation of dissent?

Portrayed by their critics as conspiracies, it is tempting to identify factions as the engine rooms of this dissent. For example, the Bevanites were charged with being 'organised, secret and with their own whips' (Charles Parnell, quoted in Jenkins, 1979: 158). Assessing such claims is not straightforward. Factions are guarded about their activities, permitting them to play down or exaggerate their strength as appropriate (King, 1974: 46).

Factions are understood here as institutionalised intra-party groups engaging in collective action to achieve the aims of their members. Table 11.2 lists the principal factional groupings within the post-war PLP. Keep Left was formed in late 1946 by left-wingers concerned at the trajectory of the Attlee government's domestic and foreign policies. With Bevan, Wilson and Freeman's resignations in April 1951, the group transformed into the Bevanites. However, following the March 1952 rebellion on the defence estimates and the re-imposition of the PLP's standing orders, the group formally disbanded. Fear of similar disciplinary reaction led Ian Mikardo to organise a small clandestine left grouping in December 1964. This quickly proved impractical and the group began meeting openly as the Tribune Group.

Until the 1974 Parliament, the Labour right organised informally. However, Mikardo's election as PLP chair in February 1974 prompted the formation of the Manifesto Group. With the Manifesto Group compromised by the number of SDP defectors originating from within its ranks, Solidarity formed in February 1981, incorporating the remainder of the Manifesto Group after the 1983 election. Significant divisions also emerged concurrently in the Tribune

Table 11.1 Exit as dissent: resignations of the whip and defections from the PLP

Date	*MP*	*Notes*
26/10/48	Ivor Thomas	Resigned from Labour Party over opposition to steel nationalisation and the Parliament Bill. Took the Conservative whip and defeated as Conservative candidate in 1950
4/8/50	Raymond Blackburn	Left the Labour Party, following difficulties with local party and called for Churchill to form a coalition government. Sat as an independent until leaving Parliament at 1951 election
10/3/55	Richard Acland	Resigned whip over nuclear defence policies. Stood as independent and defeated in 1955 election
22/3/61	Alan Brown	Resigned Labour whip over defence policy. Took Conservative whip from May 1962. Defeated in 1964 election
8/12/66	Reginald Paget	Resigned whip in protest at government policy on Rhodesia. Whip restored 15/6/67
18/1/68	Desmond Donnelly	Resigned whip in protest at withdrawal from East of Suez. Expelled from Labour Party on 27/3/68. Defeated at 1970 election as candidate of United Democratic Party
16/2/72	Ray Gunter	Resigned whip over opposition to EEC membership. Resigned seat in March 1972
6/10/72	Dick Taverne	Resigned seat following disputes with local party over his pro-EEC views. Re-elected as Democratic Labour MP in March 1973. Lost seat in October 1974
9/7/74	Christopher Mayhew	Defected to Liberals over concerns at left-wing policies of Labour. Defeated at October 1974 election
7/4/76	John Stonehouse	Resigned Labour whip following arrest and de-selection by local party. Joined English National Party 14/4/76

Table 11.1 Exit as dissent: resignations of the whip and defections from the PLP (Continued)

Date	*MP*	*Notes*
26/7/76	Jim Sillars and John Robertson	Resigned Labour whip in opposition to spending cuts. Formed Scottish Labour Party. Sillars defeated at next election. Robertson did not stand
8/10/77	Reg Prentice	Joined Conservatives after disputes with local party
20/2/81	Richard Crawshaw	Resigned whip prior to joining SDP on 2/3/81
20/2/81	Tom Ellis	Resigned whip prior to joining SDP on 2/3/81
2/3/81	Tom Bradley, John Cartwright, John Horam, Robert Maclennan, John Roper, David Owen, Bill Rodgers, Neville Sandelson, Mike Thomas, Ian Wrigglesworth	Joined SDP
19/3/81	Edward Lyons	Joined SDP
4/7/81	James Wellbeloved	Joined SDP
7/9/81	Michael O'Halloran	Joined SDP
1/10/81	Dickson Mabon	Joined SDP
5/10/81	Bob Mitchell	Joined SDP
6/10/81	David Ginsburg	Joined SDP
7/10/81	James Dunn and Tom McNally	Joined SDP
29/10/81	Eric Ogden	Joined SDP
16/11/81	John Grant	Joined SDP
30/11/81	George Cunningham	Resigned whip. Sat as independent. Joined SDP in June 1982
2/12/81	Ronald Brown	Joined SDP
11/12/81	Bruce Douglas-Mann and Jeffrey Thomas	Joined SDP. Douglas-Mann resigned and contested by-election. Defeated by Conservative candidate
2/8/81	Robert Mellish	Resigned whip after disputes with local party. Forced by-election in 1982
22/12/81	Ednyfed Hudson Davies	Joined SDP
22/1/82	Bryan Magee	Resigned Labour whip. Joined SDP 16/6/82

Table 11.1 Exit as dissent: resignations of the whip and defections from the PLP (Continued)

Date	*MP*	*Notes*
31/1/87	John Ryman	Resigned whip following difficulties with local party. Sat as independent. Did not contest 1987 election
14/3/90	Dick Douglas	Resigned Labour whip over failure to support Poll Tax non-payment campaign. Took SNP whip from 4/10/91. Defeated at 1992 election
10/12/01	Paul Marsden	Joined Liberal Democrats in protest over Afghanistan and investment in public services. Subsequently resigned from Liberal Democrats 5/4/05 and announced he would re-join Labour. Did not stand for re-election
25/4/05	Brian Sedgemore	Joined Liberal Democrats in protest at tuition fees and Iraq. Did not seek re-election in 2005
20/10/06	Clare Short	Resigned Labour whip in protest at Blair's leadership. Sat as independent until retirement from Parliament at 2010 election
16/9/07	Robert Wareing	Resigned whip after failing in bid for reselection

Source: Adapted from Butler and Butler (2011: 279–81)

Group over the party's constitution, Militant and Benn's deputy leadership challenge. Following Tribune's registration as an 'approved organisation' and the refusal of a significant section of its membership to support Benn, thirteen Tribune members resigned to form the Campaign Group.

Thereafter, the Tribune Group began to change, offering critical support to Neil Kinnock and the emerging 'soft left'. Its ranks also swelled with leadership loyalists. As the Tribune Group's membership broadened, Solidarity's stagnated. This, combined with the parliamentary and extra-parliamentary left's marginalisation, led Solidarity to disband in 1988. By this point, Tribune was increasingly incapable of functioning as a critical organisation. Unsuccessful efforts to relaunch the group in 2002 and 2005 left the Campaign Group as the only meaningful parliamentary faction during the New Labour era.

That the percentage of the PLP joining these groups remained low, the 1974–1983 Parliaments excepted, is one indication of their limitations.

Table 11.2 Peak memberships of principal factional groupings within the PLP

	1945–51	*1950–51*	*1951–55*	*1959–64*	*1964–66*	*1966–70*	*1970–74*	*1974–74**	*1974–79*	*1979–83*	*1983–87*	*1987–92*	*1992–97*	*1997–01*	*2001–05*	*2005–10*
Keep Left	19 (4.8%)	12 (3.8%)														
Bevanites			44 (14.9%)													
Tribune Group					31 (9.8%)	41 (11.3%)	46 (16.0%)	65 (21.6%)	80 (25.3%)	72 (26.8%)	57 (27.3%)	Not available	99 (36.5%)			
Manifesto Group									61 (19.3%)	134 (49.8%)						
Solidarity										68 (28.3%)	59 (28.2%)	44 (19.2%)				
Campaign Group										22 (9.2%)	32 (15.3%)	44 (19.2%)	26 (9.6%)	31 (7.4%)	27 (6.5%)	24 (6.7%)

*Parliament ran from February 1974 to the second general election that year, in October.

Sources: LHA, Manchester, Jo Richardson papers; LHA, Manchester, Papers of the Labour Party Manifesto Group; Hull History Centre, Hull, Roy Hattersley Papers; Hull History Centre, Hull, Kevin McNamara papers; Bishopsgate Institute, London, Bernie Grant Papers; Bishopsgate Institute, London, Campaign for Labour Party Democracy Archive; *Political Companion* (various issues); Waller and Criddle (1996, 2002)

Furthermore, these figures represent the highest nominal strength; active participation tended to be much lower. The participation rate of groups in rebellions was also patchy, as table 11.3 shows. Members of avowedly loyalist groups like the Manifesto Group and Solidarity participated in fewer rebellions than their left-wing counterparts. When members of these groups did rebel, it was in very low numbers and without direction from the group. Keep Left members also participated in a relatively low percentage of rebellions. More akin to an intra-party think tank (Castle, 1993: 159), it prioritised policy development.

In contrast, members of the Bevanites, Tribune and Campaign Groups cast dissenting votes in the majority of PLP rebellions. Yet they were rarely cohesive in their dissent. It was rare for the majority of group members to dissent together; exceptional for three-quarters or more to do so. In the March 1952 defence vote 93.2 per cent of the Bevanites rebelled together. The Tribune Group reached this threshold on a handful of votes including those on NHS charges (1968), EEC membership (1975) and European Assembly elections (1977). Similarly, rebellions on the Prevention of Terrorism Act (1988), the Gulf War (1991), Maastricht (1992 and 1993) and Iraq (2003) witnessed over three-quarters of the Campaign Group rebelling together.

Table 11.3 also shows it is rare for rebellions to be exclusively factional affairs. It has not been unusual for faction members to constitute the majority of rebels in most parliamentary revolts – the Bevanites, Tribune and Campaign Groups all did so at various points. But it has been atypical for over three-quarters of the personnel involved in rebellions to be drawn from a factional group. Where this does apply, the rebellions tended to be small. For example, members of the Campaign Group constituted over three-quarters of the rebelling personnel in the 1987–1992 Parliament but 74 per cent of these rebellions comprised fewer than ten rebels.

Even when group members rebelled together it does not mean they were acting under group instructions. Where available, archival records show factional steering of dissent is easily over-stated. Keep Left's minutes (Labour History Archive and Study Centre (hereafter LHA), Manchester, Jo Richardson papers), show members discussed matters coming before the House, organised delegations and coordinated contributions to PLP meetings and debates. However, discussion of papers and pamphleteering preoccupied meetings. The records of the Bevanites (LHA, Manchester, Jo Richardson papers) show similar preoccupations. The group considered the Japanese Peace Treaty, although there was little discussion on the substantive issue of whether to oppose it (Crossman, 1981: 41). There was fuller discussion of the group's stance in the March 1952 defence debate. However, there is little evidence that members were whipped on this or other votes.

Neil Kinnock described the Tribune Group as 'the light cavalry of the Parliamentary Labour Party' (HC Deb vol. 870 col. 51). The available records

Table 11.3 Factional participation in dissenting votes

Parliament	*Faction*	*% of rebellions involving faction members*	*% of faction members rebelling*				*Faction members as % of total Labour rebels*			
			0–25	*26–50*	*51–75*	*76–100*	*0–25*	*26–50*	*51–75*	*76–100*
1945–50	Keep Left	33.9	81.0	19.0			90.5	9.5		
1950–51	Keep Left	40.0	100.0				50.0	50.0		
1951–55	Bevanites	100.0	33.3		33.3	33.3		33.3	66.6	
1966–70	Tribune Group	87.2	56.8	31.5	10.5	1.1	3.2	29.5	43.2	24.2
1970–74	Tribune Group	63.4	69.2	26.9	3.8		19.2	53.8	19.2	7.7
1974–74	Tribune Group	100.0	37.5	50.0	12.5			12.5	75.0	12.5
1974–79	Tribune Group	80.6	61.8	26.1	11.2	0.8	3.6	24.1	44.1	28.1
	Manifesto Group	54.7	100.0				79.8	14.8		5.3
1979–83	Tribune Group	85.6	86.1	10.9	2.9		8.8	37.2	35.7	18.2
	Manifesto Group	76.0	95.5	4.5			56.8	38.6		4.5
	Solidarity	38.3	98.4	1.6			48.4	42.2		9.4
	Campaign Group	83.3	70.0	30.0			20.0	50.0	30.0	
1983–87	Tribune Group	59.2	95.8	2.1	2.1		29.1	62.5	4.2	4.2
	Solidarity	28.3	100.0				91.3	4.3		4.3
	Campaign Group	82.7	80.6	17.9	1.5		4.5	38.8	26.9	29.8
1987–92	Campaign Group	97.5	73.0	16.4	8.2	2.5	9.0	36.9	22.9	31.2
1992–97	Tribune Group	58.4	100.0				71.1	26.5		2.4
	Campaign Group	88.1	50.0	26.9	20.6	2.4	5.6	47.6	22.2	24.6
1997–01	Campaign Group	84.0	54.4	24.1	21.5			48.1	24.1	27.8
2001–05	Campaign Group	75.4	51.6	30.5	16.8	1.1	8.4	47.9	27.9	15.8
2005–10	Campaign Group	84.2	61.4	28.9	7.5	2.3	7.5	45.5	20.8	26.3

Sources: Calculated from sources listed for figure 11.2 and table 11.2

of group meetings are fragmentary (LHA, Manchester, Jo Richardson papers; Hull History Centre, Hull, Kevin McNamara papers; Anne Kerr papers) but demonstrate a greater focus upon upcoming parliamentary business than its predecessors. Those attending meetings would often indicate how they intended to vote. Since, where rebellions are concerned, there is safety in numbers, this was useful information to share. Group minutes also occasionally suggest a degree of additional organisation. For example, it was agreed that Mikardo would 'floor-manage' the vote on the International Monetary Fund Letter of Intent on 5 December 1967 (Tribune Group Minutes, 5/12/67, LHA, Manchester, Jo Richardson papers). Seventeen out of the subsequent eighteen rebels were group members. In December 1969, the group agreed 'to lobby those outside our Group who might be persuaded to abstain with us' on prices and incomes (Tribune Group Minutes, 16/12/69, LHA, Manchester, Jo Richardson papers). Twenty-nine Labour MPs abstained (Norton, 1975: 373), twenty-three were Tribune Group members. However, this was exceptional. Returning to Kinnock's analogy, the group lacked the cohesion and discipline required of an effective military unit. As one member confessed, 'as organisers we are less than superb. There are no whips; there are no influences. A vote is never taken at Tribune meetings' (King, 1974: 45).

In contrast, Stuart Holland described the Campaign Group as like 'a prayer meeting where everyone had to prove their ideological purity' (Benn, 1992: 375). Bernie Grant also observed a tendency to question the 'left credentials' of those who did not subscribe to, or know, 'the correct line' (Bishopsgate Institute, London, Bernie Grant papers, BG/P/11/6/1). Pressures to ideological conformity notwithstanding, there is little evidence in the archival record (Bishopsgate Institute, London, Bernie Grant papers; Campaign for Labour Party Democracy papers) to suggest active organisation of parliamentary rebellions, but rather a preference to focus on extra-parliamentary activities. The rebelliousness of members in the 1997–2001 Parliament owed much to individual initiative. The group had informally agreed to rebel only where causes for dissent could generate support beyond its ranks (Cowley, 2002: 36).

By this point, PLP factionalism had shifted. The Campaign Group was marginal, the soft left lacked an effective organisation and, given these circumstances, the right found factional organisation superfluous. Divisions within the PLP instead came to be framed in terms of 'Blairites' and 'Brownites'. Whereas the groups considered above, however imperfectly, performed functions of articulation, coordination and representation in a solidaristic organisation, the 'Blairites' and 'Brownites' resembled 'leadership factions' (Janda, 1980: 121) or 'client-group factions' (Beller and Belloni, 1978). Although Brown chose public sector reform to destabilise Blair's leadership, such differences as existed between the two camps were played out within a shared ideological framework, leading one Brownite to view them as akin to the rivalry between Coke and Pepsi (McBride, 2013: 181). Rather, these differences were

secondary to who led the government and would distribute its spoils. At their zenith, these struggles could be highly organised. Second-term rebellions on foundation hospitals, university fees and ninety-day detention were coordinated on Brown's behalf by two former whips, Nick Brown and George Mudie (Powell, 2010: 156). However, such organisation was the exception in the majority of rebellions prior to 2007 and, as noted above, rebellion did not abate after Brown entered No. 10.

Managing dissent within the PLP

Despite their limited capacities, restrictions on factions have been one disciplinary option available to party leaders. Following Bevanite success in the 1952 National Executive Committee (NEC) elections, the PLP passed a motion calling for 'the immediate abandonment of all group organisations within the Party' (PLP Minutes 23/10/52, LHA). This was indicative of a wider embrace of disciplinary mechanisms. Although the PLP's standing orders were suspended until 1952 the threat of expulsion or removal of the whip remained. Having opposed steel nationalisation and refused guarantees on future conduct, Alfred Edwards was expelled from the PLP in 1948. John Platts-Mills was expelled for signing the 1948 Nenni telegram, and fellow signatories Leslie Solley and Konni Zilliacus followed in 1949 having continued to oppose the party's foreign policy. The threat of disciplinary measures persisted in opposition. Having defied the PLP on German rearmament in November 1954, seven members had the whip withdrawn. In March 1955, Bevan's dissidence led to withdrawal of the whip for a month. Five MPs had the whip withdrawn temporarily in 1961, having defied the PLP and voted on the defence estimates. In total, this period saw more withdrawals of the whip than during the preceding fifty years (Alderman, 1967: 125).

On returning to government, however, a more liberal disciplinary regime evolved. The conscience clause of standing orders was broadened and a new code of conduct introduced an intermediate sanction of suspension of the whip. The Tribune Group was permitted to operate openly. Dissidence was reprimanded (see, for example, PLP Minutes 26/10/66; 2/3/67; 25/1/68, LHA). But, except for a month-long suspension of the whip for twenty-four MPs who abstained on spending cuts in January 1968, rebels escaped disciplinary action. Even if Labour whips sometimes played 'bad cop' with dissidents (Norton, 2004: 199) the precarious parliamentary position and the scale of dissent during the 1974–1979 government precluded returning to the disciplinary status quo ante. Indeed, despite differing leadership styles, Labour leaders after Gaitskell did not attempt to bind the PLP through such disciplinary measures. Although intolerant of dissent, Kinnock favoured other methods of party management and expulsion was reserved only for Militant's two MPs in 1991. A liberal disciplinary approach followed from John Smith's

inclusive leadership style (Stuart, 2006). Although both Blair and Brown harboured occasional desires to submit PLP rebels to disciplinary measures, they were typically dissuaded from doing so (see, for example, Campbell, 2010: 533). Dennis Canavan and Ken Livingstone's expulsions originated in 'control-freakery', but by opposing official party candidates both effectively expelled themselves. Excluding the additional case of George Galloway, expelled in 2003 for calling upon British servicemen in Iraq to disobey orders, withdrawal of the whip or expulsion was only employed in the New Labour era for those who engaged in personal misconduct.

Rather there was, as in other parties (Aylott, 2002; Kam, 2009; Lynch and Whitaker, 2013), a much broader repertoire for managing dissent within the PLP. The party's ethos of loyalty (Drucker, 1979) was a powerful resource. For those uncompelled by ethos, patronage had its place. Co-option of Bevanites to the frontbench rendered the PLP more manageable for Gaitskell, Kinnock rewarded apostates from the Campaign Group (Heffernan and Marqusee, 1992) while New Labour increased the size of the payroll vote to encompass 40 per cent of the PLP (Bochel and Defty, 2007: 51). Leaders could also seek to avoid confrontation with the PLP. Decisions could be deferred to allow for further consideration. For example, consideration of conscription was postponed for six months in 1946. Free votes could be granted. Callaghan avoided a rebellion by granting a free vote on the electoral system for European elections in 1977 while Blair did not whip the public smoking ban in 2006. For some issues, it proved possible to remove the decision from the PLP entirely. For example, Attlee deprived the PLP of input into the decision to develop British nuclear weapons. Wilson granted a referendum on EEC membership in 1975 to force the public to resolve an issue which divided the PLP.

However, most Labour leaders have discovered that an effort to compromise with dissidents in the PLP has the capacity to diminish the scale of rebellion, even if it cannot always remove it. Even Blair, who wished to present himself publicly as maintaining a tight grip on the PLP, discovered that discretion could be the better part of valour (Cowley, 2002, 2005). Rather, as Wilson found with the Parliament (No. 2) Bill and *In Place of Strife*, and as Blair found over the Iraq war, dissent is likely to escalate where the leader is unwilling or unable to offer policy concessions.

The PLP as a focus for dissent

The boundaries of authority between the PLP, NEC and party conference have been contentious throughout Labour's history. However, contention has only rarely trespassed into disputing the PLP's legitimacy. Despite Bevanite victories in the constituency section of the NEC, relations between the parliamentary and the extra-parliamentary party were complex during the Attlee and Gaitskell era. Constituency Labour Parties (CLPs) were more evenly split

than NEC results would suggest (Janosik, 1968; Steck, 1970) and the PLP's majority enjoyed considerable support. Consequently, there was no enduring and systematic fracture between the PLP and party members. On defence, for example, whereas the majority of CLPs opposed the platform on German rearmament at the 1954 conference (Harrison, 1960: 225), the majority went on to support Gaitskell's stance on nuclear weapons at the 1960 and 1961 conferences (Hindell and Williams, 1962). Given the 'praetorian guard' of unions (Minkin, 1991) defending the PLP majority and the leadership, voices questioning the PLP's legitimacy (see, for example, Jenkins and Wolfgang, 1956) did not travel far.

Rather, the PLP's legitimacy was eroded and then collapsed because of Wilson and Callaghan's struggle to maintain and stabilise a post-war settlement that was increasingly incapable of resolving economic and social problems. The reintroduction of prescription charges, deflationary budgets, statutory incomes policies and equivocations over Vietnam between 1964 and 1970 defied party conference decisions and grassroots preferences. This disjunction only widened thereafter. Wilson vetoed the commitment to nationalise twenty-five leading companies in *Labour's Programme 1973*. Callaghan followed his predecessor in regularly defying conference, famously vetoing the inclusion of abolition of the Lords in the 1979 manifesto. One hundred and eighty-one Labour Party members made 'a major misjudgement' (Chris Mullin, quoted in Horn, 2013: 199) in signing a July 1975 letter in support of Reg Prentice, later to defect to the Conservatives (see table 11.1). The crisis of legitimacy that such episodes generated was seized upon by the Campaign for Labour Party Democracy (CLPD). Founded in 1973 to ensure 'that policy decisions reached by Annual Conference should be binding on the Parliamentary Labour Party', it succeeded in securing mandatory reselection of MPs in 1979 and, in 1980, deprived the PLP of its exclusive right to elect party leaders. However, CLPD lost momentum as the left fragmented. While Kinnock would bypass the NEC in policy formulation and erode conference sovereignty, his NEC majority and union support ensured that he was able to secure conference endorsement for his reforms, preventing a reoccurrence of this crisis of legitimacy. Blair was determined to avoid tensions between the parliamentary and extra-parliamentary party (Blair, 2010: 101–2). By offering only modest policy pledges he limited underperformance as a potential source of grassroots dissatisfaction. The National Policy Forum maximised ministerial control of policy formation, while the capacity of conference to decide on matters of controversy was limited. Nevertheless, as Russell (2005) and Minkin (2014) have shown, despite a willingness to negotiate, conference defeats did take place on issues including pensions, foundation hospitals, rail nationalisation, housing and private contracts within the NHS. However, a pattern developed that union votes delivered such defeats while most constituency delegates supported the platform. This dynamic, coupled with Blair's function as a lightning

rod for grassroots dissent, meant that the PLP's legitimacy was not jeopardised as it had been in the Wilson–Callaghan era.

Conclusion

Although this chapter has identified a general trend towards increased rebelliousness, what is most striking is the complex and shifting character of dissent. At the risk of doing these complexities some violence, the post-war PLP can be seen as witnessing a succession of regimes, each with its associated pattern of dissent and factionalism.

During Attlee and Gaitskell's leadership, dissident parliamentarians faced a disciplinary apparatus apt to respond harshly. With the party focused on the construction and consolidation of the post-war social democratic settlement, cross-voting was relatively rare. But when it did occur defence was a preeminent concern. A vituperative period of unipolar factionalism briefly erupted, but the legitimacy of the PLP was not seriously questioned outside Westminster.

A liberal disciplinary regime within the PLP was inaugurated and institutionalised during Wilson, Callaghan and Foot's leaderships. However, the PLP was confronted by the difficulties of managing an increasingly enervated social democratic settlement. That struggle was the altar on which the PLP sacrificed its legitimacy with the extra-parliamentary party. The extent, breadth and depth of parliamentary dissent grew significantly within the PLP. The focus of dissent broadened and issues of foreign affairs and constitutional reform emerged as prominent sources of contention.

Under leaders after Foot, a prolonged process of change (Heffernan, 1998) saw the 'Third Way' emerge as a replacement social democratic paradigm. An extensive bi-polar factionalism within the PLP gave way to client-group factionalism. After initially abating, the extent of dissent within the PLP grew after 2001. In addition, Third Way social democracy generated its own pattern of dissent, with issues relating to crime, civil liberties and welfare being more prominent in the pattern of rebellions. Conflict with the extra-parliamentary party was not unknown, but the PLP's legitimacy was not compromised.

This invites the question of whether the period after 2015 represents the emergence of a new regime. Jeremy Corbyn's leadership is considered elsewhere in this volume (see Shaw's and Avril's chapters) and a definitive assessment will have to await the conclusion of the Corbyn era. However, it would be remiss not to reflect here on how Corbyn's relations with the PLP relate to themes related above.

Having relied on 'loaned' nominations from MPs to get onto the ballot, Corbyn's subsequent election in 2015 depended on the new system for leadership elections introduced by the Collins Review. Under this system, the PLP no longer commanded a third of the vote. As Quinn (2016) has shown,

Corbyn's lack of support in the PLP would have denied him victory under the electoral college. The consequence of being elected with the overt support of just 10 per cent of the PLP was that Corbyn lacked leadership capital (Bennister, 't Hart and Worthy, 2015) with his parliamentary colleagues. Corbyn's pedigree of dissent diminished this further, leaving him ill-positioned to demand loyalty. Events then conspired to present exactly the issues which, as noted above, have most starkly divided the PLP. In December 2015 Corbyn granted the PLP a free vote on air strikes against Islamic State in Syria. Sixty-six (28.4 per cent) Labour MPs entered the opposite division lobby to Corbyn. Then Europe returned to divide the party. Shaw considers the leadership challenge that followed the EU referendum in detail elsewhere in this volume. What is significant here is that in sponsoring this 'coup' attempt, the PLP was viewed by many party members to have acted disloyally and unfairly. The PLP's legitimacy was significantly damaged. As one MP reflected, 'The PLP – capital letters – is a swear word. Among many members, it means careerist, failure, disloyal' (Rawnsley, 2016).

Were dissent framed consistently in terms of the PLP defying Corbyn's extra-parliamentary mandate, then the PLP's legitimacy would have been further compromised. But the situation was rather more complex. For example, the renewal of Trident showed that other mandates applied. Granted another free vote in June 2016, 141 members (61.3 per cent) of the PLP voted in favour of renewal. Corbyn, however, was one of forty-seven to defy the policy agreed by the party conference. Further illustration of Corbyn's difficulties came when he issued a three-line whip in support of triggering Article 50 in February 2017. Fifty-two MPs (22.4 per cent of the PLP) defied the whip. With no guarantee that he could find replacements, he was unable to dismiss those outside the Shadow Cabinet who defied him, including three members of the Labour whips' office. Corbyn's decision also risked alienating those to whom he owed his mandate. Party members overwhelmingly supported EU membership and were potentially ill-disposed to facilitating Brexit on Conservative terms.

At the time of writing, open criticism of Corbyn within the PLP had subsided following Labour's better than expected performance in the 2017 election. However, the potential for conflict remained. The election of a handful of additional Corbynite MPs and departure of a small band of his parliamentary critics only marginally altered the PLP's political profile. Yet, while Corbyn retained the extra-parliamentary party's support and the determination to stay in office, his opponents were in no position to remove him. Boundary changes and a more permissive system of mandatory reselection could potentially engineer a more Corbynite PLP. But this would be a long-term project and, as experience after 1981 had shown, even accounting for early retirements and SDP defectors, mandatory reselection did not transform the PLP as some of its advocates on the left had hoped. In circumstances in

which Brexit would re-open a wide range of fundamental political issues, it was hard to rule out the potential for a resurgence of dissent within the PLP under Corbyn and foolhardy to discount the possibility of further erosion of the PLP's legitimacy.

References

Alderman, R. K. (1967) 'Parliamentary Party Discipline in Opposition: The Parliamentary Labour Party 1951–64', *Parliamentary Affairs*, 22:2, pp. 124–36.

Aylott, N. (2002) 'Let's Discuss this Later: Party Responses to Euro-division in Scandinavia', *Party Politics*, 8:4, pp. 441–61.

Bale, T. (2000) 'Crimes and Misdemeanours: Managing Dissent in the Twentieth and Twenty-First Century Labour Party', in Brivati, B. and Heffernan, R. (eds) *The Labour Party: A Centenary History*, Houndmills: Macmillan, pp. 268–91.

Bale, T. (2015) *Five Year Mission: The Labour Party under Ed Miliband*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Beller, D. C. and Belloni, F. P. (1978) 'Party and Faction: Modes of Political Competition', in Belloni, F. P. and Beller, D. C. (eds) *Faction Politics: Political Parties and Factionalism in Comparative Perspective*, Santa Barbara, CA and Oxford: ABC-Clio, pp. 417–50.

Benn, T. (1992) *The End of an Era: Diaries 1980–1990*, London: Hutchinson.

Bennister, M., 't Hart, P. and Worthy, B. (2015) 'Assessing the Authority of Political Office-Holders: The Leadership Capital Index', *West European Politics*, 38:3, pp. 417–40.

Blair, T. (2010) *A Journey*, London: Hutchinson.

Bochel, H. and Defty, A. (2007) *Welfare Policy under New Labour: Views from Inside Westminster*, Bristol: Policy Press.

Butler, D. and Butler, G. (2011) *British Political Facts*, 10th edition, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Campbell, A. (2010) *The Alastair Campbell Diaries. Volume One: Prelude to Power 1994–1997*, London: Hutchinson.

Castle, B. (1993) *Fighting All the Way*, London: Macmillan.

Cowley, P. (2002) *Revolts and Rebellions*, London: Politico's.

Cowley, P. (2005) *The Rebels: How Blair Mislaid His Majority*, London: Politico's.

Cowley, P. and Stuart, M. (2005) *Dissension amongst the Parliamentary Labour Party, 2001–2005: A Data Handbook*, Nottingham: University of Nottingham.

Cowley, P. and Stuart, M. (2006) *Dissension amongst the Parliamentary Labour Party, 2005–2006: A Data Handbook*, Nottingham: University of Nottingham.

Cowley, P. and Stuart, M. (2007) *From Blair to Brown: Dissension amongst the Parliamentary Labour Party, 2006–2007: A Data Handbook*, Nottingham: University of Nottingham.

Cowley, P. and Stuart, M. (2008) *Browned off? Dissension amongst the Parliamentary Labour Party, 2007–2008: A Data Handbook*, Nottingham: University of Nottingham.

Cowley, P. and Stuart, M. (2009) *Dissension amongst the Parliamentary Labour Party, 2008–2009: A Data Handbook*, Nottingham: University of Nottingham.

Cowley, P. and Stuart, M. (2011) 'Ignored, Irresponsible and Irrelevant? Opposition MPs in the House of Commons', in Fletcher, N. (ed.) *How to be in Opposition*, London: Biteback, pp. 173–85.

Crewe, I. and King, A. (1997) *SDP: The Birth, Life, and Death of the Social Democratic Party*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Crossman, R. (1981) *The Backbench Diaries of Richard Crossman*, London: Hamish Hamilton and Jonathan Cape.
Drucker, H. M. (1979) *Doctrine and Ethos in the Labour Party*, London: Allen Unwin.
Harrison, M. (1960) *Trade Unions and the Labour Party*, London: Allen Unwin.
Heffernan, R. (1998) 'Labour's Transformation: A Staged Process', *Politics*, 18:2, pp. 101–6.
Heffernan, R. (2000) 'Leaders and Followers: The Politics of the Parliamentary Labour Party', in Brivati, B. and Heffernan, R. (eds) *The Labour Party: A Centenary History*, Houndmills: Macmillan, pp. 246–67.
Heffernan, R. and Marqusee, M. (1992) *Defeat from the Jaws of Victory: Inside Kinnock's Labour Party*, London: Verso Books.
Hindell, K. and Williams, P. (1962) 'Scarborough and Blackpool: An Analysis of Some Votes at the Labour Party Conferences of 1960 and 1961', *Political Quarterly*, 33:3, pp. 306–20.
Hirschman, A. O. (1970) *Exit, Voice, and Loyalty: Responses to Decline in Firms, Organizations, and States*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
Horn, G. (2013) *Crossing the Floor: Reg Prentice and the Crisis of British Social Democracy*, Manchester: Manchester University Press.
Janda, K. (1980) *Political Parties: A Cross-National Survey*, New York: Free Press.
Janosik, E. G. (1968) *Constituency Labour Parties in Britain*, London: Pall Mall Press.
Jenkins, H. and Wolfgang, W. (1956) *Tho' Cowards Flinch: Democracy, Power and Socialism*, London: Future and Victory for Socialism.
Jenkins, M. (1979) *Bevanism: Labour's High Tide*, Nottingham: Spokesman.
John, P., Bertelli, A., Jennings, W. and Bevan, S. (2013) *Policy Agendas in British Politics*, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
John, P., Bertelli, A., Jennings, W. and Bevan, S. (2015) *Acts of UK Parliament 1911–2012 Dataset*. Available at: https://policyagendasuk.files.wordpress.com/2015/06/acts1911–2012_websiteversion_140426.xls. Accessed 28 February 2017.
Kam, C. J. (2009) *Party Discipline and Parliamentary Politics*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
King, A. (1974) *British Members of Parliament: A Self Portrait*, London: Macmillan.
Lynch, P. and Whitaker, R. (2013) 'Where There is Discord, Can They Bring Harmony? Managing Intra-party Dissent on European Integration in the Conservative Party', *British Journal of Politics and International Relations*, 15:3, pp. 317–39.
May, J. D. (1973) 'Opinion Structure of Political Parties: The Special Law of Curvilinear Disparity', *Political Studies*, 21:2, pp. 135–51.
McBride, D. (2013) *Power Trip: A Decade of Policy, Plots and Spin*, London: Biteback.
Minkin, L. (1991) *The Contentious Alliance: Trade Unions and the Labour Party*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
Minkin, L. (2014) *The Blair Supremacy: A Study in the Politics of Labour's Party Management*, Manchester: Manchester University Press.
Norton, P. (1975) *Dissension in the House of Commons*, London: Macmillan.
Norton, P. (1980) *Dissension in the House of Commons, 1974–79*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
Norton, P. (1998) *Dissension in the House of Commons, 1979–1992* [data collection] (UK Data Service SN 3929). Available at: http://doi.org/10.5255/UKDA-SN-3929–1. Accessed 22 January 2017.
Norton, P. (1999) *Dissension in the House of Commons, 1992–1997* [data collection] (UK Data Service SN 4055). Available at: http://doi.org/10.5255/UKDA-SN-4055–1. Accessed 22 January 2017.

Norton, P. (2004) 'Parliament', in Seldon, A. and Hickson, K. (eds) *New Labour, Old Labour: The Blair, Wilson and Callaghan Governments*, London: Routledge, pp. 190–206.

Powell, J. (2010) *The New Machiavelli: How to Wield Power in the Modern World*, London: The Bodley Head.

Quinn, T. (2016) 'The British Labour Party's Leadership Election of 2015', *British Journal of Politics and International Relations*, 18:4, pp. 759–78.

Rawnsley, A. (2016) 'Don't Think the Sound of Silence Means the End of Labour's War', *The Guardian*, 11 December. Available at: https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2016/dec/11/labour-war-jeremy-corbyn-opponents-control-constituencies. Accessed 11 December 2016.

Russell, M. (2005) *Building New Labour: The Politics of Party Organisation*, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Shaw, E. (1988) *Discipline and Discord in the Labour Party: The Politics of Managerial Control in the Labour Party, 1951–87*, Manchester: Manchester University Press.

Shaw, E. (2006) 'The Problem of Party Management', in Dorey, P. (ed.) *The Labour Governments 1964–1970*, London: Routledge, pp. 34–52.

Steck, H. J. (1970) 'Grassroots Militants and Ideology: The Bevanite Revolt', *Polity*, 2:4, pp. 426–42.

Stuart, M. (2006) 'Managing the Poor Bloody Infantry: The Parliamentary Labour Party under John Smith, 1992–94', *Parliamentary Affairs*, 59:3, pp. 401–19.

Waller, R. and Criddle, B. (1996) *The Almanac of British Politics: Fifth Edition*, London: Routledge.

Waller, R. and Criddle, B. (2002) *The Almanac of British Politics: Seventh Edition*, London: Routledge.

12

'What dire effects from civil discord flow':[1] party management and legitimacy breakdown in the Labour Party

Eric Shaw

Introduction: the function of party management

All large parties face the question of how to strike a balance between democracy, diversity and tolerance on the one hand and unity, firm leadership and a capacity for coordinated collective effort on the other. Striking this balance, this chapter will argue, is the task of party management. This term is frequently used but rarely defined. Two exceptions are worth noting. The first, Minkins's magisterial work on 'The Blair Supremacy', defines it as 'the attempt to control problem-causing activities, issues and developments to ensure that outcomes were produced which the managers considered to be in the party's best interests. How the best interests were understood was usually closely related to advancing the aims and objectives established by the party leadership' (Minkin, 2014: 1). A second is Avril's definition of the object of Labour Party management as 'improving actual decision-making processes with a view to successfully adapting to changing environments' (Avril, 2016a: 7).

This chapter has opted for a narrower definition, focusing on party management as a leadership function whose prime object is to regulate internal conflict and foster party cohesion, to maintain the allegiance of members and to maximise decisional efficacy, that is, the capacity to take prompt decisions in response to internal demands and external challenges (Eckstein and Gurr, 1975: 445, 453). Cohesion here is the central organising concept, best defined as 'the extent to which, in a given situation, group members can be observed to work together for the group's goal in one and the same way' (Özbudun, 1970: 305). As such it refers both to the readiness of members to co-operate

in the pursuit of common goals (however defined) and to the capacity of party managers to organise and direct that co-operative effort.[2]

Problems of party management are inevitable in any party that seeks to represent a broad range of interests and views, and which contains within itself multiple power players all jostling to advance their preferences and careers. Divergences over policy, strategy and organisation are, in short, endemic in any ideologically encompassing party (Boucek, 2009: 455). This need not be dysfunctional since disagreement can arrest tendencies towards complacency and inertia, galvanise debate, encourage participation and promote policy innovation. But this is only the case if a party is equipped with the norms, rules and mechanisms which enable it to manage and resolve disagreements, thereby preventing them from disrupting the minimal degree of order and cohesion essential if it is to operate as an effective and disciplined team (Bolleyer, 2015: 101).

The mere fact of involvement in a political party entails a minimal willingness to collaborate in the electoral interests of the party. But to contain the potentially divisive effects of internal dissension requires stronger unifying forces, or factors of cohesion. The most important, we shall argue, are *ideological integration*, *regime legitimation* and *normative integration*.

A party is ideologically integrated to the degree that there is a broad measure of attitudinal coherence, or agreement, over a set of bedrock values, beliefs and principles. Ideological integration imparts a sense of identity, provides direction and establishes parameters for policy choice. Because it fosters solidarity and shared involvement in a common project, it facilitates willingness to subsume individual disagreement in a common cause.

Patterns of legitimation can be understood as 'the felt bases or grounds of obligation, the standards by which basic political arrangements and practices are tested and validated' (Easton, 1965: 292). A party's governance system (or regime) is legitimate to the extent that the ground rules governing how decisions are made, and the principles enshrined in them, are widely endorsed by the membership. As Easton explains, in all modern political communities 'the most stable support will derive from the conviction on the part of the member that it is right and proper for him to accept and obey the authorities and to abide by the requirements of the regime' (Easton, 1965: 278). Thus the more members of a voluntary organisation accept the legitimacy of the rules, procedures and arrangements through which policies are formulated, the greater their disposition to accept even those which are unpalatable. Legitimacy, in short, forms a reservoir of loyalty that can be tapped to secure acceptance of leadership authority.

A party is normatively integrated to the extent that its members are bound together by a common organisational culture. An organisational culture can be defined as a configuration of norms, beliefs and ways of behaving that shape the way in which members relate to and associate with each other (Eldridge

and Combie, 1974: 89). The existence of strong cultural bonds can be conceptualised in terms of social capital. Social capital here 'refers to features of social organisation, such as networks, norms, and trust, that facilitate coordination and cooperation for mutual benefit' (Putnam, 1995: 66). Social capital is a crucial organisational resource since it is positively correlated with expectations of goodwill, reciprocity norms, mutual trust and habits of cooperation (Tyler and Kramer, 1996: 4, 8). The greater the stock of social capital within a political organisation, the greater the stores of trust and the easier it will be to accommodate difference, strike bargains and respect compromises.

To summarise, ideological integration, governance legitimation and normative integration operate as crucial shock absorbers which enable party cohesion to survive even where there are multiple conflicts. In what follows I shall argue that all three factors of cohesion have, to varying degrees, progressively weakened, a process which accelerated after Jeremy Corbyn's election to the leadership.

Ideological integration, regime legitimacy and normative integration under New Labour

As is well known, differences over both general ideological principles (notably over the role of the market and of public ownership) and over specific policy issues have divided the Labour Party since its formation. However, these centrifugal forces have been balanced by a shared commitment to a kernel of values and objectives – to combat poverty, inequality and exploitation and to construct a universal welfare state – around which all disparate elements could rally. Only in the early 1980s did multiple, cumulative and deep-rooted rifts imperil the unity, integrity and, indeed, very survival of the party. In these years of venomous strife ideological integration fractured, a section of the right defected to form the Social Democratic Party and Labour only narrowly escaped relegation to third place in terms of votes in the catastrophic election defeat of 1983. The shock of this and subsequent electoral defeats fostered a desire for an end to intra-party discord which enabled Neil Kinnock to set in motion a process of party revival. Through a combination of steady, patient negotiation with tough disciplinary action against subversive Trotskyist elements (notably the Militant Tendency) Kinnock was able to repair much of the damage wreaked in the early 1980s and bequeath to Tony Blair in 1994 a reasonably unified party (for detailed accounts, see Shaw, 1988, 1994).

Cohesion within the party was cemented both by a remarkable run of three electoral successes (helped by Blair's charisma and extraordinary communicational skills) and by a shared pride in major public service improvements and impressive reductions in child and pensioner poverty. But below the surface tensions soon began to simmer. For a generation and more after the war, Labour had adopted a distinctively social democratic paradigm of

problem-solving, a combination of Keynesian demand management and a collectivist social strategy which fostered the pursuit of comprehensive welfare and egalitarian goals (Moschonas, 2002: 65). Under New Labour, this ceased to operate as an overarching framework of policy. Indeed traditional ideological tenets came under critical scrutiny: collectivist public service delivery was depicted as wasteful, unresponsive and inefficient; and trade unions and professional associations dismissed as 'rent-seeking' producer groups. Influenced by public choice and new public management theories, the injection of market discipline, greater competition, more consumer choice, performance monitoring and greater reliance on pecuniary incentives all increasingly defined New Labour's approach to the organisation and management of the public services (for a full discussion, see Marquand, 2004; Shaw, 2007: 99–110). These and other policies, especially 'light-touch' financial regulation and labour market flexibility, persuaded many in Labour's rank-and-file that the core values which had for long held the party together were being sacrificed, ideological perimeters were being crossed and the party was being re-engineered for purposes alien to its traditional values of equality, solidarity and cooperation. As long as the New Labour 'project' seemed to be drawing electoral dividends, public criticism was subdued, but privately indignation and resentment were fermenting.

Though overt ideological rifts did ease somewhat under Ed Miliband's leadership they did persist. The new leader sought to maintain an uneasy party equilibrium but was assailed from the right for his alleged 'deficit denial' and 'anti-business' rhetoric; and from the left for equivocation, lack of clarity and for his hesitant opposition to the coalition's austerity programme. The party's drubbing at the polls in 2015 followed by the leadership election released these internal tensions. The three mainstream candidates (Andy Burnham, Yvette Cooper and Liz Kendall) all argued that Miliband's ambiguities over the deficit and his criticisms of 'predatory' (as against 'responsible') capitalism had damaged the party's economic credibility.[3] Miliband's general election campaign coordinator, Spencer Livermore, attacked his failure to take 'the tough decisions on the deficit' essential for regaining a reputation for economic competence (Livermore, 2016) while interim party leader Harriet Harman cajoled the Shadow Cabinet to endorse some of the Tories' benefit cuts to bring it in line with public sentiment.

In a way that few had anticipated, most party members reacted with outrage at what seemed to them a summons to shed the party's most treasured values to placate public attitudes, however ill-founded such attitudes were. The willingness of 'Labour's moderates' to accept that over-spending helped cause the crisis and to acquiesce in fiscal retrenchment, the economist and Nobel Laureate Paul Krugman tartly commented, was to endorse 'conventional nonsense … in effect pleading guilty to policy crimes that Labour did not … commit' (Krugman, 2015). Labour members were not prepared to

accept this and seethed with indignation that so many senior 'Labour's moderates' were. This created an atmosphere that the fourth candidate, Jeremy Corbyn, was able to exploit. He had scraped the requisite number of nominations, and only then by many lending their votes to encourage debate and with absolutely no intention of voting for him. But he tapped into the mood of the party, proffering himself as a conviction politician who put principle before expediency, authenticity before double-dealing and honesty before opportunism. Much of Labour's rank-and-file responded with alacrity, propelling him into the leadership. The radical left was jubilant, but the right, centre and much of the soft left of the party recoiled in horror and dismay.

In opting for Corbyn most of the party, on the surface at least, had approved an ideological brand totally at odds with New Labour and, indeed, the new leader wasted little time in disowning much of the record of the Blair and Brown governments. The gap between New Labourites on the one hand and what soon came to be dubbed the 'Corbynistas' was wide indeed – although many straddled the ground in-between. The sheer distance which separated the two most vocal strands within the party meant that one major conflict shock absorber lost much of its effectiveness. But differences over ideology and policy, significant as they were, were not to pose Corbyn's gravest managerial challenge.

Consent in voluntary organisations like political parties must ultimately rely on the perceived legitimacy of their governing structures or regimes. These designate 'the formal and informal patterns in which power is distributed and organised with regard to the authoritative making and implementing of decisions—the roles and their relationships through which authority is distributed and exercised' (Easton, 1965: 193). The greater their legitimacy, the stronger membership disposition to accept even unwelcome decisions and, hence, the easier the task of party management.

Throughout its history (as amply documented in Minkin, 1978 and 2014) there has been disagreement in the Labour Party over the rules stipulating the apportionment of power, the definition of roles and, most fundamentally, the principles underpinning its governing structure. This took the form of a clash between the proponents respectively of intra-party democracy and Parliamentary Labour Party (PLP) autonomy (see Randall in this volume). These divisions culminated in a crisis of the early 1980s as left-wing activists clamoured for a range of reforms which would decisively shift power in favour of the extra-parliamentary party, notably through the institution of mandatory reselection of MPs and a wider franchise for the election of the leader, both eventually adopted despite vehement opposition from within the PLP (Shaw, 1988: 250). These reforms were both the product of but also aggravated endemic divisions over both conceptions of democracy and the proper location of power and authority within the party.

After Neil Kinnock's election in 1983, the left fragmented and its hold over party institutions weakened. In the decade that followed, Kinnock (and his successor, John Smith), having marginalised the hard left, steered through a number of institutional changes which gradually restored some measure of consensus over the party's internal governing arrangements. This process culminated under Tony Blair with the implementation in 1997 of a package of reforms, largely instigated by his two predecessors, known as *Partnership in Power*. It represented an attempt to transcend the rift between proponents of extra-parliamentary and PLP supremacy by offering a new system of policy-making that could command broad assent (for a full discussion see Minkin, 2014).

The reforms created new institutions, such as the National Policy Forum (NPF) and the Joint Policy Committee, designed to foster a more deliberative and collaborative approach to policy formation. The original authors of *Partnership in Power* had hoped that these new arrangements would, by rendering policy-making more democratic, transparent and effective, form the basis of a revived procedural consensus. But they were to be disappointed. Supported by a wealth of evidence, Minkin demonstrates how 'the rhetoric of partnership and democracy covered the reality of the rolling coup that expanded Blair's power' (Minkin, 2014: 464). The new institutions formed no more than a dignified democratic façade behind which an unprecedented centralisation of power occurred. The measure of managerial action was not whether it followed the rules and due process, but whether it produced 'a good result' for the leader (Minkin, 2014: 137). Thus checks and balances, which had in the past constrained the leader's role, were dismantled, the policy agenda was more tightly controlled, criticism sidelined and, for the most part, the Policy Forum framework was simply ignored (Minkin, 2014: 303–30). Power and policy-making prerogatives were further centralised but at the expense of frustrating the bid to use the NPF to reconstitute a new procedural consensus which alone could form the basis of a legitimised system of power and decision-making.

Running in parallel with this fracturing of legitimacy strains was a process of what might be called normative dissolution. As noted above, a shared adherence to norms, protocols and behavioural conventions regulating the way in which members interact with each other greatly enhances a party's ability to manage conflict. Over the years Labour had honed a series of norms, conventions and protocols that underpinned and shaped the operations of its institutions. These norms included *procedural propriety* – a respect for rules, procedures and established practice; *collegial decision-making* – the notion that all senior figures had the right to be involved in key decisions; and a *bargaining* mentality – the convention that policies should evolve through a process of adjustment, give and take and mutual accommodation. But these norms were dismissed by Blairite party managers as sluggish, time-consuming and energy-sapping

and were replaced by what Minkin labels 'serious politics'. This he defines as a 'covert code of behaviour' which justified the routine use of manipulation and 'a cavalier attitude towards keeping agreements and to obeying rules'. Its object was 'playing to win' to 'deliver for Tony' (Minkin, 2014: 665). A cadre of dedicated organisers and officials reared in this culture increasingly permeated the upper echelons of the party. The tough 'can do' and 'doing whatever it takes' politics of the Blair (and Brown) era became the ruling culture into which a younger generation of Blairites (and Brownites) were socialised, and came to define their way of 'doing politics'. Playing fast and loose with the rules and the 'delivery' ethic displaced reverence for constitutional processes, and loyalty to the party was replaced by loyalty to the leader – or (as with Brown) clan chief (for a fuller discussion, see Avril, 2016b and Shaw, 2016).

But these manipulative habits combined with the other processes we have charted to engender a culture of mistrust. Calculating the degree of trust in the Labour Party with any precision is very difficult but few would deny that the stock of trust accumulated in the early Blair years has been seriously depleted. There were many factors at work, including the pursuit of 'serious politics', but the principal one was the Iraq war. In the run-up to British involvement in the Iraq war, many party members felt that Blair had been guilty of duplicity and guile and of such an order that their faith in his integrity vanished. This was compounded by a growing association of Blairism with spin, control freakery and manipulative behaviour.

Ed Miliband was aware of this and sought to repair the damage but from the outset his leadership was handicapped by the circumstances of his extremely narrow election. Many critics on the right of the party, alleging that union power alone had enabled him to squeeze past his brother David, queried the legitimacy of his rule (the 'stab in the back' myth) and he was the victim of relentlessly hostile off-the-record briefings by senior colleagues, a practice which did little to rebuild trust. An atmosphere of suspicion, resentment and ill-will became increasingly ingrained in the life of the party.

This chapter has suggested that tensions, disagreement and antagonisms are endemic in any political party which is a serious contender for political office but their disruptive effects can be managed and party unity sustained by the effective operation of three crucial shock absorbers: ideological integration, governance legitimation and normative integration. All three of these to varying degrees were eroded and devitalised from the late 1990s onwards, presenting Corbyn, when he assumed office in September 2015, with formidable managerial tasks. While he enjoyed enthusiastic mass support in the rank-and-file, his base in the PLP was far, far feebler than any previous Labour leader. How was he to consolidate his leadership, reconstruct some measure of unity in a deeply fractured party and revive confidence in the party's governing regime?

Managerial strategies under Corbyn

As Minkin notes, party management 'is probably a universal function within political parties' (Minkin, 2014: 708) but how it is enacted – the managerial strategies deployed – can vary very considerably. Managerial strategies are shaped by variations in leadership styles, preferences and priorities – but only within a setting bequeathed by the past and over which leaders may have little control. Broadly speaking, we can suggest that within Labour's traditions and history we can disentangle two managerial strategies: the *pluralist* and (for want of a better term) the *majoritarian centralist*.

Pluralist party management envisaged the containment of internal tensions and the preservation of party unity as an overriding leadership goal. It stressed Labour's character as a 'broad church', an alliance of diverse institutions, aims and interests, and hence the leader's responsibility as holding this alliance together through a process of balancing and mutual adjustment. Rather than construing democracy as the enforcement of the majority will, it sought to mobilise consent through patient negotiation and the steady composition of party differences. Leaders should operate as stabilisers and conciliators, accept the legitimate right of all elements within the party to be incorporated into the decision-making process and be prepared, in the pursuit of consensus, to sacrifice some of their own programmatic wishes (Shaw, 1988: 209).

The central feature of majoritarian centralist management, in contrast, was what Williams has referred to as the 'pathfinder' concept of leadership. A 'pathfinder' leader is someone who feels 'a duty to lead in a particular direction' and is endowed with his or her 'own vision and destination in mind' (Williams, 1982: 51). His/her election is seen to afford a clear democratic mandate including the right to implement the platform upon which the election was contested. The institutional corollary of this is a centralised managerial regime. Leaders, the argument ran, can only give effect to their mandate to the extent that they have the means to ensure that it is respected. Hugh Dalton, a majoritarian centralist of an earlier generation, expressed this view forcefully. Free discussion was an essential part of the democratic life of the party, but it should be 'followed by majority decisions loyally accepted by all [, for] some measure of healthy discipline and the submission of the individual to the collective will' was essential to preserve the unity and integrity of the party (quoted in Shaw, 1988: 27).

These two managerial strategies represent ideal types, not empirical categories, and managerial politics will always reflect a combination of both. However, leaders tend to lean towards one or the other, with Blair an obvious example of the majoritarian centralist approach (dissected at length in Minkin, 2014) and Harold Wilson and James Callaghan illustrating the pluralist approach (Shaw, 1988: 156–84). Which of the two options has Corbyn followed?

Pluralism as a managerial strategy appears most appropriate where power systems are 'intercursive', that is, where power is widely diffused, countervailing power centres exist and where, therefore, agreement can only realistically be reached by bargaining or joint decision-making (Wrong, 1979: 11). This describes the contemporary Labour Party, and there are some indications that at least a few of Corbyn's advisers (notably Owen Jones) understand this. Aspects of his own personal style – polite, emollient and disarming – are conducive to a pluralist strategy while his experience as an inveterate rebel has taught him the limitations of discipline and he could not be unaware that he would lack moral authority if he sought to impose it. Furthermore, his record so far indicates some readiness to compromise. On the crucial area of economic policy, Corbyn's key ally, John McDonnell, has for the most part sounded a circumspect note. He has not proposed any substantial extension of public ownership, toned down his anti-business rhetoric and avoided any major public spending commitments. In his first major policy announcement, McDonnell declared that, while allowing borrowing for investment policy, he would seek a budgetary balance between tax revenues and current spending, a policy essentially the same as that adopted by Ed Miliband and Ed Balls. Nobel Prize-winning economist Joseph Stiglitz commended Labour's economic proposals as 'carefully thought-out … based on taxing those at the top and ensuring that corporations pay what they should' (Stiglitz, 2017). None of this suggests a sharp 'lurch to the left'. Even on the most divisive issues, mainly matters of foreign policy and defence, some degree of flexibility has been demonstrated. Though a long-standing critic of NATO, Corbyn has affirmed his support for continued membership and while in the past a eurosceptic, he campaigned for a Remain vote in the EU referendum – though with little zeal.

But a pluralist managerial strategy has not been consistently followed and, indeed, as time wears on Corbyn and his inner circle appear to have swung, sometimes inconsistently, towards majoritarian centralism.

Under majoritarian centralism, the potency of leadership power rests on the capacity to exploit:

1. Access to legitimate power: the leadership's ability to obtain compliance by making a plausible claim that its power was legitimately constituted and that, therefore, those subject to it have an obligation to follow its directives.
2. Access to instrumental power: the ability to secure compliance through the offer of inducements (jobs, promotions, etc.) or the threat and application of sanctions.

Corbyn has sought to utilise both power resources. First, he has constantly invoked the legitimacy that derives from his (double) democratic mandate. As

Faucher has pointed out, elections have a special place in Labour's ethos and traditions since they operate as part of the 'grand narrative of democracy', with the leadership election acquiring significance 'as a ritual of legitimacy' (Faucher, 2015: 795). 'Corbynistas' are insistent that Corbyn 'was elected with an overwhelming mandate on a political programme that seeks to take the party in a direction that reflects the current views of party members' (McDonnell, 2015). His mandate was rendered even more compelling after his second, still more sweeping triumph, placing, it was argued, a responsibility on even those who disagreed with him to respect his wishes.

The problem for Corbyn was that the force and plausibility of his mandate doctrine depended upon a procedural consensus about the proper location of power and sovereignty which simply did not exist. To his supporters, the party was democratic to the extent that the PLP was rendered accountable to the rank-and-file; its wishes were now articulated by a twice-elected leader. To his critics the system of parliamentary democracy presupposed the autonomy of the PLP while the party's own traditions specified that leadership power be exercised through and mediated by the Shadow Cabinet and the PLP. Hence the doctrine of the direct mandate evoked little response, nor did it foster any inclination to co-operate with a leader reluctant to conciliate parliamentary opinion.

The disputed legitimacy of his authority meant that Corbyn has had to rely more on instrumental power. This has two facets, which Galbraith calls 'condign' and 'compensatory' power. By the former, a leader seeks to gain compliance by an ability to threaten to or actually impose sanctions, by the latter 'by the offer of affirmative reward' (Galbraith, 1983: 22). Within the Labour Party the power of parliamentary patronage falls within the first category, enforcing parliamentary discipline, imposing discipline in the wider party and mobilising the rank-and-file to pressurise MPs into the second.

The right to appoint and organise the frontbench represents the leader's most potent power of patronage. Although a Labour prime minister has always enjoyed the right to select his own ministerial team, it was only with a rule-change during the Miliband leadership that this was extended to the opposition Shadow Cabinet (previously it had been elected by the PLP). As an incoming leader, Corbyn was in the unprecedented position of lacking sufficient support in the PLP to afford him a majority in the Shadow Cabinet. His first Shadow Cabinet was designed, in an accommodating vein, to represent all strands of opinion, which meant a strong non-'Corbynista' majority. This obviously raised the question of what would happen if the views of the leader and the Shadow Cabinet came into conflict.

The first real test was the Commons debate over the government's proposal to extend the British bombing campaign (directed at ISIS) from Iraq to Syria. A substantial proportion of the Shadow Cabinet, including the shadow foreign secretary Hilary Benn, were in favour, while Corbyn, a majority of MPs and,

emphatically, most party members were against. On such a major issue of policy, it is customary to apply a three-line whip with (often notional) penalties for those who disobey. But the PLP and the Shadow Cabinet were hopelessly at loggerheads and imposing a whip was problematic. As Rawnsley pointed out, 'Mr Corbyn's record-beating history of rebellion against previous Labour leaders doesn't give him the moral authority to simply demand the loyalty of MPs as of right' (Rawnsley, 2015). In an acrimonious Shadow Cabinet meeting, deputy leader Tom Watson eventually convinced Corbyn that whipping would be ineffectual and would provoke mass frontbench resignations, so a free vote was conceded, with the PLP revealed as hopelessly split (Mason, 2015).

The new leader was left looking hapless (not helped by being upstaged by a powerful speech from Hilary Benn), his authority bruised. Accordingly, his aides briefed that a 'revenge reshuffle' would punish his critics and tighten his grip on the party. But after much prevarication Corbyn drew back and the reshuffle proved a damp squib with only two minor frontbenchers sacked. Nothing had been resolved: relations between Corbyn and his Shadow Cabinet soured still further, his authority left impaired and the media rife with speculation of ill-feelings and planned revolts. Matters came to a head in June 2016 after the Brexit vote, with many Labour MPs furious with what they saw as Corbyn's lacklustre, uninspired and half-hearted involvement in the Remain campaign. Corbyn's brusque dismissal on 26 June of Hilary Benn (whose cards had for long been marked) as shadow foreign secretary for alleged 'disloyalty' precipitated a crisis. Within two days, 80 per cent of Labour MPs backed a motion of no confidence in Corbyn's leadership followed by mass resignations from the frontbench.

Corbyn's resignation was seen as inevitable. None of his critics could conceive how, under the British system of Westminster government, a leader of the opposition so openly disavowed by so many of his MPs and his frontbenchers could retain his office, authority or credibility. But they overlooked both his (or perhaps John McDonnell's) determination and the fact that Labour's constitution does not mandate the ejection of a leader through a no-confidence vote. In the circumstances, the only way in which Corbyn could conserve his position and restore some degree of authority was by a new leadership election. Angela Eagle and Owen Smith stood but the PLP decided that only one contender should oppose Corbyn and opted for Smith. There then followed a bitter and acrimonious contest which further laid bare to a disbelieving public the depths of divisions in Labour's ranks.

But it soon became evident that, in a substantially enlarged membership (over half a million and still rising), the balance was moving further in the leader's favour with ardently pro-Corbyn recruits outnumbering the more evenly divided pre-2015 members. Corbyn was returned with an even more emphatic majority with over 62 per cent of the popular vote. His re-election

was greeted by passionate enthusiasm in Labour's rank-and-file, and utter dismay in the PLP.

It was a personal triumph but Corbyn's re-election left unsettled the question of how he could revive his authority and consolidate his grasp on the party. He appeared to rule out a more conciliatory stance when he rejected a PLP proposal that the Shadow Cabinet in future be in part elected by Labour MPs, in part appointed by the leader, thereby easing an honourable return for those shadow ministers willing to serve. This left the option of Galbraith's 'condign power' – enforcing his will through the threat or application of sanction. Here two opportunities availed themselves: constitutional change to shift the balance of power within the party in his favour and mobilising the rank-and-file to induce MPs to toe the line.

The most effective constitutional lever was to alter the rules governing candidate selection. 'The most vital and hotly contested factional disputes in any party', Ranney pointed out some years ago, 'are struggles that take place over the choice of candidates, for what is at stake […] is nothing less than the control of the core of what a party stands for and does […] Who controls selections controls the party' (Ranney, 1965: 103, 10). Labour's history over the last forty years bears this out, with the issue emerging as the central combat zone in the fratricidal struggles of the 1980s. The most contentious proposal, 'mandatory reselection', that is, the principle that no sitting MP should be readopted without a contest, was agreed in 1981 in the teeth of fierce opposition. But it was never accepted by the leadership or the PLP, and after a long and bitter struggle it was replaced by the 'trigger ballot' system, whereby an MP was automatically readopted except when a majority of party and affiliated trade-union branches voted to hold a contest – which very rarely happened.

Early on in his leadership, his supporters, notably in the Momentum organisation, deliberated on reviving mandatory reselection. The effect of this, it was anticipated, would be to expose anti-Corbyn MPs with left-wing constituencies (the majority of the PLP) to the threat of deselection. If carried through, this could have a major impact on the balance of power within the party.

The process through which political parties organise candidate selection 'may be used as an acid test as to how democratically they conduct their affairs' (Gallagher and Marsh, 1988: 1). But much depends on how party democracy is defined and, as noted above, there was no agreement here. To the 'Corbynista' Momentum organisation, mandatory reselection would have a radically democratising effect since it would enfranchise the rank-and-file, compelling MPs to take full account of their views. To its opponents it would entrench the power of an unrepresentative minority, distance the party from the views of ordinary constituents to whom alone an MP should be responsible and thereby inflict further harm on the party's electoral prospects.

According to Labour's constitution, control over rule modification lies with the National Executive Committee (NEC) subject to conference approval. Although the NEC has recently moved a little to the left it remains finely balanced and it was reluctant to air openly so divisive an issue. Accordingly, it excluded the issue of mandatory reselection from the conference agenda (Elgot, 2016). But both sides were well aware that, notwithstanding this, most MPs could be subject to contested re-election. This was as a result of the redrawing of constituency boundaries made necessary by the government's decision to reduce the size of the Commons from 650 MPs to 600. Under party rules (too complex to discuss here) this *may* mean – depending upon how the NEC interprets the rules – that a substantial number of MPs might have to face reselection. As it happened, the immediate debate was pre-empted by the calling of a snap election which precluded any deselections.

Nevertheless, the future for many MPs remains distinctly less secure than at virtually any time than in the past. Not least this is because of the availability to the leadership of a fourth managerial tool: deploying rank-and-file pressure to bring MPs to heel. Mass pressure can only be effective to the extent that it is organised, and this is where the emergence of Momentum has worried many. Momentum was set up in October 2015 to harness the energies of the many who flocked to join the Corbyn leadership campaign (for a fuller discussion of Momentum, see Avril in this volume). Though presenting itself as a vehicle for reinvigorating Labour, many Labour MPs suspect that its real purpose is to entrench Corbyn's control over the party (Momentum's head, Jon Lansman, is a long-standing Corbyn ally). They cite Momentum-orchestrated efforts to induce MPs to toe the leader's line over Syria and the future of the UK's nuclear arsenal. Although the immediate danger of Momentum-spearheaded deselections passed with the snap election, the fear persists among many MPs that their hold on their seats has become more precarious.

Conclusion: crisis of managerial control

As far as can be judged, Corbyn reliance on a majoritarian centralist approach to party management has not succeeded. One can apply three measures of effective party management:

- the ability to preserve members' allegiance;
- the ability to accommodate and pacify internal conflicts;
- the capacity to formulate binding policies. (Eckstein and Gurr, 1975: 445)

On the first measure, Corbyn continues to elicit the keen, even the exuberant, support of much of the rank-and-file but his base within the PLP is negligible. His efforts to widen his appeal among MPs have been tepid, unenthusiastic

and unconvincing as he has focused on solidifying his extra-parliamentary base. On the second measure, he has struggled to contain destabilising internal rifts or even to develop effective conflict-regulation mechanisms. On the third measure, he succeeded in the framing of a manifesto which commanded broad support in the party though the precise methods for formulating and refining policy continued to lack clarity, coherence and transparency. Overall, Corbyn has yet to demonstrate convincingly that he has those qualities – to bargain, persuade and placate – indispensable to the effective management of the party.

Corbyn's central managerial challenge was how 'to unite a party whose membership overwhelmingly endorsed him but whose support amongst parliamentarians is virtually non-existent' (*The Observer*, 2015). As the election was called, very little progress had been made. His authority seeped away with every grim poll. In a typical survey, in November 2016 just 17 per cent of voters believed he would make the best prime minister, compared with 45 per cent for Theresa May (Maguire, 2016), a disturbing finding since leadership rating is widely seen as a crucial factor deciding how people vote (see, for example, Sanders et al., 2011). Corbyn's deep unpopularity was seen by most MPs as a major handicap for the party's electoral prospects and has, hence, gravely enfeebled his authority in the PLP. His many critics in the PLP (as well as virtually all independent commentators) anticipated disaster when the general election was called for 8 June 2017. No-one imagined that in the course of the election campaign the gap between the two leaders would almost vanish.

The combination of the Tories' exceedingly maladroit and inept campaign strategy, Mrs May's robotic and wooden performance and the demonstration by Corbyn of a resilience, energy and skill as a campaigner which caught most people by surprise produced an election outcome which few had expected. Labour lost, again, but added almost 10 per cent to its vote and, with just under 40 per cent of the vote, achieved its best result since 2001. A party which had swerved to the left did not forfeit votes, as the right had warned, but added considerably to its appeal (particularly within the middle classes). The certain loser had proved a winner and Corbyn's standing, power and authority within the party were immeasurably strengthened. His critics fell silent, their collective influence was diminished and power now visibly shifted to the wider party, comprising – at most recent estimates – almost 600,000 enthusiastic and strongly pro-Corbyn members. Equally, support for Corbyn within the unions has deepened, election results in the NEC and other important party committees registered swings to the left and the Scottish Labour Party will very likely elect a left-wing leader, Richard Leonard.

But one should be wary about concluding that Labour's managerial problems have been resolved. This chapter has argued that whether or not intra-party tensions and contentions detonate into politically destabilising rows

depends on the existence of powerful binding forces. The most important of these are ideological integration, legitimatised structures of power and decision-making, and normative integration. For Labour, the most disturbing trend over recent years have been less disputes over policy and ideology than the erosion of legitimacy and trust which has weakened the supports of party cohesion.

Regimes are legitimised to the extent that there is a broad consensus over the rules which distribute powers and duties and the ethical principles that justify 'the way power is organised, used, and limited' (Easton, 1965: 292). In the absence of such agreement then conflict will constantly threaten to relapse into profound and destabilising cleavage. It remains the case that Corbynistas and their critics still lack a shared understanding of the ground rules and values which should underpin and validate the way in which power is distributed, decisions taken and sovereignty properly located. Some measure of legitimation can only be restored by a pluralist approach to party management seeking common ground and prepared to assuage feelings and mollify opponents. The majoritarian centralist approach hesitantly preferred by Corbyn and his inner circle can only, this chapter has suggested, further destabilise the party.

Differences have been patched up and driven underground by Labour's (relative) triumph at the polls. But they are still simmering. No clear managerial strategy has emerged since the election, and traditional party cleavages have been complicated by disagreements over Brexit which cut across left/right alignments. The issue of mandatory reselection remains unresolved and the respective roles and powers of the PLP and the wider party are still to be clarified. Corbyn did not use his greatly augmented authority to bind the party more firmly together. For example, a number of former Shadow Cabinet members signalled their willingness to return to the frontbench but this elicited no response from Corbyn. The majoritarian centralist approach to party management evidently still has many adherents within his inner circle. But the history of the party suggests that only a pluralist approach to party management, which seeks common ground, consensus and a willingness to give and take, can procure a stable and secure basis for party cohesion.

Notes

1 The phrase is taken from Joseph Addison's play *Cato: A Tragedy*, first performed in 1713.

2 This approach rejects as too narrow the customary operationalisation of cohesion in terms of voting discipline as it excludes many forms of divisive activity, such as highly critical public speeches and (in particular) damaging off-the-record briefings.

3 Andy Burnham urged Labour to 'celebrate the spirit of enterprise', praise 'the everyday [business] heroes of our society' and 'champion wealth creation' (Burnham, 2015).

References

Avril, E. (2016a) 'The (Unintended) Consequences of New Labour: Party Leadership vs Party Management in the British Labour Party', *Politics and Governance*, 4:2, pp. 5–14.

Avril, E. (2016b) '"Wilful Blindness": Effects and Perceptions of New Labour's Party Management', *Political Studies Review*, 14:2, pp. 163–74.

Bolleyer, N. (2015) 'The Regulation of Conflict in Political Parties: Organizational and Legal Dimensions', in Bertoa, F. C. and Mueller-Rommel, F. (eds) *Party Politics and Democracy in Europe: Essays in Honour of Peter Mair*, London: Routledge, pp. 101–16.

Boucek, F. (2009) 'Rethinking Factionalism: Typologies, Intra-party Dynamics and Three Faces of Factionalism', *Party Politics*, 15:4, pp. 455–85.

Burnham, A. (2015) 'To Regain Trust, Labour Must Admit We Spent Too Much, Says Burnham', LabourList. Available at: http://labourlist.org/2015/05/to-regain-trust-labour-must-admit-we-spent-too-much-says-burnham/. Accessed 10 May 2017.

Easton, D. (1965) *A Systems Analysis of Political Life*, New York: John Wiley & Sons.

Eckstein, H. and Gurr, T. R. (1975) *Patterns of Authority: A Structural Basis for Political Inquiry*, New York: John Wiley & Sons.

Eldridge, J. E. T. and Combie, A. D. (1974) *A Sociology of Organisations*, London: Allen & Unwin.

Elgot, J. (2016) 'Labour Conference Will Not Vote on Mandatory Reselection of MPs', *The Guardian*, 6 September. Available at: www.theguardian.com/politics/2016/sep/06/labour-conference-will-not-vote-on-mandatory-reselection-of-mps. Accessed 5 December 2017.

Faucher, F. (2015) 'Leadership Elections: What is at Stake for Parties? A Comparison of the British Labour Party and the Parti Socialiste', *Parliamentary Affairs*, 68:4, pp. 794–820.

Galbraith, J. K. (1983) *The Anatomy of Power*, Boston, MA: Houghton-Mifflin.

Gallagher, M. and Marsh, M. (1988) 'Introduction', in Gallagher, M. and Marsh, M. (eds) *Candidate Selection in Comparative Perspective: The Secret Garden of Politics*, London: Sage, pp. 1–19.

Krugman, P. (2015) 'Labour's Dead Center', *New York Times*, 14 September. Available at: http://economistsview.typepad.com/economistsview/2015/09/paul-krugman-labours-dead-center.html. Accessed 10 May 2017.

Livermore, S. (2016) 'Learning from Losing', *Progress*, 14 March. Available at: www.progressonline.org.uk/2016/03/14/learning-from-losing. Accessed 10 May 2017.

Maguire, P. (2016) 'Tories Trusted on Economy by Twice as Many Voters as Labour', *The Guardian*, 10 November.

Marquand, D. (2004) *Decline of the Public: The Hollowing Out of Citizenship*, Cambridge: Polity.

Mason, R. (2015) 'Jeremy Corbyn Bruised by Tense Labour Debates over Airstrikes in Syria', *The Guardian*, 30 November. Available at: www.theguardian.com/politics/2015/nov/30/corbyn-bruised-by-tense-labour-debates-over-airstrikes-in-syria. Accessed 5 December 2017.

McDonnell, J. (2015) 'Labour Can Be the Most Powerful Force for Progressive Change in Generations', *The Observer*, 6 December. Available at: www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2015/dec/05/john-mcdonnell-jeremy-corbyn-labour-force-progressive-change. Accessed 5 December 2017.

Minkin, L. (1978) *The Labour Party Conference: A Study in the Politics of Intra-party Democracy*, London: Allen Lane.

Minkin, L. (2014) *The Blair Supremacy: A Study in the Politics of Labour's Party Management*, Manchester: Manchester University Press.
Moschonas, G. (2002) *In the Name of Social Democracy*, London: Verso.
Özbudun, E. (1970) *Party Cohesion in Western Democracies: A Causal Analysis*, Beverly Hills, CA: Sage Publications.
Putnam, R. D. (1995) 'Bowling Alone: America's Declining Social Capital', *Journal of Democracy*, 6:1, pp. 65–78.
Ranney, A. (1965) *Pathways to Parliament*, London: Macmillan.
Rawnsley, A. (2015) 'Jeremy Corbyn Should Beware His Enemies – and Even More His Friends', *The Observer*, 13 September. Available at: www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2015/sep/13/jeremy-corbyn-followers-disillusion-labour-party. Accessed 5 December 2017.
Sanders, D., Clarke, H. D., Stewart, M. C. and Whiteley, P. (2011) 'Downs, Stokes and the Dynamics of Electoral Choice', *British Journal of Political Science*, 41:2, pp. 287–314.
Shaw, E. (1988) *Discipline and Discord in the Labour Party*, Manchester: Manchester University Press.
Shaw, E. (1994) *The Labour Party Since 1979*, Abingdon: Routledge.
Shaw, E. (2007) *Losing Labour's Soul*, Abingdon: Routledge.
Shaw, E. (2016) 'Understanding Labour Party Management under Blair', *Political Studies Review*, 14:2, pp. 153–62.
Stiglitz, J. (2017) 'Austerity has Strangled Britain: Only Labour Will Consign It to History' *The Guardian*, 7 June. Available at: www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2017/jun/07/austerity-britain-labour-neoliberalism-reagan-thatcher. Accessed 5 December 2017.
The Observer (2015) *Editorial: The Observer View on Jeremy Corbyn's Victory in the Labour Leadership*. Available at: www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2015/sep/13/observer-editorial-observer-view-on-jeremy-corbyn-victory. Accessed 5 December 2017.
Tyler, T. T. and Kramer, R. M. (1996) 'Whither Trust?', in Tyler T. T. and Kramer R. M. (eds) *Trust in Organizations: Frontiers of Theory and Research*, Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, pp. 1–15.
Williams, P. (1982) 'Changing Styles of Labour Leadership', in Kavanagh, D. (ed.) *The Politics of the Labour Party*, London: Unwin Hyman, pp. 50–68.
Wrong, D. H. (1979) *Power: Its Forms, Bases and Uses*, Oxford: Blackwell.

13

The conflicting loyalties of the Scottish Labour Party

Fiona Simpkins

Introduction

Far from establishing Labour's institutional domination in Scotland, the creation of the Scottish Parliament in Edinburgh in 1999 has challenged the Labour Party to an extent which most at the time would have found unfathomable. A series of four catastrophic elections in 2007, 2011, 2015 and 2016, which returned the Scottish National Party (SNP) as the new dominant force in Scottish politics, sent a sign that Scottish Labour would have to completely rethink itself if it were to survive in the new Scottish political landscape and started a debate within the party itself over its relationship with the British Labour Party. Despite the small rebound in the number of seats held by Scottish Labour after the 2017 general election, the party appears to have lost its grip on the Scottish electorate. The downward spiral of Scottish Labour's electoral scores since the introduction of devolution to Scotland has not only strained the relationship between the Scottish party and the parliamentary party in London but also questioned its very organisation, ideological foundations and political orientations.

An array of factors have played into the electoral demise of the Scottish Labour party in the last three elections, not least the repercussions of the two-year-long Scottish independence campaign debate. In fact, the legitimacy of Scottish Labour as a party representative of the Scottish people has been called into question for much of its recent history, not only by disgruntled members of the Scottish electorate and political commentators, but also by Labour members and leaders themselves. The much-publicised resignation of former Scottish Labour leader Johann Lamont following the 2014 Scottish

independence referendum, as she accused the Labour leadership of treating Scottish Labour as a 'branch office', renewed calls for a change of direction of party policies and a return to a more Scottish and left-wing agenda under Kezia Dugdale. Although there have been recent moves towards a more autonomous Scottish Labour party, the post-devolution period for Labour has been marked overall by the difficulties entailed by the paradoxical centralisation of the organisation and structure of the party in a decentralised political environment (Hassan, 2002). Indeed, the British polity is traditionally unitary and highly centralised and the Labour Party organisation has heretofore mirrored this model. In contrast, political parties within federal governmental systems, such as the SPD in Germany, generally tend to be modelled along decentralised, federal structures with substantial powers resting with regional branches (Detterbeck, 2012; Swenden and Maddens, 2009). Yet, although some degree of decentralisation was admitted in the relationship between the British Labour Party and the Scottish Labour Party with the introduction of devolution in the late 1990s, Labour's central organisation has remained much the same. The Labour Party has maintained its top-down approach to internal party politics and continued to exert a centripetal influence in Scotland, thereby contributing to the lack of legitimacy Scottish Labour's image has suffered under devolution and the questioning of its independence from Westminster politics.

Since 1999, Scottish Labour has had to operate within a distinct Scottish institutional landscape, offered not only by the distinct characteristics that are a heritage of Scotland's past but also by the different parliamentary and electoral models that were set up with the Scotland Act 1998, thus raising demands for a bottom-up approach to regional politics. Crucially, the issue of Scotland's constitutional future has exerted a powerful centrifugal force on the party as it shifted the focus of political debate to issues pertaining to a Scottish regional level rather than the overall British State and stressed the non-concurrence of economic and social interests at both levels. The increasing political presence of the SNP, as the only one of Scotland's main political parties with no UK-wide counterpart and therefore entirely committed to defending Scottish interests alone, and the growing saliency of the independence question in the Scottish political debate after 2007 have further heightened the need for a bottom-up approach to Scottish politics. We shall see that although Scottish Labour was able to manage these contradictory pressures and act as a buffer while in government in both Holyrood and Westminster, it was caught in a storm after losing power in both political arenas. The emergence of Scotland's constitutional question as the main dividing line in the new Scottish political landscape has imposed a bottom-up organisational approach, a decentralist and federalist model, to a strictly top-down, centralist and unitary Labour Party.

Although much has been written about the insights offered by British devolution on how national political parties respond to the challenges of

territorial devolution, most studies have concentrated on the period immediately following the creation of a Scottish Parliament when the Labour Party was in power at both state and sub-state level. Little has been written about the Scottish Labour Party's difficulties after the SNP became the new dominant political party in Scotland in 2007 and Labour lost to the Conservatives in 2010. Hassan and Shaw's seminal study of the Scottish Labour Party (Hassan and Shaw, 2012) gives much evidence of the change and continuity in Labour's organisation and practices after the introduction of devolution faced with the new challenges with which it had to contend. Yet, most studies have focused on party organisational responses to the adoption of devolved institutions or organisational regionalisation within multi-level systems (Carty, 2004; Detterbeck, 2012; Hough and Jeffery, 2006), with less attention paid to the pressures exerted by the singular superimposition of a constitutional rather than a partisan dividing line in the region's political debate.

This chapter therefore seeks to examine the current soul-searching crisis experienced by Scottish Labour through the analysis of the party's experience of devolution in light of the two contradictory forces exerted by a traditionally centralised party in a unitary polity on the one hand and an overarching constitutional debate in a devolved environment on the other hand. The recent electoral success of the SNP having moved national interests to the forefront of the Scottish political debate, particular attention will be paid to Scottish Labour's struggles to develop a distinctly Scottish agenda within the limitations imposed by Scotland's own institutional landscape and the Labour Party's centralised organisation and creed. We shall see that the post-devolution era has corresponded to a proliferation of new party alternatives in Scotland, thus undermining Labour's capacity to retain its former hegemony, and that the pluralisation of political cleavages which emerged with the increasing saliency of the question of Scotland's independence has led to a competition over regional advocacy (Hepburn, 2010). Scottish Labour's position in the Better Together campaign leading to the independence referendum of 2014 as well as its fluctuating stance on the constitutional position of Scotland – especially in a post-Brexit referendum environment – will give some insights into the current transformations undertaken by the Scottish Labour Party in order to lend it a new legitimacy in Scotland.

A unitary party in a devolved environment?

The Scottish Labour Party has deep roots in Scotland's radical history and its origins lay with the party founded by Keir Hardie and Robert Cunningham-Graham in 1888. It was absorbed by the Independent Labour Party in 1893 and then merged with the wider trade-union movement and other socialist bodies (such as the Social Democratic Federation and the Fabian Society) in 1900 when the Labour Representation Committee was formed. It

was finally rebranded as the Labour Party six years later and was able to draw much of its support in Scotland through the period of mass industrial unrest referred to as Red Clydeside, the anti-war movement and the Glasgow rent strikes which contributed to the development of the labour movement and the radicalisation of the Scottish working class. This radical past was later refuelled in the 1980s and 1990s with anti-Thatcherism, the anti-poll tax civil disobedience movement and the pro-devolutionist movement which continued to feed the idea of a more collectivist, egalitarian and radical Scottish political landscape which the Scottish Labour Party was able to draw upon to present itself as the party that spoke for Scotland and to establish itself until recently as the dominant force in Scottish politics (Hassan, 2004).

Although the Labour Party was initially organised as a conglomerate of affiliated bodies, it became a centralised body after the 1918 party conference, when it adopted a national membership scheme and a constitutional framework for a network of constituency and branch parties which operated more as branches of the central office in the regions rather than actual autonomous regional offices. Indeed, if regional branches of the Labour Party had their own conferences and executives, they had few powers and were strictly discouraged from formulating, or even discussing, policies that pertained of the wider British national interest or international interests. Until 1972, when the ban was lifted and the Scottish conference was able to discuss wider British issues (though not yet adopt an official position nor discuss international issues), debates were thus limited to framing advice on Scottish domestic policy and were further restrained by the need to support decisions made by the Labour Party's National Executive Committee and its national conference.

Yet, the unitary structure of the Labour Party was admittedly alleviated by the key role played by its affiliated trade unions in policy-making, as well as candidate selection, leadership recruitment, campaigning and, more importantly, funding. This proved to be particularly important in the case of Scottish Labour as the Scottish Trades Union Congress is not a regional branch of the Trades Union Congress but an entirely autonomous body. Notwithstanding the historical importance of the Scottish trade-union movement to Scottish Labour's sense of its past, the strength of Scottish trade unions has meant that local interests and networks have been highly influential in spite of the centralised organisation of the Labour Party and the subordinate role of its Scottish Executive Committee (SEC).[1] This further empowered union leaders and created a relation of mutual inter-dependence between them and the Scottish Labour Party's officials and SEC, the latter benefiting from the generous funding supplied by union affiliation and the electoral time donations and staffing that the unions provided. Indeed, not only did the unions pay affiliation fees but they also frequently sponsored constituency candidates and sent officials to assist Labour in its campaigns for their entire duration (Hassan and Shaw, 2012).

In fact, the territorial distribution of material party resources constitutes a significant dimension of organisational power (Dych, 1996) and of the capacity of regional parties to regulate their own affairs. The primary source of revenues for the Labour Party used to be the affiliation fees of the trade unions, which accounted for some 80 to 90 per cent of the party's budget. These, however, came to constitute only half of the party's income after it undertook reforms in the 1990s to reduce its financial dependency on the trade unions and strove to attract individual and business donations. Although devolution facilitated access to extra resources for the Scottish Labour Party, control over party finances remained part of the British Labour Party's remit. Despite efforts to increase its shares, the Scottish party is still overwhelmingly dependent on funds allocated by the central party organisation, as a majority of donors contribute to the statewide party rather than its sub-state branches. Support at statewide level is therefore essential for running electoral campaigns or managing the party's organisation (Laffin, Shaw and Taylor, 2007). This has been particularly the case of late, as Scottish Labour suffered a sharp drop in donations during Kezia Dugdale's first year as leader (Hutcheon, 2016). While the party collected donations of just under £600,000 in 2015, these fell to just over £100,000 in 2016.[2] Figures released by the Electoral Commission showed that Scottish Labour spent £337,814 fighting the 2016 Scottish Parliament election, that is, 59 per cent less than the £816,889 it spent on the 2011 campaign. The party's slump in the polls therefore mirrors a deterioration of its finances and a sharp loss of confidence among donors. Significantly, the figures released by the party in February 2017 underline Scottish Labour's increasing reliance on financial support from the UK party, despite its leader's attempts to make it more autonomous in terms of policy and personnel. The issue of funding will become increasingly pressing for the party if it continues losing the support of its main donors and becomes increasingly dependent on the trade unions and cross-border subsidies from the British party (Gordon, 2017a).

Moreover, the party reforms undertaken by Labour in the 1990s seriously dented the strong position of the affiliated organisations as block voting was abolished in favour of the One Member One Vote (OMOV) system and their voting potential at party conferences was reduced to 50 per cent, as much as the constituency parties'. With the national party executive losing power to newly established policy committees dominated by the parliamentary leadership, there was a certain loosening of ties between party and unions which changed internal power balances significantly.[3] This was particularly acute in Scotland due to the strong influence of the unions, as it meant that the Labour Party's centralised structure was no longer moderated by the role played by affiliated organisations.

By providing financial resources and manpower, as well as powerful local networks, the unions in Scotland have played a fundamental role in the party's long-standing hegemony. This is particularly true if we are to consider the

strikingly low membership of the Scottish Labour Party in contrast with its past political strengths. Labour membership has been consistently lower than anywhere else in Britain since the 1950s and has further declined from 19,703 members in 1993 and 30,770 members in 1998 to 13,135 members only in 2010 before rebounding to 21,500 in 2017 under Jeremy Corbyn's UK party leadership.[4] This suggests that the mobilisation of ground troops for electoral canvassing and campaigning often ran thin and that, for many years, Scottish Labour may have overlooked the key electoral functions of local parties whose role in information dissemination, electoral targeting and voter mobilisation has a strong impact on electoral performance (Hassan and Shaw, 2012). Scottish Labour's low membership levels therefore constitute a structural weakness which can become especially relevant when it is in a challenging electoral position, such as is the case now, faced with the threat of particularly high mobilisation rates among nationalist members and supporters across Scotland. The SNP is the third political party in the UK today in terms of membership and attracted the support of many volunteers, groups and organisations during the independence referendum campaign, which it is able to mobilise ahead of elections to influence the vote.

Furthermore, it has been argued that the low membership rate of the Scottish Labour Party finds a partial explanation in its dominance of local politics, which meant that the dissemination of a Labour message and the mobilisation of voters could be effectively managed by a small number of popular and well-respected local figures of the Labour Party, often councillors, in place of a large number of local party activists. Yet, its stronghold over local government in Scotland brutally came to an end with the introduction of the single transferable vote system in 2007, when Labour's share of seats fell to 28.5 per cent and it was only able to win two councils (i.e. Glasgow and North Lanarkshire, 6.3 per cent of councils). These poor results stressed the extent to which the first-past-the-post system had been responsible for much of Labour's strength in Scotland over the years. By inflating the results of the party to such a degree and creating political monopolies in urban Scotland and the West of Scotland in particular, the system had failed to represent the true popularity of the party in Scotland and created few incentives for the party to strengthen its membership base and renew with a vibrant political engagement (Hassan and Shaw, 2012).

Although it cannot be denied that Scottish Labour succeeded in penetrating the social fabric in Scotland through its dominance of local politics, Hassan and Shaw (2012) argue that the party's focus on practical local issues – in terms of health services, housing and education or on municipal facilities for instance – has prevented the party from forming and disseminating a more radical and ideologically driven message. The high proportion of party figures (Labour MPs excepted), local party organisations and activists involved in local government and their experience of the practical details of council management and

municipal administration have led the Scottish party as a whole to focus on concrete issues and been better able to keep in touch with its constituents. Yet, it has also meant that Scottish Labour's dominance of local politics, especially in the West of Scotland, has driven the party to focus on a limited range of policy issues with an immediate local impact rather than delivering a strong message about ideals and beliefs that are radical enough to resist the SNP's radical call for independence. Even if Scottish Labour and the SNP's policies are broadly similar on a wide range of issues, the nationalists' ideologically driven discourse may therefore be considered by voters as more inspiring. The SNP's now firmly established association with Scotland's national interests – as opposed to the UK-wide parties it competes with on Scotland's political scene – has undermined Scottish Labour's political message.

Significantly, devolution challenged the territorial cohesion of the Labour Party. While the classical functional cleavages of class and religion lost saliency in structuring party competition, new lines of political conflict emerged (Detterbeck, 2012). While this is also the case elsewhere and other countries have equally experienced a pluralisation of political cleavages with the emergence of New Left, green-libertarian, eurosceptical or populist-authoritarian parties, territorial cleavages became the main dividing line in Scottish politics with the future constitutional status of Scotland becoming a contested issue of party competition.

The first test of Scottish Labour's strength in Scotland came with the introduction of the Additional Member System for Scottish Parliament elections: until then, the Scottish party system, bolstered by the first-past-the-post method, had often been considered as a dominant-party system, as opposed to the UK's two-party system (Sartori, 1976): until the general elections of 2015, the Scottish Labour Party had been the first party in Scotland in terms of seats since 1959 and in terms of votes since 1964. The first two coalition governments of 1999 and 2003 under the Scottish Labour Party and the Scottish Liberal Democrats meant that the former had to find agreements with its partners in government and that some of the policies that were considered unpalatable to the Parliamentary Labour Party were effectively introduced in Scotland. This would most famously be the case of the Graduation Endowment and Student Support (Scotland) Act 2001, a compromise reached after the Liberal Democrats had made the issue of the abolition of tuition fees their main requirement in the talks leading to Scotland's first coalition government agreement and which came as the Labour government in Westminster was reintroducing top-up fees in England and Wales. Furthermore, Labour Scottish governments had to adapt to the new political landscape and take into consideration to at least some extent the opinions within Parliament and the wider Scottish public. Notwithstanding these limitations, Scottish Labour's lack of autonomy is also a particular handicap in the many instances when devolved and reserved matters overlap. In fact, matters reserved to Westminster under

the Scotland Acts limit the Scottish Parliament's field of action in several areas, not least through the budgetary repercussions entailed by the Barnett Formula. The high number of policy overlaps or potential policy overlaps creates a grey zone which the SNP is able to exploit in order to advance its cause and present itself as the champion of Scotland's interests.

The new institutional Scottish landscape, combined with the inherited institutions of the past, have therefore been key to the pursuit of a divergent political agenda north of the border. It enabled, for instance, former Labour First Minister Henry McLeish to introduce free personal care to the elderly in spite of the fact that the policy had been rejected outright by the Blair government and to resist a New Labour-style market-based strategy for education in Scotland. This would have important repercussions on internal party politics, as the centrifugal dynamics of a centralised Labour Party structure were offset by the centripetal dynamics imposed by the new Scottish parliamentary system.

Labour's 'branch office'? Conflicting interests and loyalties within Scottish Labour

Devolution in Scotland certainly came with a paradox for Labour: while it decentralised powers to a new Scottish Parliament, it resisted the emergence of a different Scottish Labour brand for fear of undermining the credibility and coherence of British Labour as a whole. The territorial dynamics in party decision-making are therefore key to understanding the difficulties experienced by Scottish Labour after 1999. Until 2007, Labour was in power in both London and Edinburgh and while coalition politics in the latter provided some degree of incongruence, partisan harmony and policy coherence were facilitated by the party's electoral hegemony as well as a common political ground shared by the leaderships of both the UK and Scottish parties. There were in fact few overt conflicts: the need to respect the message and creed of British Labour appeared paramount and the party structure remained very much centralised (Laffin, Shaw and Taylor, 2007). The row over free personal care to the elderly was the most notable exception, as it prevented British Labour from arguing that the policy was not affordable and undermined the coherence of the party discourse as a whole. Yet this was not a straightforward conflict between the UK and Scottish parties, as the latter was itself bitterly divided over the issue.

After introducing devolution, Labour did take into account to at least some degree the need to decentralise some policy-making responsibilities. While responsibility for UK policy development was vested in the National Policy Forum, a new Scottish Policy Forum was created in 1998 to propose and elaborate policy ideas in devolved matters which would be subjected to the decision of the Scottish conference and, if approved, could be added to the

Scottish manifesto. If the Scottish conference held a merely advisory function before devolution, it then became a sovereign body determining by a two-thirds majority which devolved policy item could form part of the Scottish Labour Party's programme and perhaps be included in its manifesto. Yet, the final drafting of the manifesto remained the responsibility of a committee equally drawn from the SEC and the Scottish Parliamentary Labour Group. Far from representing a bottom-up approach to policy, these changes thus implied a continuous top-down process involving the party leadership. Furthermore, reserved matters were still to be decided by the national policy procedures within the National Executive Committee and Scottish Labour was allowed very little input with its modest contribution of 12 members out of a total of 180 in the National Policy Forum. Besides, although the responsibility of candidate selection was entrusted to the SEC for Holyrood selections, the National Executive Committee – to which the SEC remained accountable – kept jurisdiction over all other selections. The relative autonomy of the Scottish party was alleviated by the material support of the UK party which, as we have seen, has become increasingly essential for the Scottish party and tempers divergence in policy choices. Finally, the Scottish party's lack of input on reserved matters and the fact that it was prevented from adopting official positions on these matters – such as was most notably the case over the war in Iraq in 2003 which a majority within the Scottish party opposed – meant that it was unwittingly associated with unpopular policies in Scotland and considered closer to Westminster politics (Laffin, Shaw and Taylor, 2007).

There thus were increasing calls under devolution for a more autonomous Scottish party. In 2007, leader Wendy Alexander first called for turning the post of Scottish Labour Parliamentary Group leader into that of Scottish Labour leader – which was occupied by the British party leader until 2011 – and for he or she to have authority over MPs. These issues resurfaced in the debates leading to the review of the Scottish Labour Party ordered by Ed Miliband after Labour's defeat in May 2011 and which was led by MP Jim Murphy and MSP Sarah Boyack. Indeed, the proposals of the review of the Labour Party adopted by the Scottish Labour Party conference in October 2011 meant a certain degree of decentralisation to the Scottish branch for the first time, with the creation of an elected leader of the Scottish Labour Party; opening the position of leader to all Labour parliamentarians elected in Scotland; beginning the process of restructuring local parties in Scotland on the basis of Scottish Parliament seats, not Westminster seats; establishing a political strategy board and establishing a new political base in Edinburgh.

After the May 2015 election defeat, MSP Ken Macintosh suggested to the party's outgoing leader Jim Murphy as well as the chair of the SEC and the general secretary of the Labour Party that changes be made to the way leadership elections were held and that the OMOV method be adopted in a system

of open primaries similar to that adopted by the UK party (see Avril in this volume). These recommendations having been adopted by the SEC in June, the leadership election of August 2015, which returned Kezia Dugdale as leader, was therefore held on an OMOV basis and included Scottish Labour Party members, as well as affiliated supporters (from affiliated organisations and unions) and registered supporters (who had registered online as party supporters for a minimum £3 fee). Although these changes mirror those adopted by the UK party (see Shaw in this volume), their impact in Scotland is potentially more beneficial as they boost the Scottish credentials of the Scottish party leader. The new system implies a more autonomous approach to the choice of leader of the Scottish Labour Party and is highly symbolic of the decentralisation currently sought by the party north of the border. Indeed, these changes were followed by an agreement in October 2015 between Kezia Dugdale and her British counterpart Jeremy Corbyn, for the further decentralisation of powers to Scottish Labour which would include full authority over all organisational and financial aspects, including the selection of Westminster and European candidates. Kezia Dugdale demanded that the Scottish Labour conference be entitled to formulate its own positions on reserved matters and that any divergences of opinions between the Scottish Labour Party and British Labour be negotiated, hence establishing what she referred to as a 'more federal' party structure (Settle, 2015).

Although these changes would appear to go in the right direction for Scottish Labour, its position on the political spectrum in Scotland's devolved political environment has also proved to be particularly problematic. While its UK counterpart faces little competition to the left, Scottish Labour has to contend with several left and centre-left parties. Its strategy during the May 2016 Scottish Parliament campaign was illustrative of its distinctive position. Indeed, the party tried to overcome its difficulties in two ways: first by distancing itself from Westminster politics in a bid to appear more Scottish, and secondly by trying to outflank the SNP from the left with what Kezia Dugdale has called 'the most radical Labour manifesto ever' (*Herald Scotland*, 2016; *Scotsman*, 2016). Yet, this radical left-wing stance meets two main problems: the first is the broad left-wing welfarist consensus that dominates Scottish politics. Not only are few differences to be found between Labour and the SNP on a wide set of issues (both parties broadly agree on opposing cuts to public services and protecting the welfare system, opposing the renewal of Trident and supporting a living wage), but Labour now has to contend with a new left-wing party formed out of the union of several radical movements active in the independence referendum campaign as well as the Scottish Greens (Adamson and Lynch, 2014). The second is that the core issue of Scotland's constitutional future and the radical character of the pro-independence movement during the referendum debate in Scotland have acted as a substitute to the kind of radicalism that has attracted young activists back to Labour

elsewhere in Britain, notably through the student fees protests south of the border and the pro-Corbyn activist movement Momentum (for a discussion on Momentum, see Avril in this volume).

Scottish Labour failed to see a comparable increase of its membership after Jeremy Corbyn's election as leader of the Labour Party in September 2015 because the radical voice of the pro-independence movement during the independence referendum campaign as well as in its aftermath had already created a newly energised radical movement in its fold. In a nation where there are no student fees, the political awakening of young voters came not with the fees movement but with the independence campaign (Brooks, 2016). This means that Scottish Labour has failed to renew its membership and voter bases as the young radical vote in Scotland has now defected to pro-independence parties, not least to the SNP whose members below the age of thirty account for 21 per cent of its total membership. Indeed, it has emerged that the pro-independence Scottish referendum has managed to capture much of Labour's traditional voter base. According to the Ashcroft and YouGov polls of September 2014, those in working-class occupations (47 per cent to 50 per cent) were more likely to vote Yes than those in more middle-class jobs (41 per cent to 44 per cent). According to Ipsos-Mori, 65 per cent of those living in one of the 20 per cent most deprived neighbourhoods voted Yes compared with just 36 per cent of those in the one-fifth most affluent (Curtice, 2014). Finally, some of the largest differences in support for independence were between renters and home owners. On average, only 32 per cent of freehold home owners supported independence compared with more than half of people who rent their property from a council or housing association (Mellon, 2014).

Yet the results of the 2017 general election in Scotland suggest that the SNP's powerful appeal in Scotland may be running out of steam. Against all odds, the SNP lost twenty-one seats and 13.1 per cent of the vote, with some safe seats such as those of Alex Salmond and Angus Robertson falling to the hands of the Scottish Conservatives. The Conservatives, on the other hand, increased their share of the vote by 13.7 per cent (with a total of 28.6 per cent of the vote) and gained twelve seats, all from the SNP. All but one Conservative seats were furthermore won in constituencies which voted Remain. This suggests that the staunchly unionist approach and soft Brexit stance adopted by Scottish Conservative leader Ruth Davidson was a successful combination. Scottish Labour, on the other hand, increased its share of the vote by 2.8 per cent and won six extra seats. Significantly, its total share of the vote was only 1.5 per cent below that of the Conservatives (27.1 per cent), thereby indicating that Scottish Labour will have to contend with the Scottish Conservatives over the two key issues of Brexit and the Union if it is to take advantage of the decline in SNP votes. Scottish Labour could potentially attract a new generation of voters for whom the SNP, now in power for ten years, may soon come to represent the establishment in Scotland.

Notwithstanding the appeal of the pro-independence movement in Scotland on left-wing voters, Jeremy Corbyn's leadership of the Labour Party has also failed to create a radical momentum comparable to that experienced in the rest of Britain because he both failed to obtain the support of the Scottish Labour leadership and to present an outward-looking and internationalist vision for Scotland within the Remain campaign ahead of the Brexit vote of 23 June 2016. Indeed, Scottish Labour leader Kezia Dugdale supported Yvette Cooper in the Labour leadership contest of September 2015 and severely criticised Jeremy Corbyn after he lost the support of a majority of his MPs in June 2016. Jeremy Corbyn's leadership was also criticised for the timidity of its pro-European stance in the months leading to the referendum on British membership of the European Union, not least in Scotland, where 62 per cent of voters voted Remain and where the Remain vote won a majority in every single Scottish constituency. The Brexit vote renewed calls for a second referendum on Scotland's independence and gave more credence to the SNP's long-standing position on an independent Scotland in the EU. Scottish Labour has therefore found it difficult to provide a satisfactory solution to the majority of unionist and Remain voters. It remains to be seen whether the federal solution brought forward by a Scottish Labour commission led by Lord Falconer and adopted by Kezia Dugdale in February 2017 will provide a successful alternative to the pro-EU separatist discourse of the SNP or the Scottish Conservatives' unionist and soft Brexit positions (Dugdale, 2017).

In fact, Scottish Labour's position over the constitutional future of Scotland has plagued the party since the independence referendum of 2014. Scottish Labour's participation in the Better Together No campaign alongside the two coalition government partners at the time will certainly have been damaging in two respects. First, because it stood on the same political platform as the Conservatives and secondly because of the negativity of the Better Together campaign. Although Labour launched its own initiative, United with Labour, in a bid to distance itself from the coalition partners and in particular with the so-called 'bedroom tax', with some Labour figures such as Jim Murphy even going so far as refusing to share a platform with the prime minister, the campaign was still being led by a senior Labour figure, Alistair Darling. It became an easy target for the SNP, which could present the umbrella campaign as a Conservative-led initiative, which gathered three British rather than Scottish parties and generally defended austerity policies and welfare cuts. Furthermore, given the position of the Better Together campaign as the defender of the status quo, it had trouble departing from what could generally be considered a negative stance. As the challenger, the SNP was able to lead a much more inspiring campaign and deliver a positive message about the future of an independent Scotland. Inevitably, criticism formed the core of the No campaign as it sought to attack the SNP's project. It was soon – and sometimes rightly so – accused of scaremongering and rebranded Project Fear.

This could form a partial explanation for the results of an October 2015 YouGov opinion poll which found that less than a quarter of Scots said they trusted the Scottish Labour party to tell the truth[5] and suggests that the party has trouble finding an audience receptive to its message and propose a clear vision of Scotland's constitutional future. It is no wonder then that Dugdale has now warned that her party would not participate in an umbrella No campaign leading to a second independence referendum (Gordon, 2017b).

Labour did set up its own Devolution Commission in 2012 charged with examining the current state of devolution and determining what new powers should be devolved to the Scottish Parliament. Its proposals, published in March 2014, promised to set Scottish rates of income tax, including higher rates for high earners of at least 50p in the pound, block cuts in business taxes and increase spending on housing (Scottish Labour Devolution Commission, 2014). All of these became policy in the party's May 2016 manifesto, with Kezia Dugdale's proposal to increase income tax by 1p in the pound and raise the income tax rate for those earning more than £150,000 from 45p to 50p. Paradoxically, it was in terms of welfare that the Labour Devolution Commission was least inclined to decentralise responsibilities, arguing that the welfare system was better protected by the pooling of UK resources while exposing itself to heavy criticism that it was precisely in the Union that it suffered from reforms imposed by Westminster. This would be modified in the May 2016 manifesto, as Kezia Dugdale's party advocated using the new powers of the Scottish Parliament to protect both the NHS budget and education spending in real terms. In fact, Kezia Dugdale made much of the fact that the May 2016 election would be about which party would better use the new devolved powers of the Scottish Parliament. Yet, she repeatedly stressed that her party was 'focused on using [them] to invest in the future', rather than 're-running the old battles of the past', thereby indicating her preference for the status quo and offering little if any prospects for further devolution or a reassessment of the current constitutional set-up. The outcome of the Brexit vote has drastically modified this position, as the Scottish Labour leadership is now caught between its unionist and pro-EU positions, having to argue that Labour is the only party to stand both for unionism and membership of the EU and combine its two new conflicting legitimacies as a unionist and pro-EU party.

Conclusion

On 8 February 2017, when Scottish Labour overwhelmingly voted in the Scottish Parliament against triggering Article 50 of the Treaty on European Union, the party openly defied the leadership of the Labour Party and symbolically entrenched its own position as a Scottish party rather than the Scottish branch office of the UK Labour Party. Although the vote was

non-binding following the decision of the Supreme Court, it mirrored the increasing rift between both leaderships since Labour lost power in both Westminster and Holyrood. Indeed, it appears that the more the context of governing diverges between state and sub-state levels, the greater the difficulties in elaborating and respecting uniform party strategies and policies. If there were very few clashes between the UK party and the Scottish party in the years immediately following devolution due to a consensual approach to policy with both leaderships, the relations became more tense after they lost power and their differences irreconcilable after the main political dividing line in Scotland became constitutional. The difficulties experienced by Scottish Labour after devolution in respecting the Labour creed while appearing as a legitimate Scottish party in a devolved political environment became more acute. Scottish Labour's plummeting electoral scores are a clear indication that the partisan electoral strategies of the UK Labour Party are no longer suitable for a Scottish Labour party having to survive in a political landscape marked by a constitutional divide. It will have to find a fine compromise between its conflicting loyalties as a unionist pro-European Labour party if it is to become Scotland's leading party again.

Notes

1 Indeed, Scotland's share of trade-union membership per capita has consistently been higher than England's or the rest of the UK average. Trade-union membership represented 55 per cent of the Scottish workforce in 1980, before it fell to 39.2 per cent as an effect of Thatcherite trade-union laws and the decline of the manufacturing base of the economy, and dropped further down to its current levels of 32 per cent (as opposed to 24.1 per cent in England and 25.6 per cent in the rest of the UK).

2 In 2015, income was £1,073,108, of which £592,641 was donations, and expenditure was £974,931, leaving a surplus of £98,177. But in 2016, despite election years usually boosting donations, income slumped to £400,436, of which £105,752 was donations, and expenditure was £504,402, leaving a deficit of £103,966 (Gordon, 2017a).

3 Since 1997, the development of party policies and programme is the responsibility of the National Policy Forum which comprises different policy commissions in which regional representation remains weak. In both Scotland and Wales, there are separate policy forums which bear responsibility for the development of party programmes and policies, and publish policy reports which are open to submission from local parties and affiliated organisations but whose work does not necessarily feed into the deliberations of the National Policy Forum. There thus appears to be strong parliamentary dominance in the drafting of electoral manifestos (Laffin, Shaw and Taylor, 2007).

4 The party's Annual Report presented to the Scottish Labour conference of March 2008 showed that half of the constituencies had less than 300 members and 14 of them had fewer than 200 members. A membership surge came after the leadership election of September 2015 and increased membership to the Scottish Labour Party to 18,824 members in 2015 and 21,500 in 2017, but it pales in comparison with the

membership boost enjoyed by its British counterpart (up to 380,000 members in November 2015 and 552,000 members in June 2017) as well as the current membership of the SNP (over 120,000).

5 'How Much Do You Trust the Scottish Labour Party to Tell the Truth?'. Available at: http://whatscotlandthinks.org/questions/how-much-if-at-all-do-you-trust-the-following-to-tell-the-truth-scottish-labour#table. Accessed 1 March 2018.

References

Adamson, K. and Lynch, P. (eds) (2014) *Political Parties and the Scottish Independence Referendum 2014*, Cardiff: Welsh Academic Press.

Brooks, L. (2016) 'Jeremy Corbyn "Can Help Labour Rebuild Scotland"', *The Guardian*, 24 August.

Carty, R. K. (2004) 'Parties as Franchise Systems: The Stratarchical Organizational Imperative', *Party Politics*, 10, pp. 5–24.

Curtice, J. (2014) 'So Who Voted Yes and Who Voted No?', in What Scotland Thinks. Available at: http://blog.whatscotlandthinks.org/2014/09/voted-yes-voted/, 26 September. Accessed 22 March 2017.

Detterbeck, K. (2012) *Multi-level Party Politics in Western Europe*, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Dugdale, K. (2017) 'Federal UK Would Fix "Failure of Politics"', *Scotsman*, 13 February. Available at: www.scotsman.com/news/kezia-dugdale-federal-uk-would-fix-failure-of-politics-1-4365710. Accessed 5 December 2017.

Dych, R. (1996) 'Relations between Federal and Provincial Parties', in Tanguay, B. and Gagnon A.-G. (eds) *Canadian Parties in Transition*, Toronto: Nelson, pp. 160–89.

Gordon, T. (2017a) 'Scottish Labour Donations Collapse in Dugdale's First Year as Leader', *Herald Scotland*, 22 February. Available at: www.heraldscotland.com/news/15109123.Scottish_Labour_donations_collapse_in_Dugdale_s_first_year_as_leader/. Accessed 5 December 2017.

Gordon, T. (2017b) 'Dugdale Vetoes Cross Party No Campaign in Second Referendum', *Herald Scotland*, 25 February. Available at: www.heraldscotland.com/news/15117268.Dugdale_vetoes_cross_party_No_campaign_in_second_referendum/. Accessed 5 December 2017.

Hassan, G. (2002) 'A Case Study of Scottish Labour: Devolution and the Politics of Multi-level Governance', *Political Quarterly*, 73, pp. 144–57.

Hassan, G. (ed.) (2004) *The Scottish Labour Party: History, Institutions and Ideas*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.

Hassan, G. and Shaw, E. (2012) *The Strange Death of Labour Scotland*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.

Hepburn, E. (2010) *Using Europe: Territorial Party Strategies in a Multi-level System*, Manchester: Manchester University Press.

Herald Scotland (2016) 'Kezia Dugdale Plays Down Jeremy Corbyn Party Conference Absence', 18 March. Available at: www.heraldscotland.com/news/14353843.Kezia_Dugdale_plays_down_Jeremy_Corbyn_party_conference_absence/. Accessed 5 December 2017.

Hough, D. and Jeffery, C. (eds) (2006) *Devolution and Electoral Politics*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, pp. 214–47.

Hutcheon, P. (2016) 'Donors Desert Scottish Labour as Kezia Dugdale Is Told: Be Stronger on the Union', *Herald Scotland*, 11 September. Available at: www.heraldscotland.com/news/14735734.Top_Scottish_Labour_donors_walk_away_from_Dugdale/. Accessed 5 December 2017.

Laffin, M., Shaw, E. and Taylor, G. (2007) 'The New Sub-national Politics of the British Labour Party', *Party Politics*, 13, pp. 88–108.

Mellon, J. (2014) 'Class Divisions and the Scottish Referendum', Centre on Constitutional Change, 19 June. Available at: www.centreonconstitutionalchange.ac.uk/blog/class-divisions-and-scottish-referendum. Accessed 22 March 2017.

Sartori, G. (1976) *Parties and Party Systems: A Framework for Analysis*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Scotsman (2016) 'Labour Unveils its Proposals for "Tax and Spend" Election', 29 March. Available at: www.scotsman.com/news/politics/labour-unveils-its-proposals-for-tax-and-spend-election-1-4039437. Accessed 5 December 2017.

Scottish Labour Devolution Commission (2014) 'Powers for a Purpose – Strengthening Accountability and Empowering People'. Available at: http://s.bsd.net/scotlab/default/page/file/26e0eb4bdf4c775d14_ram6b81bk.pdf. Accessed 7 March 2018.

Settle, M. (2015) '"I Need to Set Labour Party Structure on a Different Course" – Kezia Dugdale on More Federal Structure for Labour', *Herald Scotland*, 26 October. Available at: www.heraldscotland.com/news/13897321._I_need_to_set_Scottish_Labour_Party_on_a_different_course____Kezia_Dugdale_on__federal_structure__for_Labour/. Accessed 5 December 2017.

Swenden, W. and Maddens, B. (eds) (2009) *Territorial Party Politics in Western Europe*, Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

14

The 'movementisation' of the Labour Party and the future of labour organising

Emmanuelle Avril

Introduction

The ever-increasing importance of new technology tools and platforms, the growing emphasis placed on community organising in campaigns and the gradual opening up of party structures are all pointing to the deep organisational transformation that the Labour Party is currently undergoing, with the frontiers between party and the wider community becoming increasingly porous. In view of dwindling membership numbers and the gradual loss of Labour's informal system of community involvement through networks of local councillors, trade-union officials, Labour clubs and tenant associations (Hassan and Shaw, 2012), there has been talk, since 2010, of growing the party (back) into a social movement. Thus both the Blair-supporting Movement for Change and, more significantly, the pro-Corbyn Momentum have sought to galvanise support both inside and outside the party, making full use of the mobilising potential of internet tools and platforms – a key feature which distinguishes present-day forms of organising from early ones (on the impact of new technologies on Labour Party structures and campaigning see Avril, 2013).

This process of 'movementisation' (Olivier, 2004) is couched by some in very optimistic terms as a way to reconnect the party with the wider electorate in an age of rising anti-politics (see, for example, Stoker, Jennings and Twyman, 2016) and to create a mass movement ready for government. Others point on the contrary to the dangers such an evolution may entail, arguing that radicalisation through social media will in fact alienate the party further from the interests of the wider electorate and turn it into a mere protest group. Indeed,

the echo chamber effect of digital tools and platforms can also be said to increase polarisation of opinion within the party, leading to a deepening of the rift between two 'camps' – the 'Corbynistas' v. the 'anyone-but-Corbyn' camp – thereby heightening dissensus where there used to be compromise and a 'broad church' approach.

At the time of writing, the Labour Party finds itself in a unique and unprecedented dysfunctional situation – which may adversely affect its chances of electoral success – where the overwhelming majority of members of the parliamentary party are pitched against a grassroots movement focused around Jeremy Corbyn's two leadership campaigns (see also Shaw in this volume). In addition, the very idea of Momentum as a social movement is itself contested: while Momentum organisers insist that it does qualify as a grassroots labour movement, critics argue that it is too unrepresentative of the party's working-class roots, both socio-demographically and ideologically, to be able to claim that label (for a balanced assessment see Thompson, 2016). Therefore, to understand what this means in terms of the nature and future shape of Labour organising, we need to consider the long-term trajectory of the Labour Party since its inception. Indeed, the party emerged out of the labour movement in a process of institutionalisation, and is now, since the summer of 2015, showing signs of de-institutionalisation, accelerated by Corbyn's leadership and the post-Brexit referendum vote confusion. Will Labour evolve into a mass membership bottom-up community movement or a shrinking protest party?

Drawing mainly from political science and organisational studies, but also from social movement analysis, this chapter examines the current terms of the debate on the future of Labour organising and tracks the emergence of hybrid forms of political parties with emphasis now placed on social movement activities such as crowdsourcing and fundraising, alongside traditional election campaigning. The analysis starts with some methodological considerations, continues with a presentation of Labour-supporting groups and movements, with particular focus on the most recent, visible and controversial one – Momentum – and then leads to an appraisal of the impact which this 'movementisation' is having on the structure and mobilising power of the Labour Party.

Analysing Labour Party movements

The conventional view of the respective role of social movements and political parties is that social movements are focused on protest and political parties on governing (for a general discussion on the 'political process' approach to social movements, see della Porta and Diani, 2006: 16–19). Yet, as Kriesi points out, even though the legacy of Tilly's highly influential model (1978), which established a clear delineation between social movements defined as 'challengers' seeking access to the institutionalised realm of politics and 'polity members'

who already enjoy routinised access, is still largely valid, it may also hinder the appraisal of the parties' changing organisational forms since 'the borderline between insiders (political parties) and outsiders (social movements) in politics is not as clear-cut as is often assumed by social movement scholars' (Kriesi, 2015). Indeed, taking the example of the radicalisation of the Republican Party in the United States under the influence of the Tea Party movement, Hutter, Kriesi and Lorenzini (forthcoming) stress that the introduction of mechanisms such as primaries has contributed to the growing influence of social movements over established political parties. The authors show that in times of crisis of representation, and especially in two-party systems where there is no chance of electoral success for outsiders, social movements are able to transform existing political parties through intra-party mobilisation. In this respect, Labour's Momentum presents the interesting case of a social movement created specifically to sustain a particular political line embodied in one individual (in this case, Jeremy Corbyn), confirming a trend towards increased synergy between institutionalised political organisations and protest movements.

The breaking down of boundaries between the two types of organisations calls for a similar reappraisal of academic barriers between the two subfields of social movement study and political party study (Piccio, 2016). One of the factors of the relative lack of interest in political parties in the social movement literature has been the academic compartmentalisation between these two fields of research, with each group of scholars working in a silo, independently from the other (Kitschelt, 1990), each using distinct concepts and theories (Luck and Dechezelles, 2015: 17–18). Yet della Porta and Diani (2006: 20) underline that social movement analysis is largely transferable to other types of organisations, such as political parties. If attempts have already been made to bridge the gap (in particular Hutter, Kriesi and Lorenzini, forthcoming), as yet relatively little empirical research has been conducted on the way social movements' forms of organising influence specific political parties in the UK. This is even more relevant for a left-wing party such as the Labour Party for which 'organising' takes a specific meaning since, historically, parties of the left have tended to emerge from protests outside of the polity. As Rhiannon points out, 'organising as a tool for building democratic structures and taking the message to a wider audience is at the core of progressive movements and political parties' (2009: 30). Thus the British labour movement generated its own interest organisations in the shape of trade unions, but also created its own dedicated party at the turn of the twentieth century. Yet even though the Labour Party has retained the original institutional link with the trade unions which created it as a political organisation – a unique feature for a mainstream left-wing government party – there is surprisingly little political science research focused on the so-called Trade Unions Link as such (Minkin's *Contentious Alliance*, 1991, being one notable exception; see also Wickham-Jones, 2016): political science has tended to focus on the study of the political arm

of Labour, while trade-union research has been the preserve of social and labour history scholars. At a time when the Labour Party is under the influence of a movement seeking to transform it, such effort to bring together the various strands of academic research is even more pressing.

One explanation for such a 'division of labour' among academics is the fact that the relationship between parties and social movements has traditionally been envisaged as a conflictual one (leaving aside the discussion as to how best to categorise trade unions, which are institutionalised organisations that also have social movement features). The classic definition of a social movement is an informal network of individuals, groups and organisations coming together around a common cause and engaged in a political or cultural conflict (Diani, 1992). A political party is defined as an organisation whose main objective is to gain direct influence on the political process by reaching positions of power. Therefore social movements, whose objective typically is to bring about change and challenge the status quo, have tended to look at political parties as part of the problem and as obstacles to achieving their own goals. Indeed, a feature of parties as they become institutionalised – including parties such as Labour which emerged out of a movement – is to become over time primarily concerned with sustaining themselves rather than achieving their original goals (in Labour's case, working-class representation in the Commons and in the government).[1]

But this classic polarised view is now regarded as largely outdated so that, as Piccio (2016) notes, there have been growing calls in the last two decades to theoretically and empirically bridge the boundaries between so-called institutional and non-institutional politics and to consider parties and social movements as placed on a continuum of political action (Goldstone, 2003; McAdam, Tarrow and Tilly, 2001). Therefore, even if social movements and political parties are distinct from each other in terms of organising, operation and goals, there are strong links and frequent interactions between these two categories of organisations. A party may take part in a specific social movement campaign whose objectives are aligned with its own and as such may be considered as much a social movement organisation as any other organisation within that movement. In fact, the engagement of political parties in social movement activity is one of the elements of what Meyer and Tarrow (1998) labelled the 'social movement society', where popular protest has become a codified and almost institutionalised form of political participation. Far from being considered as undemocratic and destabilising forces, social movements are then regarded as part and parcel of conventional politics.

But the current upheavals in the Labour Party force us to further revisit some of the recent thinking in political science. Although Tilly's classic view of social movements as 'challengers', echoed by Gramson's definition of movements as 'outsiders' (1990), hence first and foremost as disrupting the smooth running of the democratic process, is now regarded as outdated and has been

countered with new models awarding a more positive and even 'normal' role to social movements inside the polity, there is still virtue in keeping in mind early conceptions of a dialectical opposition between parties and movements when analysing Labour Party movements. Corbyn himself – and Momentum as a whole – may indeed be regarded as an 'outsider' inside his own party (Dorey and Denham, 2015; for an in-depth discussion of the impact of Corbyn's party management style on cohesion within Labour see Shaw in this volume). In the same vein, the recent evolution of the Labour Party would seem to put a new perspective on the highly influential thesis of the autonomisation of political parties from civil society as theorised by Katz and Mair (1995) through the concept of 'cartel party', a model which points to the inability of contemporary political parties to fulfil the key function of articulating the demands of the social groups they are supposed to represent. Instead, the party's 'movementisation' indicates that Labour may be moving towards a different party model.

Indeed, the literature also identifies parties which, wanting to retain their protest vote and a strong activist base, are inclined to reject the compromising approach required for managing political power and to adopt a bipolar structure, with a party of government on the one hand, and a radical movement party on the other, thus merging together the institutional and protest spheres (Luck and Dechezelles, 2015: 21). This is reflected in Labour's Momentum, whose website displays both the statement that the movement 'evolved out of Jeremy Corbyn's 2015 Labour leadership bid to build on the energy and enthusiasm generated by the campaign' and the assertion that 'Momentum … works to increase participation and engagement in the party to enable it to win elections and enter Government'. This convergence between institutional and non-institutionalised politics has been reinforced by the recent reform of the eligibility criteria: an individual may join Momentum provided he/she is 'a member of the Labour Party and no other political party'. What we are witnessing is an attempt to combine protest politics and party politics, which is reflective of a wider trend.

Political parties have been restructuring so as to become more movement-like, borrowing tools from social movements, in particular community organising methods, to better engage with civil society and mobilise support outside of the closed circle of party members. There has been a consensus within the Labour Party that some 'movementisation' would help revitalise the party in this age of declining voter turnout and party membership. Writing for the Labour right-wing *Progress Magazine* in March 2015, before the surge around Corbyn's candidacy, Ferguson (2015) argued that a future Labour government would 'urgently need to cultivate the seeds of movement politics it sowed in opposition'. Labour blogger and former parliamentary candidate Ion (2015) advocated 'a structure that can better empower members and supporters and build capacity for campaigning at a local, regional and national level' and

called for the adoption of open primaries for the selection of parliamentary candidates. There has been a general discourse of participation and deliberation, as well as sustained efforts to open party structures to civil society, with a view that the wider circle, made up of party supporters, was ideologically more moderate and therefore closer to the party voters. Even though the advent of Momentum eventually failed to confirm these expectations, its emergence is not to be regarded as a freak event but rather as a direct result of trends established both inside and outside the party over the past two decades.

Momentum, Movement for Change and other precursors

To better grasp the significance of Momentum, and try to ascertain the nature of this 'movement', it helps to locate it within a longer evolution towards the 'movementisation' of Labour. Indeed, the focus on social movement mobilising tools, such as community-building, is not new, nor is it specific to the Labour Party. A combination of citizen disaffection with representative politics and a global democratic 'push' have led parties in all liberal democracies to design new ways to connect with their electorates and to seek inspiration from other organising models. Labour, having temporarily managed to reverse the long-term decline of membership in the late 1990s, in New Labour's heyday, soon saw the Blair bubble burst and the party revert to the long-term trend of decline. From this point on, the leadership has invested considerable energy in trying to attract new members and generally to regenerate the link with civil society. Early efforts by the Labour Party in power to engage with the wider community were bolstered by the development of online tools and platforms. This was seen first in 2003 with the launch of the Big Conversation project to debate the challenges facing Britain through online and offline forums, which was described by the government as the largest public consultation exercise ever carried out by a political party in the UK, and then in 2006 with the Let's Talk initiative, a consultation exercise on public service reform to engage the wider public in the party's policy formulation by listening to the opinions of people both inside and outside the party. These early experiments, though short-lived and largely derided as gimmicks, nevertheless paved the way for more sustained and successful efforts to open the party structures wider so as better to reflect the diversity of civil society.

Internally, the party's socialisation site for members, Membersnet, launched in the same period, never grew into a platform from which to reach out to the wider community and remained purely a campaigning tool for activists. But the Labour Supporters' Network, created in 2004 in the belief that the large numbers of hesitant voters who were not inclined to engage in traditional party structures could be persuaded to take the step of joining, or at least to participate in some of the party's campaigning activities, took the opening of

the party's formal structures a step further. The shift towards community organising methods, a model borrowed from the US to provide grassroots organisations with deeper roots into the community (Alinsky, 1971), has been gradual but steady. Explicit reference to the community organising model came with the launch of a five-year programme of community organising called Movement for Change at the time of David Miliband's 2010 leadership campaign, which brought together a community action group, Citizens UK (established by the former director of Save the Children and the Children's Society), and Ed Miliband guru and Labour peer Maurice Glasman. It was thought by those behind Movement for Change that this organisation would at some point constitute the community organising wing of the party. At around the same time, US campaigner Arnie Graf suggested to Ed Miliband (who had been elected party leader by beating his brother) the creation of a Labour Party Supporters' network which would allow citizens reluctant to become *bona fide* party members to acquire voting rights in internal elections in exchange for a very small financial contribution. The Labour Party went on to produce its own community organising manual with a view to rebuilding the party as 'a community-based, campaigning organisation' (Labour Party, 2012: 5). This approach was taken to a new level in the run-up to the 2015 election, where all major UK parties created networks of volunteers.

The decision to mobilise the tools and methods of community organising can be regarded as a step leading to a more ambitious 'movementisation' of the party. The latest attempt to 'movementise' the party was seen in Momentum, created in support of Jeremy Corbyn during the 2015 leadership contest as a tool to mobilise the massive influx of newly enfranchised 'supporters' – who, following the leadership election reforms adopted in March 2014, were given a vote in the leadership election in exchange for a £3 fee.[2] It was also seen to a lesser extent in its soft-left riposte Open Labour, created in December 2015 as the voice of 'normal' Labour members, and then in the right-wing Saving Labour group, set up the following year with the explicit purpose of deposing Corbyn following the Brexit vote in June 2016. Momentum is also a response to Progress, an independent organisation of Labour Party members created in 1996 by a group of Blair supporters who define themselves as Labour's Progressives and who supported Liz Kendall's candidacy in the 2015 leadership election (she came fourth with just 4.5 per cent of the vote), and which, like Momentum, has been accused of creating 'a party within the party'.[3]

Therefore Momentum, which adopted a similar model to grassroots Democrat-supporting groups in the US, comes from a long lineage of attempts to engage with the wider community of voters to compensate for declining membership, activism and citizen political participation in general, and is not an isolated case. Whether Momentum, as it claims to be, qualifies as a social movement, a grassroots movement organised with a view to promoting social

change, or is just another ginger group among many, seeking to influence the direction of the party, or simply a loose coalition of varied interests (Momentum also describe themselves as a 'network'), is a topic of heated debate both in the Labour Party and in academia. One feature which clearly sets Momentum apart from the other examples covered in this chapter is that it was created outside the party. Momentum was set up by Labour left-winger and activist Jon Lansman, who, crucially, retains personal control of Momentum data through his company Jeremy for Labour Ltd,[4] in support of a leader deemed to be the voice of the grassroots and who represented a minority view among the parliamentary party. All other groups and movements, in contrast, originated either with the leadership or with influential groups among the parliamentary party, with a view to organising the grassroots in support of their own objectives. Following months of internal debate, accusations of entryism by far-left groups outside of the Labour movement (such as the Trotskyist Socialist Workers' Party and Socialist Party – the current incarnation of the 1980s Militant Tendency – or Left Unity) and stories of abusive behaviour, especially on social networks, Jon Lansman made it clear that he would not relinquish control of the organisation in the face of the Trotskyist challenge. As a result, Momentum clarified its relationship with the Labour Party in January 2017, establishing that new members must also be members of the party (existing members were required to join the party by July 2017).

Within Labour, Momentum is supported by radical left groups such as the long-standing Campaign for Labour Party Democracy, of which Jon Lansman has been a prominent member, formed in 1973 by a group of rank-and-file activists with support from about ten Labour MPs as a response to the way annual conference decisions were continually ignored by the Wilson government (see Randall in this volume), and the Labour Representation Committee (LRC), created in 2004 (and named after the original 1900 LRC), to 'fight for socialist policies in the Labour Party, the broader labour movement, and in wider society', and whose explicit goal is to 'secure support for socialists within the Labour Party, the unions and Parliament', focusing on preparing the way 'for a real, credible alternative at the next election' (www.l-r-c.org.uk/).[5] The irony is that these Labour radical left groups, which used to engage in internal fights with the leadership to promote grassroots democracy from the margins, now find themselves unusually aligned with the leadership, a situation which requires them to suddenly change focus. Although it is too early to tell what the effect of having to turn their action outwards after decades of internal struggle will be on such groups, the expectation is that this may generate problems linked with difficulty in adjusting to their current status as the 'new norm'.

As for Momentum itself, as any collective, it does not constitute a homogeneous group and is instead internally divided between, on the one hand, young enthusiastic anti-austerity 'progressives' drawn from social movements

such as UK Uncut, as well as ex-Green voters or non-voters, whose purpose is to engage in campaigns for a number of causes (Pickard, 2017), and, on the other, battle-hardened far-left activists, active in the Stop the War Coalition and far-left parties, bent on leading an ideological battle. In an article for the soft-left magazine *Renewal*, Momentum's national organisers identified four strands within the Momentum coalition (Klug, Rees and Schneider, 2016a): first, extra-parliamentary, social movement activism (particularly post-financial crisis movements such as UK Uncut and Occupy); secondly, more traditional left-wing protest coalitions, such as the People's Assembly and the Stop the War Coalition; thirdly, the existing Labour left (its few remaining MPs and organisations such as the LRC); and fourthly, the left of the trade-union movement (among which some that have been affiliated to Labour all along and others, such as the Fire Brigades' Union, that are now re-affiliating). An idea of the ideological profile of Momentum members can be inferred from the movement's own internal survey,[6] which yields interesting results. The survey shows that an overwhelming majority of members (80.6 per cent) favour One Member One Vote (OMOV) over the traditional Labour Party conference delegate democracy inherited from the trade unions. They favour direct grassroots democracy, a model imported from social movements, as well as insurgent parties such as the Greens, which points to a significant culture change. The irony is that, until the March 2014 leadership election reform was put to the test, OMOV had been consistently pushed by the party's right as a way to dilute the influence of supposedly 'radical' party activists. Momentum therefore houses different groups with differing objectives and political cultures, and the January 2017 reforms reflect an effort to keep the fight within the Labour tent.

A comparison of Momentum's features with that of its rival, Saving Labour, helps understand its success in mobilising support. Apart from the fact that Momentum is also strongly organised on the ground through local groups, meaningful differences can be observed just by looking at their respective websites and Facebook pages during the second leadership election campaign opposing Corbyn and Owen Smith in the summer of 2016. The Momentum website (www.peoplesmomentum.com/), having been created a year earlier, was much more developed and offered many more interactive features, allowing visitors to freely download and print leaflets. The Saving Labour website's landing page, in contrast, merely asked whether one was a party member and for an email address and redirected visitors to a page asking if they wished to send their MP or MSP a message. The reactivity of the two websites was also very different: a visitor subscribing to Momentum would receive a thank you email back within seconds, but there was no immediate follow-up from Saving Labour. The limited role ascribed to the platform beyond relaying the group's message is made clear by the fact that the web link is now dead, although the Facebook page is still active (www.facebook.com/savinglabour/). Overall,

Saving Labour sent out fourteen emails about the ongoing leadership election between 12 July and 14 September 2016, before all communication stopped. Momentum has been sending a steady flow of emails, first about Corbyn's candidacy, then about actions such as anti-Trump demonstrations, as well as calling for help in election campaigns. These differences would tend to show that Saving Labour was not as well organised as Momentum and that it followed a top-down model of mobilisation in which the role of the member was limited to supporting the Parliamentary Labour Party.

Given their characteristics and the circumstances of their creation, it is unsurprising that one effect of these various groups and movements, designed to promote one particular faction around a candidate or leader with a specific ideological profile, has been to entrench factionalisation and move the party further away from the 'broad church' model (see Shaw in this volume; also Shaw, 1988). The opening up of the party was bound to the idea of turning the traditional party structures into an organisational form closer to that of a movement, thus increasing the party's responsiveness to voters' concerns. But, as the outcome of the inclusion of registered supporters in the leadership election has shown, the thinking behind the reform may have been fundamentally flawed, since the new system has done nothing to reconnect the party with manual and routine white-collar workers whose support it is crucial for the party to conquer again.[7] And with each faction accusing the other of dressing up a power grab as empowerment of the members, what are the chances of a party renewal?

'Movementisation': strengthening or weakening the party?

The exploration of the relationship between social movements and political parties in the first section of this chapter showed the categories to be often blurred, sometimes by a deliberate attempt – as in the North American Tea Party movement – and at other times because organisations change categories, Green parties being the most obvious example. Indeed, the adoption by political parties of some of the features of movements has led to the emergence of hybrid party models, such as the 'movement party' (Kitschelt, 2006), which describes movements transitioning to electoral politics as parties, as seen in Greece's Syriza and in Spain's Podemos, and 'social movement partyism' (Almeida, 2010), whereby parties acquire movement features through the adoption of extra-parliamentary strategies, as seen in Latin American politics (Hutter, Kriesi and Lorenzini, forthcoming). More specifically here, what is also witnessed is the reverse shift, from party to movement, through a process of 'de-institutionalisation', whereby parties adopt more fluid structures (Olivier, 2004) and the evolution of organisational structures towards – at least in theory – a bottom-up model bolstered by the availability of new online tools and platforms. As 'movementisation' translates into a push towards increased

internal democracy, increased participation and the opening up of structures to voters and civil society, Labour left-wingers such as Hilary Wainwright (2008) have advocated the 'movement party' model as a way to renew the party.

But if there are obvious advantages for parties to borrow some of the organisational features from movements, there are also fundamental differences between political parties and social movements whose very raison d'être is to challenge the status quo and offer an alternative to political parties for citizens wishing to engage in the political process. To a large extent, the two organisational models can even be seen as fundamentally incompatible, since bringing them together would involve balancing the strategic autonomy of the leadership required in a partisan organisation with the openness and dynamics of a grassroots movement. Scarrow points to the dangers associated with changes designed to bolster participation in party processes for partisan organisations, which are then 'more likely to function as temporary campaign organisations than as permanent bodies' (Scarrow 2013: 99). Indeed, it was argued that the recent and spectacular expansion of the Labour Party's grassroots could prove fatal to the party as it risked turning it into a fringe protest movement (BBC News, 2015).

In addition, recent trends indicate that grassroots empowerment goes hand in hand with the erosion of full party members' prerogatives. Although during the 2015 election campaign all the mainstream parties which focused on creating supporters' networks took precautions to stress the differences between member status and supporter status, the boundaries are undeniably becoming blurred. As a result, the different levels of membership – and commitment – now often coexist, in keeping with Scarrow's definition of the 'multi-speed membership party' (Scarrow, 2015; see also Garland, 2016). If these trends are confirmed, volunteers and supporters are expected to be given ever-increasing influence on the life of parties, which results in a massive shift in the party's centre of gravity. In Labour's case, as Garland points out, 'the move to an affiliated supporter scheme and partially open primary marks another, significant departure from the party's traditions of representation and legitimacy' (2016: 6). While the trend is clear and seen across the political spectrum, the impact of such change is not easy to forecast. One effect could be the further disengagement of traditional activists. As members and supporters – often derided as a loose network of clicktivists (Bale, 2016) – do not show similar levels of engagement (Fisher, Fieldhouse and Cutts, 2014; Ponce and Scarrow, 2013), it may matter that members retain some of their prerogatives and are able to maintain their position in the membership pecking order.

It is important to recall at this point that, behind the rhetoric of democratisation and grassroots empowerment, the opening up of Labour Party structures had first been designed as a means to dilute the influence of activists. It was hoped that by including a wider, supposedly more moderate constituency in internal decision-making processes, Labour would move closer to the wider

electorate. Of course, Jeremy Corbyn's hugely successful 2015 leadership election campaign proved these premises to have been wrong, thus adding another nail in the coffin of May's law of curvilinear disparity – which posits that grassroots members will always be more ideologically minded than the party elite and the voters – since, according to a poll published by YouGov on 10 August 2015, 55 per cent of the '£3 sign-ups' chose Jeremy Corbyn as their first preference, as opposed to 49 per cent of full members. As soon as it became clear that the new leadership election method was not going to yield the 'correct' outcome, leading figures of the party started asking for the election to be put on hold or suspended altogether, discarding any notion that the more democratic method was an end in itself. Talks of infiltrators, of possible legal challenges and of a membership 'purge' contradicted the whole principle of the move to OMOV which eventually allowed the party to more than double its membership base.[8] But what this experience demonstrates is that the prospect of having a real impact on the outcome of the leadership election led to a rush to join Labour's swelling ranks of 'registered supporters', even if the enthusiastic crowds turned out not to be so welcome after all in the eyes of the scheme's own creators.[9]

There are two antagonistic views of the role and impact of Momentum on the Labour Party. Trade-union activist Maria Exall explains in a post on the LRC website that 'differing views of the future nature of Momentum highlight contrasting understandings of its function within the Labour party' (Exall, 2016). Momentum organisers on the one hand define its role as injecting movement features into the party, stressing the idea that an organisation can be both things at once. In this view, Momentum is 'a member-led democratic social movement embedded in the Labour Party and the Labour movement' (Klug, Rees and Schneider, 2016a), focused both on promoting popular power and furthering the party's electoral prospects. They consider that the growth of the membership through Momentum 'offers Labour the opportunity to return to its radical heritage and become a social movement as well as a campaigning machine again – dual aims Momentum seeks to encourage' (Klug, Rees and Schneider, 2016b). The Momentum survey indicated that the priorities of its members were 'Campaigning for Labour victories in elections' (71.7 per cent) and 'Helping members to become more active within the Labour Party' (68.2 per cent), ahead of 'Providing political education' (60.6 per cent) and 'Organising local community activities and campaigns' (59.2 per cent). Hence a majority of Momentum members consider the social movement part of their activity as complementing and strengthening, not replacing, vote-seeking activities, which remain paramount. Momentum's critics, on the other hand, regard Momentum as nothing other than a vehicle to increase Corbyn's grip over the party, seeking to mobilise factionally within Labour so as to win internal elections and selections, deselect moderate MPs and councillors, and generally take the party over to shape it in its own image. This was the line

of attack of Corbyn's challenger in the 2016 leadership election, Owen Smith, who warned on 16 September 2016 that Momentum was using the Labour Party as a 'host body', 'seeking to occupy it, hollow it out, until it's outlived its usefulness, when you throw it aside like a dead husk' (Heather and Walker, 2016). This view thus posits a fundamental incompatibility between the means and objectives of movement and party.

Indeed, there is a tension between community organising, which seeks to empower members, and party discipline, which requires some degree of control. How far can community-organising practices be successfully mixed with party politics? Parties need to project a coherent image or they may become severely weakened. 'Movementisation' thus carries a serious risk that party unity will be undermined and voters confused (Taylor, 2010). On the other hand, this may help regenerate the flailing bonds between the party and its voters. Initial fears – partially alleviated by the unexpected results of the June 2017 snap election and Labour's good standing in the polls since[10] – that Momentum's – and Corbyn's – agenda would radicalise the party so much that it would destroy the party's electoral standing should not obliterate the potential for a rejuvenation of the party through bottom-up organising. A focus on campaigns rather than on vote-winning activities has been shown to have high mobilising potential. In their article for *Renewal*, Momentum organisers emphasised the input of the new activism, which is more diffuse, horizontal and decentralised. 'In some ways' – they explained – 'Momentum is trying to give organisational form to this type of activism, giving it a home in the labour movement and the Labour Party, while connecting the Labour Party and labour movement to new forms of activism and political cultures' (Klug, Rees and Schneider, 2016b). In a surprising echo of New Labour's argument that organisational reforms were required because traditional party activities (such as meetings) were putting voters off, Momentum organisers too argue that 'the world of motions, councillors' reports and minutes – though necessary for the functioning of a successful political party – can seem alien and disempowering' (Klug, Rees and Schneider, 2016b). Regardless of their respective agendas in promoting the opening up of party structures, both Blair and Corbyn have claimed to revitalise the party by offering 'a new kind of politics', moving away from conventional forms of organising and promoting community empowerment. In a context where the fragmentation and alienation of working-class communities is being successfully exploited by Labour's competitors, the challenge therefore is to create a movement that can win elections.

Conclusion

Current tensions in the Labour Party are reflective of a clash between two competing models of organising – the traditional 'broad church' party model and the radical populist movement party model. In the first, top-down model,

the main source of power rests with the parliamentary elites for whom the priority is electoral politics; in the second, bottom-up model, power lies with an enlarged grassroots for whom the defence of ideological purity is paramount. 'Movementisation' and the shift towards more inclusive structures have led to a rebalancing of the relationship between the grassroots and parliamentary elites. This is because, by opening up its formal structures, the Labour Party has broken down the barriers which stood between the party organisation and civil society and thus finds itself increasingly being influenced by forces outside it. The effect of the new system of semi-open primaries for the election of the leader, which allowed a marginal candidate to tap into support in wider society, is a good illustration of the impact that such open decision-making devices may have on the direction and organisation of a party. The changes may be compounded by a similar evolution of the trade unions, which also seek to move beyond their traditional concerns of job regulation so as to broaden their appeal, with 'social movement unionism' (for a definition see Dibben, 2004) '"reaching out" to other groups to emphasise social justice aims' (Parker, 2008: 1). All these changes are not just simply creating new organisational designs: the pressures they generate call for a rethink of the very nature of political organisations.

The Corbyn case also raises the question of whether an enlarged membership automatically entails increased organisational strength. Parties strive to build mass memberships because, especially for parties of the left, party members constitute the main resource, both as a source of funding and as feet on the ground. But in the classic party model, members should not be awarded too much influence over the strategic choices of the leadership. The bottom-up features which result from 'movementisation', which place limitations on the autonomy of the leadership, may therefore prove detrimental to the party's electoral fortunes. At the same time, a reversal of this process under a new leader could have catastrophic results. Therefore, the contested nature of Corbyn's leadership should not obscure the fact that some form of 'movementisation' may be the only way the Labour Party can hope to survive as a mass membership organisation with strong links with civil society.

Notes

1 This is an ideal-typical definition of the evolution of parties in power, and great variations are to be found in the degree to which individual parties move towards self-preservation or remain primarily goal-oriented.
2 By the close of registration for the 2015 leadership election, in August, 112,799 people had registered as supporters through this method.
3 According to its website, as of 1 August 2016, Progress had 2,794 continuing members and subscribers. *Progress* is also the name of the group's magazine. www.progressonline.org.uk/. Accessed 5 March 2018.
4 Jeremy for Labour Ltd is 'the registered data controller of data collected during both of Jeremy's leadership campaigns, through Momentum's website and during

its campaigns'. www.peoplesmomentum.com/company_structures. Accessed 5 March 2018.

5 With just over 3,000 likes on Facebook and 6,000 followers on Twitter, the LRC, chaired by current shadow chancellor John McDonnell, is a small but vocal group. It also hosts *Labour Briefing*, the journal for the left founded in 1980.

6 Full results available at: https://d3n8a8pro7vhmx.cloudfront.net/momentum/pages/939/attachments/original/1484068264/Momentum_members_survey_16–17.pdf?1484068264. Accessed 5 March 2018.

7 Surveys of Labour members have shown them to be predominantly middle class, well-educated and/or professionally employed in the public sector, and if anything the opening up of the party to the wider circle of supporters has widened the gap even further (Kellner, 2017: 25).

8 According to figures released by the Labour Party on 10 August 2015, the breakdown of membership was as follows: total members of the Labour Party: 292,973; fully paid-up membership prior to general election 2015: 187,000; new members joined since general election 2015: 105,973; affiliated supporters: 148,182; registered supporters: 112,799; total electorate for the leadership election: 553,954.

9 In the second leadership election in 2016, restrictions were brought to the scheme, which is likely to be completely phased out.

10 In January 2017, according to a YouGov poll, Labour was trailing 11 points behind the Conservatives and Corbyn's personal rating was abysmal, with just 14 per cent of people considering the Labour leader would make the best prime minister. Another YouGov poll conducted in September 2017 placed Labour ahead of the Conservatives by 4 points, even though Jeremy Corbyn continued to trail 8 points behind Theresa May as the person British voters viewed as the best prime minister.

References

Alinsky, S. (1971) *Rules for Radicals: A Pragmatic Primer for Realistic Radicals*, New York: Random House.

Almeida, P. (2010) 'Social Movement Partyism: Collective Action and Political Parties', in van Dyke, N. and McCammon, H. J. (eds) *Strategic Alliances: Coalition Building and Social Movements*, Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, pp. 170–96.

Avril, E. (2013) 'The Evolution of Decision-Making in the British Labour Party: From Grassroots to Netroots?', in Avril, E. and Zumello, C. (eds) *New Technologies, Organizational Change and Governance*, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 102–16.

Bale, T. (2016) 'Jezza's Bezzas: Labour's New Members', *The Huffington Post*, 28 June. Available at: www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/tim-bale/jeremy-corbyn-labour-membership_b_10713634.html. Accessed 12 January 2017.

BBC News (2015) 'Tony Blair Says Labour's Position is a "Tragedy"', 9 December. Available at: www.bbc.com/news/uk-politics-35050984. Accessed 5 March 2018.

della Porta, D. and Diani, M. (2006) *Social Movements: An Introduction*, Oxford: Blackwell Publishing.

Diani, M. (1992) 'The Concept of Social Movement', *Sociological Review*, 40:1, pp. 1–25.

Dibben, P. (2004) 'Social Movement Unionism', in Harcourt, M. and Wood, G. (eds) *Trade Unions and Democracy: Strategies and Perspectives*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, pp. 280–302.

Dorey, P. and Denham, A. (2015) 'The Election of an "Outsider" as Labour Leader is Linked to New Selection Rules and the Ideological Alternative on Offer', The

Democratic Audit, 10 October. Available at: www.democraticaudit.com/2015/10/02/the-election-of-an-outsider-as-labour-leader-is-linked-to-new-selection-rules-and-the-ideological-alternative-on-offer/. Accessed 21 November 2016.

Exall, M. (2016) 'Momentum, Democracy, the Trade Unions and the Labour Party', Labour Representation Committee, 22 December. Available at: http://l-r-c.org.uk/news/story/momentum-democracy-the-trade-unions-and-the-labour-party/. Accessed 17 January 2017.

Ferguson, M. (2015) 'Preparing for Power', *Progress Magazine*, 27 March. Available at: www.progressonline.org.uk/2015/03/27/preparing-for-power/. Accessed 21 November 2016.

Fisher, J., Fieldhouse, E. and Cutts, D. (2014) 'Members Are Not the Only Fruit: Volunteer Activity in Political Parties', *British Journal of Politics and International Relations*, 16:1, pp. 75–95.

Garland, J. (2016) 'A Wider Range of Friends: Multi-speed Organising during the 2015 Labour Leadership Contest', *Political Quarterly*, 87:1, pp. 23–30.

Goldstone, J. (2003) 'Bridging Institutionalized and Noninstitutionalized Politics', in Goldstone, J. (ed.) *States, Parties and Social Movements*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, pp. 1–24.

Gramson, W. A. (1990, 1st ed.: 1975) *The Strategy of Social Protest*, Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Publishing.

Hassan, G. and Shaw, E. (2012) *The Strange Death of Labour Scotland*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.

Heather, S. and Walker, P. (2016) 'Owen Smith Accuses Momentum of Using Labour as "Host Body"', *The Guardian*, 16 September. Available at: www.theguardian.com/politics/2016/sep/16/owen-smith-momentum-jeremy-corbyn-labour-leadership-host-body. Accessed 5 March 2018.

Hutter, S., Kriesi, H. and Lorenzini, J. (forthcoming) 'Social Movements in Interaction with Political Parties', in Snow, D., Soule, S., Kriesi, H. and McCammon, H. (eds) *The Blackwell Companion to Social Movements*, Oxford: Blackwell (new edition).

Ion, M. (2015) 'The Labour Party: A Machine or a Movement?', LabourList, 10 June. Available at: http://labourlist.org/2015/06/the-labour-party-a-machine-or-a-movement/. Accessed 17 January 2017.

Katz, R. and Mair, P. (1995) 'Changing Models of Party Organization and Party Democracy: The Emergence of the Cartel Party', *Party Politics*, 1:1, pp. 5–28.

Kellner, P. (2017) 'Public Opinion and the Depth of Labour's Crisis', *Political Quarterly*, 88:1, pp. 20–9.

Kitschelt, H. (1990) 'New Social Movements and the Decline of Party Organization', in Dalton, R. and Kuechler, M. (eds) *Challenging the Political Order: New Social and Political Movements in Western Democracies*, New York: Polity Press, pp. 179–208.

Kitschelt, H. (2006) 'Chapter 24: Movement Parties', in Katz, R. and Crotty, W. (eds) *Handbook of Party Politics*, London: Sage, pp. 278–91.

Klug, A., Rees, E. and Schneider, J. (2016a) 'What is Momentum?', *Red Pepper*, 26 October. Available at: www.redpepper.org.uk/what-is-momentum/. Accessed 17 January 2017.

Klug, A., Rees, E. and Schneider, J. (2016b) 'A New Kind of Politics', *Renewal*, 24:2. Available at: http://www.renewal.org.uk/articles/momentum-a-new-kind-of-politics. Accessed 17 January 2017.

Kriesi, H. (2015) 'Party Systems, Electoral Systems, and Social Movements', in della Porta, D. and Diani, M. (eds) *The Oxford Handbook of Social Movements*, Oxford: Oxford University Press. Available at: http://www.oxfordhandbooks.com/view/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199678402.001.0001/oxfordhb-9780199678402-e-24. Accessed 17 January 2017.

Labour Party (2012) *Real Change to Win. Community Organising: A Labour Party Guide*, London: The Labour Party.

Luck, S. and Dechezelles, S. (2015) *Voix de la rue ou voie des urnes? Mouvements sociaux et partis politiques*, Rennes: Presses Universitaires de Rennes.

McAdam, D., Tarrow, S. G. and Tilly, C. (2001) *Dynamics of Contention*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Meyer, D. S. and Tarrow, S. (1998) *The Social Movement Society: Contentious Politics for a New Century*, Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield.

Minkin, L. (1991) *The Contentious Alliance: Trade Unions and the Labour Party*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.

Olivier, L. (2004) 'Les partis politiques saisis par les logiques militantes du mouvement social, "Mouvementisation" et désinstitutionnalisation partisane: le cas français', *L'engagement et le désengagement politique*, Congrès annuel de la Société québécoise de science politique, Université de Montréal, 26–28 May.

Parker, J. (2008) 'The Trades Union Congress and Civil Alliance Building: Towards Social Movement Unionism?', *Employee Relations*, 30:5, pp. 562–83.

Piccio, D. R. (2016) 'How Social Movements Impact Political Parties', in Giugni, M., Bosi, L. and Uba, K. (eds) *The Consequences of Social Movements: People, Policies, and Institutions*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 263–84.

Pickard, S. (2017) 'Momentum and the "Corbynistas": Young People Regenerating Politics in Britain', in Pickard, S. and Bessant, J. (eds) *Young People Re-generating Politics in Times of Crises*, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 115–137.

Ponce, A. F. and Scarrow, S. E. (2013) 'Party Members vs. Party Sympathizers in a Period of Declining Membership: Who Does What (and With Whom)?', Social Science Research Network (SSRN). Available at: http://ssrn.com/abstract=2313935. Accessed 21 November 2016.

Rhiannon, L. (2009) 'Social Movements and Political Parties: Conflicts and Balance', *Cosmopolitan Civil Societies Journal*, 1:2, pp. 30–41.

Scarrow, S. E. (2013) 'New Challenges of Intra-party Democracy: Grassroots Activists, Instant Members, and Cyber-militants', in Avril, E. and Zumello, C. (eds) *New Technologies, Organizational Change and Governance*, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 85–101.

Scarrow, S. E. (2015) *Beyond Party Members: Changing Approaches to Partisan Mobilization*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Shaw, E. (1988) *Discipline and Discord in the Labour Party*, Manchester: Manchester University Press.

Stoker, G., Jennings, W. and Twyman, J. (2016) 'The Dimensions and Impact of Political Discontent in Britain', *Parliamentary Affairs*, 69:4, pp. 876–900.

Taylor, M. (2010) 'Can Political Parties be Community Organisers?', The Royal Society for the encouragement of Arts, Manufactures and Commerce, 7 June. Available at: www.thersa.org/discover/publications-and-articles/matthew-taylor-blog/2010/06/can-political-parties-be-community-organisers/. Accessed 21 November 2016.

Thompson, P. (2016) 'Corbynism Isn't a Social Movement, and Labour Shouldn't Be One', *Renewal*, 24 August. Available at: http://www.renewal.org.uk/blog/corbynism-isnt-a-social-movement-and-labour-shouldnt-be-one. Accessed 17 January 2017.

Tilly, C. (1978) *From Mobilization to Revolution*, Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley.

Wainwright, H. (2008) 'Rethinking Political Parties', *Red Pepper*, 8 February. Available at: http://www.redpepper.org.uk/Rethinking-political-parties/. Accessed 21 November 2016.

Wickham-Jones, M. (2016) 'Lewis Minkin's Labours: The Developing Party–Trade Union Relationship', Symposium on Lewis Minkin's *The Blair Supremacy*, *Political Studies Review*, 14:2, pp. 175–88.

Concluding remarks

Emmanuelle Avril and Yann Béliard

What this overview of two centuries of working-class history and organisation has revealed is the permanence of conflicts inside the labour movement, in spite of the abundance of declarations about the value of unity and solidarity. Although the creed 'United we stand, divided we fall' has been shared by trade unionists, co-operators and socialists alike, printed on the front page of their publications, displayed on their posters and banners ever since they formed their first associations, the consensus every labour activist wished for seems to have been superseded more often than not by the most stubborn of facts: dissensus. If the emancipation of the working class is the common goal, if building a unitary body seems the logical means to reach that aim, how is it that decade after decade the picture has been one of innumerable groups, frequently disunited, and sometimes even at loggerheads?

Levels of conflict: an integrated approach

The chapters in this volume have collectively sought to provide explanations to these paradoxes by offering an exploration of three different levels and kinds of conflict. At a first level of analysis, they have addressed intra-organisational tensions, that is the tensions affecting specific groups. Ophélie Siméon's piece concentrated on the divergences inside Robert Owen's Grand National Consolidated Trades' Union in the 1830s while Jeremy Tranmer offered his take on the splintering of the Communist Party of Great Britain (CPGB) in the late 1980s. Nick Randall and Eric Shaw focused on internal divisions within the Labour Party, the first through a longitudinal study of division within the Parliamentary Labour Party and the

second through a study of the unmanageability of the Labour Party under Corbyn.

At a second level of analysis, the chapters have explored the tensions which exist *between* different types of organisations. Thus Steven Parfitt's piece unveiled the rivalry that, from the early 1880s to 1900, opposed the British Knights of Labor to New Model Unions on the one hand and New Unions on the other. In the altogether different context of 1944–1945, Anastasia Chartomatsidi compared the positions of three political organisations, the Labour Party, the CPGB and the Revolutionary Communist Party, over Britain's military intervention in Greece; while David Stewart and Anne Beauvallet respectively examined the Labour Party's relationships with the co-operative movement and the teachers' unions.

The third level of tensions that contributors were invited to analyse was that between labour organisations and spontaneous working-class protests, and more recently 'new social movements', where unusual modes of organising may appear. Lewis Mates and Yann Béliard revisited such confrontations between grassroots protests and 'officialdom' through a reappraisal of the Great Labour Unrest (1910–1914). Anna Clark too, in her chapter on domestic servants, highlighted the frictions between the initiatives of the 'unorganised' and labour movement headquarters. Such conflicts, under an electoral form, were also observed by Fiona Simpkins in contemporary Scotland through the disaffection of working-class voters towards Labour.

While these three levels of approach have proved to be useful entries into the wider unity–division debate, what has also emerged is that the distinction between those three levels was seldom so clear-cut. Though all chapters emphasise intricacy and complexity, three of them deserve particular notice in this regard. David Evans's study, for example, builds a bridge between the first two levels, showing how the birth of a breakaway union is initially an internal affair, until the break becomes effective and the inner struggle becomes a very public one, between two separate bodies. Fiona Simpkins reconstructs a similar process in the political field with her analysis of Scottish Labour's emancipation from the Westminster 'mother firm'. Another illustration of the way the three levels are inextricably linked is Emmanuelle Avril's inquiry into the current metamorphosis of the Labour Party. In the fight to expel or maintain Corbyn as the party leader, deciding whether the last word will belong to insiders or outsiders, even distinguishing the former from the latter, is a very complex task. The growing porosity of the boundaries between party and movement today is one more reason to rethink labour politics in the past outside of ready-made compartments and straitjackets.

The recurrence across time of the issue of unity and disunity has led the different chapters to resonate with each other in unexpected and hopefully thought-provoking ways. If union is desirable, what kind of union should be promoted? In the fight for class independence and social progress, what sort

of alliances should be accepted or refused? Be it in the context of an industrialising country or of a 'post-industrial' Britain, working-class people and their associations, in their attempts to better the lot of the labouring majority, have repeatedly had to deal with those core issues – as the case studies brought together in this collection aptly illustrate.

A plural engagement

The authors of this book themselves stand united and divided. Coming from different disciplinary horizons, we are segmented methodologically, and have accepted 'eclectic pluralism' as our standpoint, since imposing an interpretive framework on the contributors would have contradicted the very philosophy of the sponsors of the conference from which this collection developed. The Society for the Study of Labour History professes a 'broad church' vision which, from its birth in 1960, has allowed Marxists and non-Marxists to coexist rather peacefully. Eclecticism is also a guiding principle of the Labour Movements Group of the Political Studies Association, which brings together social historians and political scientists – still a relative rarity in an academic world where research tends to be confined to disciplinary silos.

But eclecticism does not mean that we are not united by a common outlook. One thing the contributors share is indeed a concern for the future of the British labour movement, and their writing – even dealing with the past – was informed by present-day preoccupations. The authors of the chapters in the present volume are well aware that they are products of their age, human beings engaged, intellectually if not organisationally, in the political fights of the day – and they are happy to admit that the book was not written from an omniscient perspective, but from a certain window, indeed from many windows, with all the limits and distortions that this entails. When studying a topic like ours, claiming to be ideologically neutral is at best naïve, at worst hypocritical (Callaghan, Fielding and Ludlam, 2003: 1–2). Instead, we suggest the reader accepts Neville Kirk's contention that 'commitment to the cause of labour is not incompatible with historical truth' (Kirk, 2010: 166).

Though that commitment could be seen as an impediment, we believe that making it explicit is the first step towards objectivity, and that the contemporary passions fuelling our research may help it reach out to the general public, and not just academia. There would be little point in pretending that the economic and political context did not shape and even orient our work. The crisis affecting global capitalism since the 1970s and its latest major episode – the 2008 worldwide banking crisis – have re-ignited debates about the need for an alternative (Kocka, 2016). So has the Brexit vote earthquake, with its revelation of fault lines and fractures in British society which for too long had been actively ignored. Clearly long-term trends are at present combining with a number of spectacular events to rekindle interrogations about the

viability of capitalism as a system, and about the possible role of workers and their organisations in the social mutation our world is undergoing (Wallerstein et al., 2013). Naturally this book's place is inside, not outside, that public debate.

Prospects and perspectives

The road ahead for the British labour movement is anything but self-evident, and the gap between the variety of paths imagined below and actual outcomes is sure to prove wide. If the parameters to be taken into account to sketch plausible scenarios are indeed too numerous for any of us to play the perilous game of prophesising, there are, however, a number of questions that can guide our prognoses, relating on the one hand to the organisational matters on which this book has focused, on the other to the notion of class, which our focus on organisation was never meant to eclipse. One crucial point of contention is about the possible role of the Labour Party in the coming years. Can it be reclaimed for the cause of social progress, or does the way forward for the labour movement lie outside of that party, if not against it? The fact is that 'the sound of grinding axes is almost deafening when reading most studies of the Party' (Fielding, 1997: 20), and visions of the future too differ according to political positionings, which thus need to be specified.

For reformists who see the institutions of representative democracy, and the Labour Party's action within them, as the most credible vehicles for progressive change, the political evolution since the 2017 snap election has been somewhat comforting. Indeed, it can be inferred from the rise of Labour's standing in the polls that the gravitational forces within the party are still powerful enough to save it from implosion – even though this disintegration had looked very likely in the first two years of Corbyn's leadership. Momentum was seen at first by its critics as a blatant attempt by radical forces outside Labour to take over the party and re-shape it in their own image. But with Momentum's founder choosing to fence off the influence of the far left in the movement and tightening the formal link with the Labour Party – in conjunction with insider groups such as the Campaign for Labour Party Democracy or the Labour Representation Committee – a reconfiguration of the left now looks less likely than it did at the time of Corbyn's first leadership victory. This, however, should not be taken to mean that the gravitational pull is bound to bring the party back to some kind of 'centre ground'. Because of electoral triangulation, the two mainstream parties' political battlefield is constantly shifting, and judging by the recent efforts deployed by Theresa May to pitch the Conservative Party as the champion of working-class interests, Labour's left-wing swerve may reconfigure the landscape of British politics. After decades of neglect, working-class concerns are now, in rhetoric at least, front and centre of today's political battles. At the launch of the Labour

Party's 2017 general election campaign, did Corbyn not state that a Labour government would refuse to 'play by the rules' of the establishment and its followers?

Putting the current Corbyn/Momentum phenomenon into historical perspective, one may thus feel entitled to analyse the current turmoil as the norm rather than the result of exceptional circumstances. A long-term view of unity and division in the British labour movement has shown that, however acute tensions may seem within the Labour Party, those dialectical relationships have, throughout the history of the labour movement, acted as a kind of ballast, allowing the pendulum to swing left and right, but always pulling it back from the brink of electoral wipe-out (Bevir, 2000; Freeden, 1999). At the same time, there is no denying that the centrifugal pull of the Brexit referendum vote is having a deep impact on British politics, and that the Labour Party has not been preserved from the blow. In the middle of the ongoing Brexit negotiations, the main line of fracture, both between and within parties, is the issue of Britain's relationship with the European Union and, more specifically, that of the status of EU citizens in the UK, as well as that of UK citizens in the EU. The Brexit campaign has also served to exacerbate the Labour Party's two main problems – the Scotland wipe-out and the loss of support from its traditional voters. Corbyn's tactical choice of cultivating ambiguity about this new source of divergence within Labour and of pushing the Conservatives into a corner on Brexit may well prevent Labour's foretold disintegration and precipitate the Conservatives'. But how long the effects of that choice will last is uncertain. For the Labour Party will need to develop new structures and organising methods if it wants to channel the idealism of its huge cohort of young supporters whose priorities overlap only partly with those of the 'heartlands' the party seeks to recapture.

Looking beyond the Labour Party, it is the fate of the whole political system which is in fact at stake. The relative stability which had historically resulted from the UK parliamentary system, with its bipolar adversarial structure, the presence of 'broad church' parties aggregating diverse interests and the (usually) strong majorities commanded by the winning party, has been slowly eroded in this age of de-alignment, and further accentuated by the polarisation of public opinion around the issue of Brexit, to the point where there is doubt as to whether the system will ever return to a pre-referendum point of equilibrium.

Because strong economic and social undercurrents are at present rocking 'old style' politics, some observers and actors tend to place their hopes for a regeneration of the British labour movement outside of the Labour Party tent. The refusal to consider the Labour Party as a reliable vehicle for the defence of working-class interests is as old as the party itself. Both Marxists and syndicalists, in the years preceding the First World War, considered it as a mere appendix of the Liberal Party. Later on, academics engaged in the New Left,

such as John Saville and Ralph Miliband, analysed the party as too respectful of the powers that be to play any role in a socialist transformation of society (Martin and Kirby, 2010; Miliband, 1961). A similar understanding was propagated by the far left in the 1970s, Tony Cliff and Donny Gluckstein going so far as to call the Labour Party 'a bourgeois party' – while advocating the building of a different, *revolutionary* workers' party (Cliff and Gluckstein, 1988). The evolution of the Labour Party under Blair and Brown has given credit to such criticisms and explains why many today see the party as a false friend – or even a real enemy – of the labouring classes.

Some see therefore the trade unions or the co-operatives as the more likely gateways to a labour renaissance, while others place their hopes in 'new social movements' such as Occupy the City of London, or in the potential mobilisation of currently voiceless and invisible sections of the working class. One can argue here that co-operatives today no longer represent in the eyes of the masses the vibrant counter-society they once were, while trade unions, adapting to the Thatcher–Major climate, have tended to become as 'professional' as the Labour Party and increasingly aloof from the everyday concerns of their rank-and-file (Andolfatto and Contrepois, 2016). As for the more recent anti-globalisation and anti-austerity mobilisations, they have failed to put forward a programme or structure capable of federating popular discontents, and the poorest sections of British society seem precisely too demoralised and disoriented at present to coalesce into a reborn labour movement. Yet if the spiral of working-class exclusion from electoral politics continues (Evans and Tilley, 2017), together with the unrelenting rise of economic inequality, the possibility of extra-parliamentary unrest challenging the status quo – and existing labour movement bodies in the process – cannot be excluded altogether. In the 1840s, in the 1910s, it was precisely through the initiatives of workers with no say in the official political arena that the labour movement transformed itself and erupted onto the public scene. Even though strike statistics since the miners' defeat in 1985 have remained extremely low, industrial unrest is cyclical (Haimson and Tilly, 1989; Silver, 2003) and anti-strike legislation, however stringent, cannot kill resistance altogether.

Class matters

One key obstacle to a rejuvenation of the labour movement is certainly the fading away of the language of class, and the present 'demonization' of the working class (Jones, 2011). But if positive identification with labour is seriously impeded, the reality of class, in the Thompsonian sense of class relationships, of class as a lived experience, as the acute consciousness that society is made of 'them' and 'us', remains strong (Thompson, 1963). The fact that the composition of the working class has changed dramatically (regular wage earners might be soon outnumbered by temporary and self-employed workers) does not mean that Britain has become classless – quite the opposite. But there

is no easy answer to the question of how workers atomised by the employing class may be able to surmount divisions. Although some anticipate that anger against flexibility will soon take an explosive form, the building of a political alliance between the various sub-sections of the working class – the 'old working class' tempted by xenophobia; the educated 'precariat' attracted by Corbynism; the migrant workers deprived of citizenship – is hard to imagine (Standing, 2016). Whatever the obstacles, we consider that there is merit in imagining a future for labour not merely as an *object* in the discourses of politicians, but as a historical *subject*.

But the various scenarios we have examined all depend on the future evolution of global capitalism and the moves British capital-owners will make in that unstable setting. Even though the hypothesis of Corbyn leading the Labour Party to victory in the next general election has recently become credible, there is doubt as to how this would affect the workers of Britain. Recent experiences of left-wing governments in Europe, from Hollande to Tsipras, show that the pressure of the capitalist class over politicians with reformist claims can be extreme. In this sense, despite Corbyn's claim that under his leadership a Labour government would break the status quo and 'shatter the economic consensus' (Bean, 2017), Labour's return to office could be a pyrrhic victory. Whether the economy keeps on stagnating or plunges once again into recession, the labour movement outside of the Labour Party will also be affected by what capitalism has in store. The trade unions' established position as chief negotiators at the national, branch and workplace levels, their internal solidity and their partnership with the Labour Party may be preserved or shattered depending on the ups and downs of the stock markets, and on how the Confederation of British Industry rides the storm. The evolution of the present economic crisis will be paramount in making direct industrial action a credible option or not for British workers. Strike waves, though they can hardly be correlated directly to economic cycles, tend to take place in moments characterised either by a brutal slump in conditions or by a certain recovery after very hard times, when workers feel encouraged to regain the ground lost in the days of depression. In addition, the Scottish case raises the question of the nature and role of the State and the Union in the UK and whether progressive change can be accomplished within their existing, arguably reactionary and outmoded, structures and characteristics. Thus the diverging and converging pulls affecting what is left of the British labour movement will not be determined solely by the deeds and words of rank-and-file workers, grassroots activists and leaders but also, crucially, by the external decisions made by employers and the State, as well as by the profound, subterranean shifts in the economy.

Finally, some may consider that this volume, with its neatly circumscribed British scope, is far too Eurocentric in a phase when labour studies are turning global. Yet we take the view that the questions raised here are far from being strictly British: the Labour Party turmoil is inseparable from the international

crisis of social democracy and the declining membership of trade unions is common to most industrialised nations of Western Europe. What British workers may or may not achieve tomorrow has a lot to do with how labouring people elsewhere in Europe, and indeed around the world, will face the challenges with which capitalist society confronts them. In fact, the story of the British labour movement was never separated from that of workers abroad, if only because British workers themselves moved around a lot. Therefore, in the twenty-first century, thinking about the perspectives for British labour without paying attention to the two billion workers which have entered the global labour market since 1975 – Chinese and Indian workers in particular – would make little sense. If we have not indulged into comparative or transnational work, this does not mean that such a broad outlook has not informed our inquiries, nor that they cannot be used for such purposes by specialists of labour around the world. British labour studies could be given a new impetus by their post-colonial offshoots (Price, 2010) and our interrogations about the unity of labour movements are echoed on all continents.

This collection has tried to set out new avenues for research, so as to renew and expand the field of British labour studies, with a view to widening the academic and audience interest in the field. If not by their research methods, if not by their political positioning, the authors of this book do share two essential ideas that make it a collective work and not a mere juxtaposition of individual chapters. One is the conviction that class remains relevant as an analytical tool: our focus on groups and factions, on organisational matters, does not undermine that centrality but has allowed us, we hope, to offer an integrated *and* multidisciplinary approach of the labour movement that readers will have found illuminating. When so many have announced that labour studies were 'in terminal decline or already extinct', the chapters presented in this volume have testified on the contrary to their 'capacity for resilience and renewal' (Kirk, 2010: 162). The other idea uniting us is the belief that the labour movement's present difficulties are not the end of the road. Though Selina Todd's *The People* tracks the *Rise and Fall of the Working Class* (Todd, 2014), the case may be that an exaggerated perception of the linearity of labour's ascending movement until the 1950s has led to a parallel overestimation of the irreversibility of its decline since 1980. Remembering past losers and retrieving missed opportunities may therefore be the best way to remind ourselves that the future is unwritten, because the past too, before it became congealed in the tales of the winners, was once open and unpredictable. The pace of change in the past few years, accelerated by the fallout of the 2008 financial crisis, thus cautions against hasty conclusions. However balanced, wide ranging and well informed our appraisal of current events, it may very well be that what comes next takes us completely by surprise.

Paris, 15 October 2017

References

Andolfatto, D. and Contrepois, S. (eds) (2016), *Syndicats et dialogue social. Les modèles occidentaux à l'épreuve*, Brussels: Peter Lang.

Bean, E. (2017) 'Labour Will Shatter the Economic Consensus that has Seen Homelessness Double, Says Corbyn', *LabourList*, 16 October. Available at: https://labourlist.org/2017/10/labour-will-shatter-the-economic-consensus-that-has-seen-homelessness-double-says-corbyn/. Accessed 16 October 2017.

Bevir, M. (2000) 'New Labour: A Study in Ideology', *British Journal of Politics and International Relations*, 2:3, pp. 277–301.

Callaghan, J., Fielding, S. and Ludlam, S. (eds) (2003) *Interpreting the Labour Party: Approaches to Labour Politics and History*, Manchester: Manchester University Press.

Cliff, T. and Gluckstein, D. (1988) *The Labour Party: A Marxist History*, London: Bookmarks.

Evans, G. and Tilley, J. (2017) *The New Politics of Class: The Political Exclusion of the British Working Class*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Fielding, S. (1997) *The Labour Party: 'Socialism' and Society since 1951*, Manchester: Manchester University Press.

Freeden, M. (1999) 'The Ideology of New Labour', *Political Quarterly*, 70:1, pp. 42–51.

Haimson, L. H. and Tilly, C. (1989) *Strikes, Wars and Revolutions in an International Perspective: Strike Waves in the Late Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Jones, O. (2011) *Chavs: The Demonization of the Working Class*, London: Verso.

Kirk, N. (2010) 'Challenge, Crisis, and Renewal? Themes in the Labour History of Britain, 1960–2010', *Labour History Review*, 75:2, pp. 162–80.

Kocka, J. (2016) *Capitalism: A Short History*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Martin, D. and Kirby, D. (2010) 'John Saville (1916–2009): Appreciations and Memories', *Labour History Review*, 75:1, pp. 114–19.

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

Price, R. (2010) 'Histories of Labour and Labour History', *Labour History Review*, 75:3, pp. 263–70.

Silver, B. J. (2003) *Forces of Labor: Workers' Movements and Globalization since 1870*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Standing, G. (2016) *The Precariat: The New Dangerous Class*, London: Bloomsbury Academic.

Thompson, E. P. (1963) *The Making of the English Working Class*, London: Victor Gollancz.

Todd, S. (2014) *The People: The Rise and Fall of the Working Class*, London: John Murray.

Wallerstein, I., Collins, R., Mann, M., Derluguian, G. and Calhoun, C. (2013) *Does Capitalism Have a Future?* Oxford: Oxford University Press.