

politics in a technological society

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into the seventies



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1. the predicament of politics

The political institutions of the western democracies are now facing three central problems which will grow in importance over the coming years. First, it is becoming increasingly difficult for politics and government to come to grips with the development of industry and economy. Our institutions and tried methods are becoming inadequate to deal with the pace, scale and complexity of modern technology and with the reduction in the power of national governments which has been the result of the internationalisation of the capital market and the growth of the international corporation. Second, as our societies become increasingly concerned with problems of affluence, the preoccupations of politics follow a similar course and those minorities outside the scope of the general prosperity may become in effect disenfranchised.

Finally, and partly as a result of the first two issues, politics itself is declining as an activity in terms of its importance and its status within society. This last question has several aspects. It is reflected in the growth of popular apathy towards, and possibly contempt for, politics; in the rise of groups on the far left, particularly among students, who are extremely hostile to conventional politics; and in a certain loss of understanding of the essence of politics itself among both politicians and other élite groups. This point may be difficult to accept in the light of the continually expanding role of governments; but it is erroneous to equate politics with government, and in fact it is the tendency to do so which is partly responsible for the decline in the understanding of politics itself.

These are very general, abstract themes, but they can each be shown to be of considerable practical importance to the British Labour Party at the present time. For example, the problem of how politics may come to grips with industry and economy has long been a central interest for socialists and also a continuing area of frustration and disappointment for Labour governments. It is ironical that the present time (when new developments are increasing the urgency of this question) is one when Labour is in a mood

of doubt and uncertainty about its approach to them; the party moved from its commitment to nationalisation to an advocacy of national economic planning, but after the sad experience of the latter it has really done very little to replace it. The scale and power of economic institutions is becoming ever greater; modern technology is, in some of its manifestations, posing a growing threat to the human and natural environment; and modern societies face decisions about the quality and content of the expanding material wealth to which they are irrevocably committed, but seem incapable of developing institutions which will allow such choices to be made. These are practical questions which need to become of central importance to a party with Labour's historic interests.

The problem of the poor in an affluent society has again been historically a strong ground for the Labour Party. In recent years, however, many within the party reached the conclusion that the poor, if not the whole manual working class, were a declining minority, and that as a consequence Labour must move away from them to seek new and growing areas of support among those groups who were felt to be both the creators and the creation of the "technological revolution". This withdrawal by the Labour Party from a profound and continuing concern with the poor obviously poses problems for the latter; but it also poses problems for the Labour Party and for politics as a whole.

On the third question, the decline of politics, the position is more complex. We may justifiably complain of Labour recently losing sight of the "stuff of politics", but the problem goes deeper. There are certain tendencies within socialism, of both the revolutionary and social democratic varieties, which have always misunderstood politics. Working from these models it would be possible to argue that socialism is inimical to politics. The present problem is that some of the recent economic and industrial developments have strengthened the appeal of these technocratic approaches to socialism, just as they have strengthened the

enemies of politics everywhere. These three problem areas are, of course, all related. Its attempt to drift free from a particular class base has led Labour to a position where it has been making its mass appeal with the bland, populist slogan, "more wealth"; other parties have of course done the same, and this is one explanation for the decline of politics.

This has meant that we have failed yet to face the question "what kind of wealth, and what for?" which contains far more of the reality of debate and clash of opinion. Thus, a further consequence of the decline of social class in politics has been a loss of perspective on the clashes of interest and conflicts which exist within society; such clashes and conflicts are crucial to politics. The obsessions with merely pursuing "more wealth" and the neglect of social conflict both have the same result. They lead to a loss of the idea of choice and of political alternatives; and this can be closely related to our third problem, the relationship between government and industry.

Labour, as a mature political party, should naturally be undertaking a process of rethinking and planning at the present time, although one hopes that the interval available for this rethinking will be comparatively short. One of the few good consequences of Labour being so surprisingly shaken from office in June 1970 is that the party did not leave office exhausted, but eager to regain power. It would be disastrous to spoil that mood by declaring that the party is in the wilderness and needs to spend a couple of decades there "rethinking"; but it is necessary that when Labour again returns to office it does so with a few strong and well prepared plans for what it intends to do with its power. The process of rethinking has, of course, already started. An interesting contribution to it was the Fabian pamphlet by Anthony Wedgwood Benn, which was most important in indicating that there is a willingness to consider some of our urgent but previously neglected problems among at least some of those who held high office in the last Labour government. (A.

Wedgwood Benn, *The New Politics*, Fabian Tract 402, 1970.) Benn's emphasis on decentralisation stems largely from an optimistic view of the emergence of the intelligent citizen in a technological age, and of the scope for greater diversity and variety which has been made possible in a modern society. However, while it would be wrong to undermine the relevance of these factors, I am more concerned with the pessimistic aspects of modern technology and the arguments of decentralisation that have to do with the network of powers and interest groups which underlie any political structure. A more serious departure from Benn's approach, however, is that, while supporting the case for a different attitude to local and voluntary pressure groups from that normally found among members of the Labour Party, I am also arguing for a stronger political role for central decision making as well, for Benn probably underestimates the extent to which the state must involve itself in the affairs of a modern society.

the idea of politics

The aim of the responsible politician is to use power to achieve certain valued ends. By "responsible" is meant the politician who aspires to statesmanship rather than the wheeler dealer. The distinction lies in the fact that the true politician works in the framework of an overall social consensus and unity, even though he represents a faction, or series of factions, within that consensus. (For an excellent discussion of these aspects of politics, see B. Crick *In defence of politics*, 1962, especially chapter 1.) To appreciate the uniqueness of this vocation it must be contrasted with certain other related types of activity. The politician is not primarily a man of arms or violence, although he may on occasions command the use of violence to maintain order. Essentially he works within the fabric of institutional constraints and shared values which make him "responsible" and limit his exercise of violence. Second, he is not an administrator, although there are many important managerial tasks which he must pursue if he

is to execute his policies. Essentially, he is concerned with making choices which affect the direction of events, and which are, as value choices, necessarily subjective and not entirely accessible to science and calculation. Finally, although his work is concerned with values and choices the politician is not a moralist, but essentially a man of action and power, and he must understand how to use power in order to achieve his goals. The politician's world, therefore, consists of three elements: power, values and a background of constraints. The individual party of politicians owes its position to certain power bases, and its duty is, by the use of the power of the state, to pursue certain valued goals of both the party and the society as a whole. It does this by working on the general political context within which it operates, and which comprises the various values and prejudices existing within the society, the other bases of power in it, and other non-political constraints which may be termed "the facts of life". Obviously, there are further complications to this picture; for example, the individual party is itself a mixture of sometimes competing factions.

This view of politics is by no means obvious or universally acceptable. At present the most important challenge to it is the image of the politician as a manager or administrator. Politics is coming to be seen as the management of technical efficiency. The idea of a structure of interests and values which compete and within which the politician works, is entirely lacking from such an image. Instead, it takes for granted a consensus of values upon the goal of increased prosperity, and sees as the only relevant conflict that between the efficient and the inefficient. The very existence of such a view is, of course, part of the phenomenon of the decline of politics in the face of the problems of modern technology.

There are several ways in which the vitality of political life, and particularly of social democratic politics, is threatened in modern societies but it is important to be clear about what it is we consider to be threatened. There is no democratic "golden age" for us to remember

with nostalgia. Not only is it the case that industrial society has been the first to make possible the political enfranchisement of the masses; it is also only in modern society that man has been presented with the possibility of choice over a wide area of life, for in former periods sheer scarcity constrained the greater part of existence for the majority of mankind. To speak of a decline or failure of politics must refer to the contrast between reality and the rhetoric of our beliefs in parliamentary sovereignty and government responsibility, or to the contrast between reality and our own hopes, as modern men, of a large degree of choice and freedom in our political life. Perhaps most important, and certainly most optimistically, our fears of a decline of politics refer to a failure of our political institutions to realise their potential, to facilitate our opportunities for choice and decision making. Wedgwood Benn has pointed out the several ways in which modern technological man has been presented with unprecedented opportunities for choice. Perhaps the most accurate way of describing our present fears is therefore to say that there are certain factors in the contemporary situation which may prevent us from reaching our potentialities for a rich political life—or, more specifically for socialists, for a political life which makes it possible to realise certain egalitarian objectives. It may also be that at the present time we foresee certain developments which, were they to occur in the way we fear, would constitute a threat to that degree of political vitality which our societies at present possess.

the growth of bureaucracy

Bureaucracy is such a favourite butt for criticism from all political directions, that it is extremely important to spell out precisely what we mean when we list it as one of the potential "enemies" of politics in an industrial society. At its simplest, bureaucracy is a means of institutionalising clear, universal and impartial procedures for the administration of authority. As such it is infinitely preferable to most of his historical alterna-

tives; arbitrary and unpredictable power, or irrational and unfathomable traditions. Its problems arise, unfortunately, from three of its most valuable properties: its institutionalisation of rules, its objectivity and its claimed impartiality.

The powerful institutions created to administer a large state acquire a rigidity and power of inertia which may subvert the purposes of the decision makers to whom they are in theory subject. In this familiar image, the politician is reduced to a pathetic figure astride a vast monster with a will of its own. The problem of objectivity is a more subtle one, and relates to the wider theme of scientific administration which can be traced back to the early days of industrialisation. (The most important seminal figure in this history was Saint-Simon, the writer of the French post-revolutionary period. Interestingly Saint-Simon called his ideal social system, which was to be governed by committees of industrialists and financiers, "socialism". For a thorough and detailed analysis of the whole development of thought referred to here, and stretching over the past two centuries, see S. Wolin, *Politics and vision*, 1960, ch 10.) There is a lengthy tradition of thought which claims that the new rationality of modern organisation has made possible an objectivity of decision making which eliminates the need for political choice and renders social conflict obsolete. Political problems are treated as administrative problems, and the idea that the business of government may be concerned with clashes of values and outright conflicts of goals is avoided with horror. The fact that so many of a government's activities are mediated through an administrative machine which, as a good bureaucracy, seeks to operate objectively and rationally, tends to strengthen this denial of conflict and of value judgment. The point applies, of course, to a wider area than government itself; many of our bureaucracies are private ones, such as those in industry. In their case, the neutral appearance of bureaucracy serves to mask the fact that such organisations are essentially the servants of various private interests. This mark of neutrality may go some way to

explaining the extraordinary lack of popular concern over the immense concentrations of corporate power which exist in our society. This may be contrasted with the very widely held view that trade unions have far too much power; particularly "unofficial" strikers who do not even have the sanctions of a union bureaucracy.

Closely related to the problem of misleading objectivity is that of impartiality. People like to believe that government is a high minded, headmasterly task of blessing the good and punishing the bad according to rules of justice. In practice, of course, virtually every decision by a government is the product of various lobbyings, pressures and influences; and the ability of different groups to exert such pressure is very unequal indeed. When a decision is an avowedly political one, one may at least hope that such factors are appreciated, and that a socialist politician will remember the inequalities existing among the groups which come to exert pressure on him. But when tasks which are essentially policy making come to be seen as administrative decisions, there are dangers. The lobbies and the pressures will not disappear, but their operation is concealed. Ironically, it is quite likely that the "administrative" approach to policy making may reflect the inequalities of pressure groups more closely than a confessedly political process which is alive to the pressures and powers being brought to bear. This reveals the folly of that frequent and earnest appeal to take certain issues "out of politics". Where the issue concerned involves making policy the plea is in fact semantically absurd—"take politics out of politics"—but its absurdity can be seen to extend farther than semantics.

If these are some of the persistent problems of bureaucratic administration, it is important to recognise certain ways in which these problems are increased in an advanced industrial society. First, the management of modern technology involves a massive extension of administrative activity. (J. K. Galbraith, *The new industrial state*, 1967.) A considerable amount of planning is necessary, and

complex modern industrial developments involve a complicated chain of decision making. Further, there is greater interdependence, both among economic institutions, and between them and the state. This in itself extends the range of administration and bureaucracy. All these factors increase the problem of rigidity and inertia in bureaucracy and it becomes difficult to bring political desire to bear on economic decisions.

Second, the process of decision making which is involved is increasingly technical, and the amount of information which has to be absorbed when decisions are made becomes vast. This makes it less possible for decisions to be taken by politicians rather than by administrators, and also helps spread the myth that all such decisions are simply technical and do not have to do with conflicts of interests and pressure groups. Modern politicians are frequently heard to remark that government is increasingly a problem of management, and that ministers increasingly resemble business executives in the work they do. There are dangers here, first, of becoming so obsessed with managerial activities that real political choices are neglected, and second, that political acts will masquerade as merely technical ones. The record of socialists on this issue has been an ambiguous one, since socialism frequently becomes equated with rational centralised planning. Socialists have been particularly vulnerable to the attractions of seeking an end to the instability and chaos of politics through some means of central planning in the democratic interest. Given that socialism's supporters have usually been the main victims of chaos and instability, and tend to suffer from the inequalities of the lobbying and pressurising process, this is not at all surprising. Socialists have therefore tended to be the fathers of many state bureaucracies, whether they have been socialists of the kind in power in eastern Europe or western European social democrats.

Another reason for socialism's bureaucratic tendencies is the continuing attempt by socialists to find more sensitive and egalitarian means than the free market for making continual decisions and

allocations. In this attempt socialism is by no means seeking to avoid the problems of political choice; it is precisely the reverse. The tragic irony of this is that although such bureaucracies are established in order to make decision making more responsive to human control, they frequently fall foul of the tendencies mentioned above and the original purpose is frustrated. The ritualism and blind formalism of bureaucratic rules replace the similar disadvantages of the market. There appears to be a definite loss of momentum in the gap between the original act of political decision and its continued administrative implementation over time. This brief analysis may appear highly remote and abstract, but for practical examples one may cite the familiar failure of nationalisation to fulfil the early hopes of many of its advocates for the democratisation of industrial powers. Essentially public ownership has proved little other than an administrative device.

The most recent socialist initiative to follow this fate is the policy of economic planning which has been advocated by most social democratic parties, including our own Labour Party, in their search for a new approach after the disillusion with public ownership, although in many ways this supposedly "socialist" policy simply reflects the needs of all major industrial planning in a modern state. J. K. Galbraith (*op cit* ch 9) devotes an ironic chapter to the way in which traditionally socialist themes become transmuted into the needs of all large corporations. Of course, to demonstrate this is not to deny that such planning may be vital to economic growth, nor is it to deny that the Labour Party played a crucial role in advocating such planning at a time when the Conservative Party was trapped in a peculiarly doctrinaire aversion to it. The danger comes when such planning is seen as being in itself distinctly socialist.

technology and corporate power

The political significance of the rise of the giant corporation goes beyond the growth of bureaucracy and the creation

of a vast number of administrative tasks which obscure the essential nature of political decision making. The existence of private corporations is an instance of the abdication of politics. One can trace this back to the philosophy of economic liberalism which developed out of the crisis of 17th century England. Economic liberals sought to exclude wide areas from interference by political authority, but this does not mean they sought a freedom from all authority; politics was to withdraw in deference to the apparently superior rationality of Adam Smith's "hidden hand", the market mechanism; but such writers as Smith were not simply writing technical economics, but political economy. It was their explicit purpose to demonstrate, not merely how economic institutions worked, but how this operation provided a means of social regulation. From this stems the paradox that it was the liberals and utilitarians, those defenders of individual liberty against arbitrary political authority, whose ideal was essentially that of the regulated conformist society. Their complaint was not against order and authority as such, but only that which stemmed from central political authority.

There is nothing extraordinary in the attempt to exclude certain areas of life from political interference; it is upon the existence of such exclusions that the distinction between free and totalitarian societies rests. But there are certain difficulties in seeking to make economic activity such an area, and the extreme logic of *laissez faire* has never really been accepted. First, there are many aspects of a corporation's activities which are not reflected in its market situation; for example, the pollution to a surrounding neighbourhood caused by a factory which ejects smoke into the atmosphere. Governments have frequently imposed regulations which make firms take such externalities into account. Second, the private corporation is not simply a cluster of individuals, nor is it an abstract entity operating in a market. It is an institution which employs labour and exercises authority over men. The approach of classical economic theory, that the relationship between employer and

employee is an extension of the market, is inadequate and misleading. The firm also adopts an authority relationship towards these employees and in some ways acquires some of the characteristics of a government. The corporation is a sub-sovereign. This means that the firm cannot really claim total freedom from politics, and nearly all industrial societies have a variety of forms of state intervention in employer-employee relations, whether in terms of negotiating solutions to disputes or in laying down minimum standards of safety, health and welfare. Third, the activities of economic corporations have important wider implications for the general development of society. The kinds of product which a society's institutions produce, the structure of social relationships dictated by the relationships within its great employing corporations, and the geographical location of firms within the society, are all of vast importance. This is a far more difficult area than simple externalities, and with the exception of the question of industrial location, government interference in these fields is extremely difficult and can have many difficult consequences.

These are characteristic problems of any industrial economy; but all three of these dimensions of the problem have been increased with the more recent twin developments of the giant corporation and advanced technology.

First, the externalities of the highly scientific technologies of modern industry are becoming increasingly complex and difficult to predict. The sheer scale of man's ability to manipulate his physical, chemical and biological environment has implications which are only gradually being discovered. During the course of European Conservation Year we have been made aware of some of these, and such dramatic incidents as the Torrey Canyon disaster, the death of Lake Eyrie, and the spread of smog to most major American cities have forced this question into the forefront of popular debate. These externalities raise difficulties unparalleled by those of the past; there is little reason why firms should

bother about them on their own initiative; and there are considerable difficulties in the process of discovering the very existence of some of these problems, let alone in finding means of countering them. It may be argued, however, that although these are admittedly important problems, they are essentially technical and administrative and therefore do not relate to our major problem—the decline of politics. But this is not entirely the case. The question of imposing restraints and controls on the harmful activities of industry will frequently involve a clash with the interests of powerful corporations, but more important, the abolition of undesirable externalities is not always a straightforward option. Imposing restraints on industrial activity nearly always involves a cost, possibly ultimately the cost is a loss of economic growth.

Wider than that, the conflicts of interest which surround industrial activity are by no means clear cut. For example, the threatened destruction of natural environment by a new industrial investment in an area is not simply a case of greedy capitalists wrecking natural beauty; there may well be low wage earners in the region who would benefit from the investment. There are therefore many difficult conflicts of interest and value in the choices which have to be made over the externalities produced by large scale industry. The problem is not simply one of technicality but involves political decisions; and by and large these are political decisions which governments are not yet in a position to make. In particular, it is extremely difficult for this question to take an important political priority when so many governments have the achievement of continuously increasing economic growth as both their overriding commitment to the electorate and as the precondition for fulfilling most of their other policy ambitions.

So far as the second range of political implications of the great corporation is concerned (its relations with employees), further complications are emerging. Modern economies are extraordinarily interdependent; one sector relies on the other, is liable to suffer from dis-

ruptions of production in it and will inherit its increases in costs. In particular unpredictable disruptions (such as "wild-cat" strikes) and cost increases (particularly wage increases not planned for by companies) will disrupt the delicate balance of large scale inter-firm planning. When this is set in the context of the general tendency towards continuous inflation in prosperous mass production economies, it may readily be appreciated why industrial relations has become such a difficult political issue.

Governments committed to economic growth cannot afford to risk disruption to the health of industry. As a result the whole area of trade union activity, plus the mediating role which governments have played in industrial conflict, is threatened. This development does not threaten politics in the same way as some of the other issues under discussion, but it does involve a set of new constraints over what has in the past been an area for bargaining and negotiating. The conflicts of interest which are at stake in disputes between employers and their workers frequently have to be subjected to the interests of industrial co-ordination; government intervention is more likely to be on the employers' side, for the employers are able to present their interests as the national interest. This is a further example of how in a modern economy certain important conflicts are not able to be faced openly and fully because of the universal and necessary goal of economic prosperity.

The third problem area concerns the wider social implications of industrial activity, where technological advance makes some form of political intervention both more urgent and, in some ways, more difficult. Advanced industrial societies may develop in a variety of different ways. One general example is the relative priority to be given to mass the production of consumer goods in comparison with the social services, but there are other more subtle choices which can be made concerning the kind of industrial development which will be pursued. Somehow a decision on this will emerge since a society cannot move in all altern-

ative directions at once. It is considerably difficult to determine, however, who will make such decisions or where they will be made. Certain strategic choices in this area need to be made by governments, since these decisions are essentially political ones in the sense that we are here using that term; but at present our ability to deal with questions of this nature, let alone to turn them into major political issues, is weak indeed. Here again, the over riding pursuit of economic growth has dominated the political arena; a British government may well retort to this point that it would be only too happy to make decisions about the direction of future economic growth, but at present it is somewhat more concerned with ensuring that the growth takes place.

Technological change is not simply an abstract element; technology acquires its political relevance when it is embodied in the development plans of major private and public corporations. Classical economic liberalism once sought to exempt economic activity from political interference on the grounds that it was constrained by the market network, and, in many areas of the economy, market mechanisms are still of considerable importance. But it is precisely in those areas concerned with advanced technology that market mechanisms have become weakened; the giant bodies necessary for the exploitation of such technology are in many ways able to transcend these constraints. In addition while the firms themselves have become less restrained, they have, through their sheer existence and their needs of operation, placed new constraints on politics and government. The fact that the economic health of whole societies is dependent on their continued prosperity naturally strengthens their position in their relations with government; indeed, international companies may on some issues be more powerful than sovereign states. Such corporations are able to affect the industrial legislation of governments by their ability to pick and choose between different countries as potential candidates for investment. These developments, which are as yet not fully understood, have changed the nature of the traditional field of de-

bate on economic issues; but the rhetoric of this debate continues. "Government interference" in industry, and, even more, workers' or unions' "interference", is commonly regarded as at least undesirable and probably outrageous; meanwhile the virtual autonomy of private power goes hardly remarked.

The implications of these developments for our central theme—the fate of politics—are of considerable importance.

First, *industry and government become more interdependent*. The state is called upon to underwrite the corporations' activities, to facilitate the co-ordination of various sectors of the economy, and to provide the general social and economic environment within which corporations may operate successfully. The corporation is therefore making demands on the state which amount to political demands, and the corporation's claim to freedom from political interference becomes less tenable. An important consequence of interdependence is that the corporation takes on tasks which are public in nature. It carries out planning functions for government, and it acquires the status of a private government in its relations with employees, sub-contractors and possibly, even with its customers. A company operating in an important way overseas may be an important determinant of foreign policy: the protection of its private interests are regarded as the equivalent of the protection of the national interest. As governments acquire more industrial responsibilities and corporations take on political roles, an important point made by Galbraith (*op cit.*, ch 26), becomes very relevant: it is difficult to define where the apparatus of government ends and that of the corporation begins.

A second set of problems concerns *the goals of the corporation*. There is often debate over whether or not the private company should adopt profit maximisation as its only aim. It is argued in favour of profit maximisation that if it is not followed there will be gross inefficiencies in resource allocation. (Among many possible examples one may cite E.

V. Rostow, "To whom and for what ends is corporate management responsible?" in E. S. Mason, *The corporation in modern society*, 1960 and M. Friedmann, *Capitalism and freedom*, 1962, p133.)

A corporation is only being responsible if it accepts the impersonal direction of the market; if it attempts to devise new criteria for guiding its activity it will either be inefficient or will begin to usurp a power and responsibility that belongs to the political authorities. On the other hand, it has also been argued that it is unrealistic for corporations to assume they need only operate on profit maximisation assumptions. The large company affects, in its operations, a wide range of matters which do not enter into the market transactions which determine profit. The most outstanding example is, of course, the destruction of the natural and human environment through pollution. It is inadequate for industry to say it is the responsibility of government to impose restrictions on industrial activities if it seeks to safeguard such externalities, because governments take time to catch up with and frame legislation to deal with new abuses, and because although industry seeks to deny responsibility for such wider goals, it is always ready to oppose proposals for external restriction and uses its strategic economic importance in order to do so. An example of this was the prolonged, but ultimately unsuccessful, attempt by the US car industry to delay legislation on the control of exhaust fume emission on the grounds of the cost burden to the industry and the effect on its competitive position. (Britain still has no comparable legislation.)

The modern corporation is a clumsy and difficult giant. It has long ceased to be the passive participant in a market situation as assumed in the models of economists. It can no longer even be claimed that the company simply provides goods to satisfy existing needs. It is frequently the needs of the firms themselves to develop in certain ways which determines their new production plans; advertising and state sponsorship of large developments may be seen as two means by

which corporations achieve such an objective. These points are not necessarily evidence of the cunning or greed of capitalism, however, for if a company the size of say, a modern aircraft corporation goes into decline, there are immense consequences of unemployment and industrial dislocation. The point of presenting these facts is to indicate that in a modern economy we have become so dependent on the activities of such corporations that only rarely can we afford to challenge them. We have to accept that their goods and needs are those of the society as a whole. This then is a real transfer of sovereignty from both state and consumer to private centres of power and wealth.

The response of socialism to these developments has been as ambiguous as its response to the growth of bureaucratic administration. The main response of socialism to the anarchy of the market has been to develop ideas of welfare state, public ownership and economic planning. To a large extent socialist ideas have passed into common consent in most industrial societies, and we do enjoy a wide range of constraints and controls over the exercise of economic power. However, it has also been the experience of socialism that public ownership rarely did much to change the relationship between company and state, and in more recent years social democratic thinkers have devised a whole range of planning mechanisms which are intended to do the same tasks more skilfully and subtly. This growth of planning certainly means that government becomes a more active participant in its relations with industry, but ironically the immense growth in technical and administrative work which it involves can lead to a diminution of the essentially political nature of government. The state may grow in its administrative role, but at the same time decline in its political role. Unless these exercises in planning are to assert certain economic goals, apart from those of greater profitability, the function of planning will simply be to act in a service capacity for modern industry; indeed industry needs this kind of planning for its own purposes. The

early socialist ideal of some kind of control *over* industry may become simply the provision of assistance to industry in its own problems of planning.

social stratification

Closely related to industrial changes are changes in the pattern of stratification in a society. It is to a large extent his position in the industrial order which determines a person's rank in society, his economic position and his style of life. It will also be important, along with these other facts, in determining his pattern of allegiances and feelings of solidarity; and it is upon the division of a population into such more or less self-conscious groupings that the viability of a political structure depends. A truly political culture will be lacking where there are not sufficient grounds for the variety of goals and allegiances that such a division produces. Historically the main basis for such a dearth of political culture has been mass poverty, but there have also been fears that the condition of "mass society" created by universal affluence, as relevant divisions of interest within a population become eroded, would have a similar effect. Patterns of class structure are closely related to the histories of individual societies, and discussion of this question will be principally concerned with the UK.

An outstanding source of confusion in a discussion of social class in Britain is the different ways in which the term has been used. In the Marxist use of the concept, class refers mainly to an antagonistic relationship between owners of means of production and their workers within capitalist society. In the British tradition of debate, however, class is usually used to refer to the peculiarly British set of status distinctions which has continued, with changes and developments, since pre-industrial times; it is only, for example, in such a sense that the USA can be called, as it frequently is, a "classless" society. In a way, therefore, the Marxist and British uses of the concept refer to very different, if not opposite, phenomena. A thorough analy-

sis of different uses of the term "class" is not of immediate importance, but this point of confusion in the discussion draws attention to an important historical fact about social class in Britain. In this country, pre-industrial patterns of social distinction have survived to an extraordinary degree. There was never an outstanding conflict on the Marxist model between a landed aristocracy and a capitalist class. Several members of the English aristocracy entered industry at an early age, while the goal of the rising middle classes was to emulate the life style of the old aristocracy. And this process has been carried on within a political system which, élitist and traditional though it may be, has embodied certain important elements of pluralism from an early phase. Consistent with this, English élites have characteristically been flexible, and, where necessary, prepared to compromise.

This has had important implications for the development of working class politics in Britain. First, the loyalty and deference typical of non-industrial status structures have been continued, while the existence of parliamentary institutions has channelled working class aspirations into parliamentary objectives. On the other hand, the working class movement has been a strong one, and once this strength had been demonstrated, the national élite responded with its customary flexibility. The result is that the British working class movement has found its aims and its political means within a context of constitutional loyalty; it has rarely been communist or revolutionary.

Furthermore, however, it has not been a cravenly deferential movement; it has developed a form of class consciousness born of a certain life experience and of the traditions of sturdy independence within an overall nationality loyalty that are characteristics of the British parliamentary model. (There have been several studies on this theme. Two of the more recent examples are E. Nordlinger, *The working class Tories*, 1967 and W. G. Runciman *Relative deprivation and social justice*, 1966.) The history of working class politics in this country has been

consistent with this image. The first representatives of labour to sit in the House of Commons were for a while content to sit with the Liberal members, and when eventually an Independent Labour Party was formed, it was still accepted that it should compete for power *within* the parliamentary structures, even though its members may then have entertained Utopian hopes of the social transformation that could be achieved by their activities.

For the Marxist this means that the British worker has lacked class consciousness; but this is only true if one has in mind a certain type of class consciousness; that which regards class relationships as a complete conflict situation in which one class can gain only at the expense of the other and therefore seeks the destruction of that other. The leadership of the British Labour movement has tended to hold a different notion of conflict, one which is consistent with the parliamentary model. Here the classes are seen as definite entities, with interests of their own, but it is not desired that one class must destroy the other; the aim is simply to ensure that the working class will be among those groups whose interests are represented in the political and social conflicts which take place within the context of overall national unity. Such a concept is strongly implied both by the Chartist campaign of the 19th century and by the development of policies for Labour representation which marked the origins of the present Labour Party. Among working class people as a whole, however, to the extent that they have consciousness of class, it is even farther removed from the Marxist ideal.

People are simply aware of belonging to a certain group which has certain distinctive patterns and styles of life, and which faces common problems and hazards. (See the discussion of class consciousness in D. Butler and D. Stokes, *Political change in Britain*, 1970). This distinctive experience is felt, more or less, to be different from that of those other sections of society who are perhaps more privileged; "Them" as opposed to "Us".

To the extent that the policies of the Labour Party are the product of the experiences of the working class (and of course this is by no means the only source of its policies) they have been coloured by this essentially pragmatic background. Problems have been thrown up by the life experience of people and then translated into vague political objectives which have, over the years, acquired a permanence and almost the status of ideology. The most important of these have been: the pursuit of full employment and economic stability; security from the consequences of economic adversity; the provision, through public services, of what are felt to be basic requirements of life and which cannot be achieved through private spending from working class incomes; and for a few groups, such as the coal miners, these aims were supplemented by the desire for public ownership of certain industries. In several areas, therefore, Labour has been a party which has sought to bring the resources of the state to bear on those areas of life where working class people have had insufficient power to provide for themselves. However, in the main area of working class strength, the trade union movement, Labour has, throughout its history, pressed for free collective bargaining.

Over the years these distinctive policies, thrown up ultimately from working class experience, attracted the attention of various groups of intellectuals who were in pursuit of similar objectives, though often for very different reasons. There have been centralising planners seeking a tidy regulation of the economy; egalitarians seeking to reduce overall inequalities of wealth; believers in various of the social services; and libertarian idealists in revolt against the British establishment for a variety of reasons. The high water mark of this great lumbering coalition was reached in 1945-48; the British working class exercised its independence in a most striking way and elected a government which, in the institutional vacuum left by the destruction of the war, erected the framework of institutions to which we have now become accustomed.

This rapid summary of the historical background of the Labour movement in the context of British social stratification provides a perspective to a discussion of more recent changes. After the collapse of the Attlee government, the Conservative Party was able to receive the gratitude of a population sharing in the new prosperity which swept the advanced world from the early 1950s onwards. It is difficult even now to comprehend the contrast between the society of that period and the era of mass unemployment and a static economy which had preceded the war; and this remains true even when the many gaps in the coverage of this affluence are taken into account. One man who was fully aware of the change was Harold Macmillan, and his infamous "You've never had it so good" was no more than an accurate factual summary of a decade. In the course of these changes, working class aspirations also began to alter. Industrial stability and protection from adversity were surpassed as goals by the general desire for constantly increasing material wealth; and this was a goal shared by the leaders of industry, the growing number of professional and non-manual workers, and the majority of working class people. And in the context of a new found security, the social services could be taken for granted. These changes in working class life chances and perspectives did not necessarily involve a reduction in inequalities in the sense of objective differences in wealth and power; indeed, such inequalities have maintained an extraordinary persistence. (Much of his material is summarised by J. Westergaard, "The withering away of class: a contemporary myth" in P. Anderson and R. Blackburn, *Towards Socialism*, 1965.) But the inequalities exist at a higher overall level of wealth, and this makes a qualitative change. The difference in terms of political and social attitudes, between a man with two cars and a man with one is not the same as that between the man with one car and him with none.

The former relationship between working class poverty and middle class wealth has been further confused by changes in occupational structure which both created

a range of formally manual jobs which in many ways share characteristics of income, status and responsibility normally associated with white collar employment; and routinised many clerical jobs so that they more closely resemble factory employment. (D. Lockwood, *The black coated worker*, 1959.) These changes disrupt the association between non-manual work, high income and middle status on the one hand and manual work, low income and low status on the other, which earlier provided an important basis of class identity. Finally, to the extent that there has been an erosion of various class divisions, these have happened for some aspects of stratification but not for others. For example, while inequalities of income and property have shown a remarkable tenacity, there has been a considerable decline in the deference and humble respect formerly according to the privileged by the deprived.

The first major response to these changes came after Labour's third successive electoral defeat in 1959, when the thesis of *embourgeoisement* was propounded and was soon seized upon with enthusiasm by the so called "revisionists" in the Labour Party. (The major example produced within the Labour Party was Mark Abrams (ed), *Must Labour lose?*, 1960.) This thesis held that the newly prosperous workers had forsaken the Labour Party and its collectivist aspirations in favour of the Conservatism which had seemed instrumental in bringing about the novel private prosperity. The revisionists received this theory favourably because it seemed to point to the same conclusion which they had been advocating for some time: that Labour would have to discard many of those collectivist policies, which had distinguished it from the Tories, if it was to gain this new "middle class" of manual workers. Of course, none of the major advocates of such a change put the matter as crudely as that; rather it was placed in the framework of various revisions of socialist themes. Moreover, the attack on the revisionists from the left consisted more of a rehearsal of old dogmas than a sophisticated analysis of the available evidence. The net practical effect of the

embourgeoisement thesis within the Labour Party, however, was a loss of perspective on political goals and political will, based on an over hasty reading of poor sociology.

The evidence on which the thesis was based was mainly that of market research, and the notions of social class used in market research are most inadequate for wider social analysis. The Abrams volume is an example of this. Further, the "social class" categories used by the opinion polls on electoral opinion have a market research base. (For a discussion of the market research approach to social class, see Mark Abrams, "Some measurements of social stratification in Britain" in J. A. Jackson (ed) *Social stratification*, 1966.) Based largely on the division of the population into consumption groups (a combination of income and life style) market research concepts cannot cope with ideas of class relationships or of norms and values, yet these are central notions to a full understanding of the changes in British social structure and their implications. Subsequent work has certainly shown that there has been an erosion of the solidarities characteristic of the traditional working class Labour strongholds (and, it might be added, of traditional Conservative working class communities). Most important has been the series of papers and monographs by J. H. Goldthorpe and D. Lockwood on the theme of the "affluent worker". But to describe the emerging pattern as one of "going middle class" is crude in the extreme. It is more likely that there is an increasing fluidity and uncertainty in working class political responses. Former models of behaviour, whether of the deferential or solidarity modes, offer little guidance to those sectors of the working class who find themselves in a new and changing economic environment, where their new prosperity is by no means accompanied by integration into middle class society. Their response to this situation has been described as "instrumentalism" but this in itself simply emphasises the fluidity and flexibility of the situation; aspirations have yet to be shaped and pushed in various directions.

Acceptance of the *embourgeoisement* thesis therefore weakened politics in two ways. First, it led to a fear of posing radically different political goals from the Conservatives and an attempt to appeal to a classless mass electorate. This involved a denial of social conflict and inevitably a failure to raise political debate above the level where each party competes to be regarded as the most likely to bring more wealth. Attention is therefore focussed on means rather than ends, and politics declines. Second, by failing to realise the fluidity of the situation of the "new working class" Labour missed an opportunity to offer alternative goals and objectives to the inegalitarian search for private prosperity offered by the Tories. The full bitter harvest of this wasted opportunity was not reaped until June 1970.

In the meantime something very important happened. The ability of the Conservatives continuously to increase affluence lost credibility in the early 'sixties.

Several fundamental inadequacies in the British economy became evident. It became possible for Labour to enter political battle again, using as its theme the technological revolution and posing a conflict between modernisers and opponents of modernisation. However, this conflict is spurious and fails to provide a valid and continuing basis for genuine political division in Britain.

conclusion

This rapid survey of the context in which modern politics is operating presents an essentially gloomy picture. Politics is misunderstood and despised by an age which pretends to scientific objectivity in its decision making; it is squeezed out of public affairs by the vast growth of administrative activity; it is presented by modern technology with new problems with which it cannot yet deal; its power is diminished by the rise of giant corporations; and the basis of its controversies is undermined by the ambiguity and amorphous image of modern social structures.

2. Labour in the 'sixties

The developments considered in the previous chapter can be seen as laying potential "traps" for a Labour Party. The rise of bureaucracy may lead to a false equation between a socialist's desire for a "rational" society and the demands of technical efficiency for rationalisation. The growth of the modern corporate economy may produce a similarly false equation between the desire for planning of the socialist idealists and the needs for a very different kind of planning and co-ordination by large scale industry. The arrival of mass prosperity may lead to a narrow conception of the task of government in an expanding economy. The result of all these factors is a loss of political purpose, and closely allied with this is a loss of awareness of the continuing existence of social conflict. In its attempt to go beyond the formal rationality of the market, socialism has wisely sought to erect mechanisms of economic and social planning to fulfil the wider goals of its social policy; but this has been done without an awareness that these wider goals are notoriously difficult to maintain as the over riding determinants of administrative operation. Administration is more likely to act in response to the pressure of powerful interests in society.

We may begin our account of the fate of the Labour Party amid these traps by again turning to the battle between the revisionists and the traditional left, which wages long and bitter in the early 'sixties. Two events eventually favoured the revisionists. First, and paradoxically, was the death of their leader, Hugh Gaitskell, and the accession to the party leadership of their opponent, Harold Wilson. Second, was the economic crisis that began to envelop Britain during these years. It was becoming clear that the economic plight of the country, with the resurgence of severe unemployment, called for a new level of government intervention in the economy that only a Labour government would be prepared to provide. Neglect of the social services, especially housing, and a rising concern about the education service, heightened by the succession of major government reports on the subject, resulted in the whole area of

debate shifting to those areas where Labour was generally considered strongest. Meanwhile the general prestige and mystique of the Conservative establishment was being undermined both by internal scandal and dissension and by the rise of a new radical mood in parts of the mass media.

It became possible for Labour to articulate a criticism of Conservative mismanagement of affluence. The Tory stand of 1959 could be attacked retrospectively as one of complacency, of resting on obsolescent laurels while the structure and quality of our productive industries were declining. There was also a criticism of mismanagement in that the social services had been neglected and some groups in society continued to be left behind by the new affluence. If many workers were becoming more prosperous there was also a growing *nouveau pauvre*. Harold Wilson's role was to translate certain existing themes of socialist rhetoric into the language of the new technology. Where Gaitskell had tried to jettison the party's commitment to public ownership in order to "modernise" its image, Wilson simply changed the meaning of the commitment. Socialism became the political management of technology.

The most important expressions of this socialism are to be found in Wilson's address to the party conference in 1963, the speeches he made in early 1964, and in the manifesto for the election of that year. The most important elements of these themes were: (i) the belief that the class structure of the country had changed in the direction suggested by the theorists of *embourgeoisement*, and that the manual working population was undergoing long term numerical decline. This led to the party making a new appeal to the "growth generations" of scientists and technicians. To do this a traditional socialist concern for attacking privilege and social inequality was translated into an appeal for the new men of technology to have access to the boardrooms and other positions of power within industry from which they had previously been barred by nepotism, the

“old boy network” and so forth. (ii) Concern at the country’s economic predicament and declining world role. Here the stress was placed on the encumbrances to growth and technological improvement caused by a decadent government and industrial élite. The charge against this élite was not that it was inegalitarian but that it was inefficient. Here Labour invoked economic planning and greater government intervention in industry as solutions to this inefficiency. To do this a traditional socialist concern for public ownership as the disinheritance of the capitalist class and democratic control over the use of national resources was translated into a state led attack on obstacles to economic growth and the co-ordination of economic units in the interests of efficiency. (iii) Concern over the neglect of the social services. In its plans for these services Labour had been greatly influenced by J. K. Galbraith’s analysis of public squalor and private affluence, which implicitly indicated the role of a Labour Party in an advanced economy. (J. K. Galbraith, *The affluent society*, 1958.) In this branch of its policies, the theory of the translation of socialism into the language of technology does not apply. This was a continuing theme in its own right.

With the exception of this last, the achievement of Harold Wilson and those about him was to create an image of socialism as the midwife of technocracy. The achievement was in many ways an impressive one. It solved the problem of a re-interpretation of socialism in terms of affluence; it provided a basis for a critique of Conservatism, making use of modern problems and traditional socialist themes; it provided an engine for social change in the form of the promised technological revolution; it suggested how the problem of continuing poverty might be relieved; and it won a general election. Finally, in a party which set so much store by its myths and legends, it made it possible to achieve some of Gaitskell’s aims in seeking to amend clause four under the guise of doing precisely the reverse. Such a revision was certainly needed; but when it was carried out it was done without pro-

per thought, almost surreptitiously, and as a result of the contingencies of the political climate of the immediate period. The resulting inadequacies only became evident during the period of Labour government, and particularly at the end of it.

It is important when considering a government’s success or failure in coming to terms with problems, to remember two major facts. First, politicians in government are far from being masters of what occurs under their ostensible command; the politician in government frequently inhabits a world of competing undesirable alternatives, and therefore the actions which he is forced to take and defend are often far from being the actions of his own free choice. This is an elementary point which is often forgotten when, from the luxury of not being directly involved, judgment is passed on men’s deeds. Second, one cannot expect men holding office to be aware of problems which are only beginning to make their presence felt and which hardly anyone has yet been able adequately to define. Moreover, so much time is occupied with running a modern department of state that a minister must find it difficult to gain even a superficial knowledge of what his government colleagues are doing, let alone keep abreast of what new basic strategies should be adopted.

failure of economic strategy

Before the 1964 election Harold Wilson said (in “Labour’s economic policy”, *The New Britain*, 1964) that when Labour came into office it would have to rely on traditional measures to deal with the short term crisis inherited from the Tories, but that later the effects of government supported technological change would put the economy on an entirely more stable basis. This second part of the strategy, or part of it, has continued with success. A fairly wide range of industries benefited from the attentions of the Ministry of Technology, and the effects of this and wider efforts at improving industrial efficiency, have already been seen, ironically, in the high rate of

unemployment co-existing with expansion; this phenomenon is partly evidence that the ratio between investment and employment has changed, signifying that industry is on the whole now more capital intensive. But the other wing of the government's policy for industry, large scale economic planning, came adrift. The "short term crisis" became endemic.

This was a situation for which Labour had not been prepared, and it responded with measures of considerable orthodoxy. The great struggle to maintain sterling and save the balance of payments that was the immediate inheritance was expected, but the July 1966 crisis and panic measures brought a rapid end to the government's renewed honeymoon with the electorate, and for over a year the country stumbled through crisis and wage freeze until the second major trauma of devaluation. This in itself led to further cuts in several of Labour's treasured policies, although in such areas as defence it induced a new clarity of purpose. National economic recovery began some time after this, but the cost was severe. Such treasured achievements as the national plan were cast aside, but of greater interest was the effect of this experience on the party's, and particularly the government's, stance. Ministers acquired an obsession with the balance of payments target, to the neglect of other criteria by which they may have claimed to be judged. This succeeded the preoccupation with the status of sterling which had finally collapsed with devaluation.

From this experience we may learn something of the impotence of politics before the great economic imperatives. One really needs to know to what extent the Labour ministers can be "blamed", in the sense that it would have been possible for different men in the same situation to make different decisions with less unpleasant consequences; but it is extremely difficult to make such a judgment. Some factors suggest scope for such "blame": the decision to make an avoidance of devaluation a virtually ultimate priority, opposition to a policy of import controls, and so forth. Perhaps also Labour had deluded itself into be-

lieving that a Labour government would encounter no political hostility from what earlier and less "enlightened" socialists had considered to be the representatives of international finance capitalism. It must be remembered that before the 1964 election Labour had decided that in the economic field the only major conflict was between the modernisers and those standing in the way of technical change.

Even if Labour had over simplified and misconceived some of the problems of financial management, however, this cannot be the full answer. A modern economy is extremely difficult to manage because control of several of the important variables in the situation has passed from the power of a nation state. There is now an international capital market. There are now several international firms whose internal transfers of goods figure in the exports and imports of individual countries' balance of payments. (These points are largely based on Louis Turner, *Politics and the multi-national company*, Fabian Research Series 279, 1969.) Some international firms have immense resources available for investment in different currencies, and their investment strategies will determine whether or not it is in their interests for individual countries to devalue or stay at parity. Such factors as these have created a situation of extraordinary instability. The power of a national government to gain a purchase over transactions of this kind is small, and yet the consequences of pressure on a currency or balance of payments difficulties may be such as to wreck a government's programme on virtually everything. Some measures have resulted from the crises of recent years, such as the Bâle agreement, to protect economies such as ours from some of this instability. But it remains a problem of vast proportions.

the reforming image

The second area of Labour's failure was its inability to impose a decisive image as a reforming government. This was particularly disappointing in view of its many achievements. If one examines, on

paper, the record of Labour's policy making in the field of the social services, one cannot fail to be impressed by the steady progress in fulfilling the promises of the election manifesto, and in keeping progress moving despite the constant economic difficulty. Every year of the government's life saw new major initiatives in housing, education, social security, tax reform or regional and local planning. On a different level, the Labour government of 1964-70 did more than any previous administration to protect the social sector from the general retrenchment made necessary by economic crises. Similarly, a strenuous effort was made to maintain a high level of public spending in the development districts and in the newly designated urban priority areas. Yet despite all this, only rarely did the government appear to seek to be judged by these criteria; only occasionally were some of these reforms paraded proudly before the electorate. Much of the party's attention was devoted to depicting Labour as the saviour of the balance of payments; little was done for its far more credible image as the reformer of several areas of social policy, several of which are equally crucial to the lives of many members of the electorate.

Ministers had become so totally preoccupied with the terrors of the crisis that it was extremely difficult for the government to conceive of itself in any different terms. Labour had entered the 1964 election with a detailed critique of Tory neglect in the social services; during its period of office it took steps to deal with much of this neglect, and yet when it came to presenting itself before the electorate in 1970, the party appeared to have forgotten all this. Something had been lost in those six years, and much of it was the result of the truly frightening experience of economic issues through which ministers had lived. There is, however, a further cause of this shedding of Labour's most distinctive policies. Politics does not yet seem able to deal with questions more sophisticated than "How can we achieve more wealth?" It cannot cope, on the level of mass appeal, with the crucial questions of what we are to do with the wealth, and the kind of

society which we wish to see emerge from our various activities. These are general problems that affect other parties and other societies, and it is therefore idle to "blame" Labour for them.

However, within the context of this situation we may examine the folly of Labour's particular response to the problem; how socialists, among others, had yet to realise they were losing sight of the essential decision making role of politics; and the general failure of the last government to appreciate the changes which are taking place in the structure of social class. The combined effect of these factors on a Labour government already cowed by its experience of economic difficulty was to impose upon it an entirely passive attitude to public opinion and prejudices. It began to be accepted that social services had become unpopular, and that what people really wanted was more private consumption. It was realised that the very poor were now a minority, and that if ordinary workers felt themselves to be poorly off or dissatisfied, they were likely to blame either coloured immigrants or the poor, who were dependent on the welfare state. As a result, Labour tended to become ashamed of the policies which it was introducing on such matters as housing subsidies and family allowances. Even on issues where there was no evidence at all of public unpopularity of Labour policies, such as comprehensive education, it seemed to be believed that this would be of no interest as a public issue, and during the election campaign of 1970 it was hardly ever mentioned.

Not all politicians accepted such a passive attitude towards public prejudices as the Labour Party's. Enoch Powell did not and neither did those Conservatives seeking to undermine the welfare state. In a series of compromises ranging from the ban on Kenyan Asians to the witch hunt for people claiming social security benefit to which they were not entitled, Labour fed and assisted these prejudices, and did little to take the initiative in asserting the centres of concern and in galvanising public attention. Labour was right to decide, as it appears to have done, that

it should try to replace the Conservative Party as the natural governing party of Britain; it was also right to assume that in order to do so it would have to make more concessions to popular sentiment than would be acceptable to the left wing. There is little purpose, however, in a social democratic party seeking to become the party of the national consensus simply by adopting the policies of its opponents. Not only does this involve a complete loss of purpose by the party itself; it is also likely to fail. An electorate may well decide that a Conservative Party is the better party to head a conservative consensus. The task of a social democratic party is to ensure that increasing affluence is interpreted in terms of the priorities of social democracy. It must seek to shift the political consensus in the direction of egalitarian welfare policies. This will not be achieved by installing radical measures by stealth and seeking to compete with Conservatism in its reactionary policies. The position has already been reached where several established Labour policies have entered the political consensus and become fairly well entrenched there. The National Health Service is probably the most outstanding example, as are some other achievements of the 1945 government. It is difficult to discover any actions of the 1964-70 government which will have the same impact, despite the weight of solid achievement of those years. An exception may be comprehensive education, but, again, when it came to the 1970 election campaign, little was done to make this a major issue, even though the Tories were challenging it.

planning and inequality

Despite the legislative progress where the social services are concerned, the Labour government made very little attack on inequality in Britain. Indeed, one may go farther and assert that the reduction of inequality hardly figured at all in Labour's strategy. Labour tended to see as the only valid conflict that between modernisers and those standing in the way of technical change, and it disregarded the reduction of inequality in its conception

of social class differences. Therefore, although Labour entered office with several policies for administrative improvement in the social services, it was not really prepared to make any major onslaught on inequality through tax changes and a redistribution of wealth and income. Indeed throughout that period of the Labour administration when large scale economic planning was really in the ascendancy, it was far from Labour's intention to increase the proportion of money going to the social services. This commitment to planning was marked by the publication of the national plan in 1965. Brian Abel-Smith has shown that under the plan it was envisaged that the gap between social and private spending would narrow *less* quickly than it had under the last six years of Conservative government. (Brian Abel-Smith, "Labour's Social Plans" in *Socialism and affluence*, Fabian Society, 1967.) Abel-Smith's discussion uses as its point of departure a quotation from Anthony Crosland's *The Future of Socialism*, where he asserted that a socialist was distinguished from other politicians by his giving an "exceptional priority" to changing the balance between private and public spending. Evidently the national plan was not inspired by this motivation; by the time of the plan the distinguishing mark of a socialist was, at least for some, simply the readiness to apply the concept of rational planning, irrespective of the goals of the plan. Here, of course, we are simply dealing with planning in the crude sense of the divide between private and social spending; any hopes that Labour meant by a planned economy some concept of public intervention in the kind of private expansion that would be undertaken was beyond question. Rather government investment was to be determined by the desires of the private sector.

This point is of crucial significance to the whole argument of this pamphlet. The high water mark of the great economic planning theme which Labour had adopted in the early 'sixties also marked the low point of its commitment to the party's traditional concerns in the social sector. Equally significant, however, is the

extraordinary irony that as a result of the gradual collapse and eventual abandonment of the national plan, the planned rates of growth of private and public sectors collapsed, but the social services continued to be protected from the major impact of the succession of squeezes. It proved to be the case that the social services fared relatively better in the irrational hurly burly of politicking and crisis than in the orderly process of rational planning. This should remain a major warning to those who tend to equate orderly centralised government action with socialism and who despise or ignore the importance of lobbies and pressure groups.

The national plan had as its overriding goal a certain rate of economic growth, and its procedure was to consult industries on their needs, as they had themselves defined them. The plan thus approximated very closely to the Galbraithian model of planning. The pressures for policies traditionally associated with the Labour movement were not strongly brought to bear at this stage. In contrast, the political infighting and concession granting that was imposed on the government by its economic misfortune made it possible for sections of the party to exact the price of their continued loyalty, and the traditional pressures could be reasserted.

the trade unions

The first inkling of the government's eventual stance on industrial relations was its response to the seamen's strike in summer 1966. A group of under privileged and ill paid workers were, through their trade union, seeking to put pressure on their powerful employers; the kind of activity on which the whole history of the Labour movement had been based, and a Labour prime minister appeared on television to promise to bring the full weight of the state to bear on the side of the employers against the strikers. It seemed strange to many in the Labour Party, but it should not have done so. The government's attack on the seamen continued faithfully the rhetoric of the

1964 and 1966 election campaigns; the power of the state must be used to ensure that nothing interferes with our economic recovery; the cardinal aim of policy must be success in achieving a favourable balance of payments surplus, and no private groups may be allowed to interfere with our progress on this issue. These had been the slogans of 1964 and 1966, slogans into which many Labour supporters had read a determination by a Labour government to use the state apparatus to oppose privilege and inequality. And yet these were the slogans which were now being used to justify the breaking of a strike by a section of the Labour movement itself.

This early pattern of response was later repeated at a more general level. A whole series of government spokesmen followed employers and the Conservative press in making a false and arbitrary distinction between official and unofficial strikes, and in condemning the latter virtually unremittingly. The policy on industrial relations generally was paralleled by an incomes policy necessitated by the industrial crisis. This made necessary a government stand on the growth of incomes which obviously prejudiced the ability of the government to appear as honest broker in labour disputes. This whole development of policy ended with the government being forced to back down from restrictive legislation on strikes in summer 1969 in the face of determined opposition from the TUC. The result of this entire history has been a widening gulf between the two wings of the Labour movement and a divergence of aims which may not simply be healed by combined opposition to the policies of the Conservatives. Throughout the period of Labour government the debate about industrial relations was seen entirely in terms of the effects of strikes on industrial production. Although the actual effect of strike action on the country's economic performance has been shown to be small (H. A. Turner, *Is Britain really strike prone?* 1969) it is purely within such a context that the activities of unions have come to be discussed. The whole concept of the strike as the working man's countervailing power

against his considerably more powerful employer is almost forgotten.

That Labour has come to adopt this approach to trade union activity is of disturbing importance. First, it marks a triumph of the rationalising planners to whom the unions' voluntary activity to protect their members is as unwelcome as is free enterprise, and considerably easier to deal with. Second, it indicates the conversion of Labour to the view that future advance in the position of working people depends on the undisturbed progress of industry; undisturbed, that is, by political controversy and conflicts of interest. Third, and most important, in an interdependent and inflationary modern economy the existence of an independent and powerful trade union movement raises obvious and considerable problems from which no government can be expected to abstain.

It is commonly believed that the power relationship between management and labour has been reversed. Such a view entirely overlooks the many powerful disincentives to strike action imposed on all workers. (Some of these are analysed in V. L. Allen, *Militant trade unionism*, 1966, p27, *et seq.*)

The extent to which such a view is true is limited indeed. At best a few of the strongest unions may be able to make it far easier for an employer to grant a wage increase and raise his prices rather than stand firm. But this position by no means extends to all unions and industries. The degree of arbitrary authority which management holds over its employees is powerful indeed; we frequently hear of "unconstitutional" action by workers, but we are rarely told of the many ways in which management action may interfere with accepted agreements and procedures. Further, the power of unions has not been sufficiently great to erode the many wide inequalities in the remuneration, fringe benefits and conditions of work between workers and higher salaried staff. Of course, it could be argued that this merely indicates the ultimate hollowness of the unions' power and the impossibility of their gaining

through industrial action what can only be won in the battlefield of politics and government. (This, I assume, is the essence of the complaint against unions' "excessive power" in Thomas Balogh, *Labour and inflation*. Fabian tract 403, 1970.) In theory this view contains much truth; but when it is urged in the absence of any such political attack on inequality, it is difficult to see what lessons the unions are expected to draw from it. This may partly explain why the appeal by Labour ministers that incomes policy was an essential weapon of socialism, fell on deaf ears. The pursuit of equity and social justice by Labour's incomes policy was limited to differentials within the range of moderate and low incomes; it did not tackle the major inequalities of wealth and income. Indeed there is even considerable doubt as to the policy's success in pursuing the more limited objective with success (J. Edmonds and G. Radice *Low Pay*, Fabian Research series 270, 1968.)

conclusion

Perhaps the biggest problem of the Wilson government was its failure to establish roots. In many ways, considering the immensity of the problems it faced, its achievements in social reform were fine and worthy of pride, but it failed to establish itself and its objectives in the "heart and minds" of a changing electorate. The relationship with the unions suffered heavily; losses in local government elections destroyed the morale and local power base of many constituencies; instead of a concerted attempt to win public support for many of the government's excellent policies there was too often a determination not to be outflanked on the right by the newly aggressive Tory Party. The "technological" image of 1964 could forge no lasting political theme and the claim to superior economic efficiency could be no continuing boast of one particular party. And, in an atmosphere of increasing political fluidity among the British electorate, the 1970 general election returned a government more ideologically ruthless than this country has seen for many years.

3. the bases of power

Recent developments may be seen as arguing in several ways for a move away from a pre-occupation with parliamentary success. First, the centralised industrial planning which will be undertaken by any modern government leads politicians to become detached both from the particular interests and pressures of their own party and from the very idea of there being such competing interests. This does not mean that the planning process is not subject to influence from particular interests; it will reflect those which were consulted in the course of preparation of the plan. It is a central fact of political life in Britain that those interests to which the Conservative Party are favourable are more powerful than those with some relationship to Labour. It is not universally true, but is generally so. It therefore follows that, since all governments will be forced to respond in some way to the pressures imposed on them, Labour governments will be forced to respond to hostile pressures more frequently than Conservative administrations. In such a situation it is important that the Labour Party take more seriously the task of establishing points of pressure which are sympathetic to its interests and which will be operative whatever government is in power. It is also important that the Labour Party repair its relationship with that major interest group with which it is already supposed to have close alliance, the trade union movement. There is little point exploring exciting new channels for participation, decentralisation and so forth while the major established form of voluntary and serious political activity among working people is undergoing a major crisis, because the problem of the ability of a modern economy to accommodate and tolerate local unco-ordinated activity remains unresolved.

Second, there is the problem of Labour's relation to the consensus. If Labour is eventually to become the natural governing party, it is necessary that we see a shift in commonly accepted beliefs and opinions on a whole range of social issues. This cannot be achieved by a political party alone, but depends on a whole fabric of institutions, local and national.

In recent years there has been much improvement on this type of issue from Labour's point of view. Several very active and popular groups have emerged, at local and national level, to support the interests of social services, possibly the most successful being the educational pressure groups based on the Association for the Advancement of State Education. This body, with its strong local groups, has done much to produce a public opinion on the issue of comprehensive education which is essentially sympathetic to Labour policy. The area of voluntary pressure groups is one where Conservatives have traditionally been much more successful than Labour. At local level Conservatives permeate a whole network of institutions and thus build essential bases of support, not simply in terms of rationally conceived political positions, but through the gentle but profound suffusion of beliefs and prejudices. It is such a pattern of prejudices and fundamental attitudes which determines the political position of most members of the public who do not take an active interest in politics. To a certain extent Labour has achieved something similar in those traditional bastions of the party's support such as mining and ship building communities. But it is precisely this kind of community which is declining; the urgent need is to establish an essential political identity in the newer and so far unrooted cultures which are emerging in our society.

Third, there are the pressure groups of a very different kind which are emerging in the neglected urban areas where live those people who are rejected and ignored by an affluent modern society—or, who, on such matters as the construction of an urban motorway, may be directly damaged by it. It is significant that the various community action groups which have sprung up in various cities to defend the interests of such people have emerged during a period of Labour government. One must remember that the party had accepted the arguments produced in the early 'sixties about the need for it to acquire a more "middle class" image. It is therefore somewhat hypocritical if members of the Labour Party

criticise those who resort to "direct action" instead of using constitutional channels, since it is essentially Labour which has turned its back on the urban poor. There are further dangers of politics losing touch with the nature of the problems of such areas. There is already considerable evidence that the usual process for dealing with the problems of deprivation (central legislation and implementation through administrative machinery) is not sufficient for assisting people who are entirely estranged from the operation of official machinery. Voluntary community action will be essential so long as this kind of area survives, and it is important that this action is carried on with some kind of relationship to the party if the latter is to maintain its social concern. This is another of the splits which developed in the years of office which must now be healed.

Finally, it is important that we become more aware of the new conflicts which are generated by the developments of modern technology. In 1964 Labour staked its claim as the party which would introduce the technological revolution, but which would do so humanely. But the extent of the "human" concern required, and the appreciation of the conflicts involved, was then narrowly conceived. It was mainly limited to acceptance of the need for redundancy payments for those rendered unemployed by technological advance. It is only very recently that we have all become more aware of the clashes of interest that modern progress can involve: of the problems it causes for the preservation of our natural environment; of the new structures of power created by the giant international corporation. These are potentially extremely important political issues. Forcing them into the degree of popular concern which will be required if they are to realise that potential, will not be easy. However, it will be eased if Labour is able to maintain close contact with those pressure groups which are certain to emerge to advocate the various interests likely to be disturbed by such change. Of course, this does not mean that there is an unambiguous source of Labour support waiting to be tapped. In

many cases the conflicts involved are very confused indeed, but it is only if we are close to them that we shall be able to establish a position.

socialism and pluralism

The period in opposition provides what one hopes will be a brief opportunity to work more deeply on these issues. A considerable change is required in Labour's traditional approaches. The left wing tradition in this country has always been a centralising one, suspecting local activities and voluntary pressure groups. It is indeed significant that it is during the past few years that we have seen the emergence of a far left which, in complete contrast with, say, communists and left wing socialists, has shown complete disillusion with the idea of socialism as centralised administration, and has given a new emphasis to community, spontaneity and anarcho-syndicalism. One would not wish to follow the extreme left in their rejection of economic and social planning. Such planning is necessary to many of Labour's social objectives, and is in any case inevitable in any modern economy. What *is* suggested is that rational economic planning will only be an objective of socialists in so far as we can be reasonably sure that such planning will serve those whose interests we seek to benefit. The socialist's initial concern is therefore not merely to establish planning machinery, but to seek ways of strengthening the arm of those interests in society which are weak and which he hopes to see strong.

It has been an error of socialists of all kinds to make as their objective the establishment of a certain structure of administrative arrangements. This was the error of the "clause four left" who sought to translate the vague aspiration of that clause of the party's constitution into a firm commitment to a specific set of administrative proposals. In a not dissimilar war, the party as a whole made such an error with the planning commitment of 1964. Our knowledge of the operation of human institutions is too limited to permit us to decide that cer-

tain specific policies can characterise our whole political outlook. We should be content to keep as our cardinal beliefs the identity of the interests which we seek to advance, and to leave it to the needs of a specific time to frame the precise proposals most likely to further them. Not only is this approach justified in terms of the state of our knowledge; it also describes more accurately the source of popular allegiances to a particular political party. Parties are rarely supported because of their belief in a specific item of policy, such as nationalisation, but because of their identity with certain basic attitudes and prejudices.

Conservatism has historically been the political philosophy best able to understand the importance of general prejudice and sentiment in political allegiance, but the philosophy which has coped most readily with man's inability to specify in advance all time solutions to major human problems has been classical liberalism. Liberalism, as reflected in the system of party politics itself, makes no great assumptions about the ideal man or the ideal society; these are allowed to develop through the changing wisdom and experience of time. There is no attempt to specify in advance those forms of social organisation which will most effectively fulfil man's ultimate objectives. The weakness of classical liberalism is that it can do little to remedy the inequalities that exist within the pluralistic system. It is a philosophy most suited to those groups which can successfully stand on their own feet and have the ability and the resources to impose their varied aims and ambitions on their political system. The weak go to the wall and are ignored. It is the particular role of social democratic and trade union movements to seek to assert the influence of precisely these groups which are otherwise unable so to impose pressure. Conservatives and Liberals alike may wax eloquent about democracy and bemoan the lack of it in the countries of the communist bloc; but it is only an organised labour movement, with political, industrial and social welfare ambitions, which can make possible a fully democratic pluralism in an industrial society.

It is in this area that we find the distinctive qualities of socialism. It is the continuing task of the socialist movement to represent the interests of the relatively weak, the relatively poor, the relatively powerless. Conceived thus, socialism is not tied to any particular administrative proposals; it may often be the case in practice that increasing state centralism will protect the powerless from the powerful, but it may also occur that the state power tends to represent the interests of the more powerful, or simply the interests of the national bureaucracy itself. It may be objected that to conceive of the Labour Party as the party of the underprivileged will make it the representative of nothing more than those small groups who have been left behind by prosperity, and thus never in a position to be the governing party representing a majority; but the idea of relative powerlessness extends a great deal farther than this. In a society where privilege and inequality are deeply entrenched, as is the case with most societies, there is a continuing task of uncovering those areas where injustice has become both intolerable and remediable, and mobilising political pressure to arouse the intolerance and introduce the remedies. With time and changing circumstances the areas of need where this pressure for social justice is required will vary, and the solutions it will seek must also change; but the essential motivation remains.

Socialism is thus seen here as a continuing process of strengthening the pluralism of our political structure, of constantly seeking to make that pluralism more egalitarian, facilitating the participation within it of groups who have previously been excluded, and preventing the expulsion from it of those who seem likely to be weakened by social change. This will involve seeking the means whereby such groups are able to increase their power, and can mean a variety of different activities. It may mean strengthening and defending those institutions of the Labour movement which already exist but which will come under increasing pressure from the changing needs of industrial ownership and management; most important

here is the trade union movement itself. It may mean welcoming and assisting those new groups which are springing up within our society to sponsor particular aims with which Labour supporters should have much sympathy; examples would be the Association for the Advancement of State Education, Shelter, and the Child Poverty Action Group. It may mean working with local tenants' associations or similar groups to advise people on their rights and assist them in those areas where society has provided them with the legal rights but not the means to implement them. Or it may mean helping them organise in order to achieve those rights which society is not prepared to give them; an important example here may be the struggle of the Roman Catholic minority in Northern Ireland.

There are varying degrees of hostility to some of these types of action within the Labour movement at present. For many years the party has concentrated its political attention on building up its parliamentary strength and its control of local authorities. The belief has been that if only power at national level could be attained Labour and its interests would be all powerful, Britain would be well on the road towards socialism, and the power of government would be enough to pursue successfully the party's objectives. Pressure groups and other bodies not directly related to the structure of the movement as a whole have been viewed with suspicion, and Labour has, at local level, tended to be a socially isolated group among voluntary bodies.

This approach overlooks the important truth that within a society such as ours government and parliament are not wholly sovereign, but are subject to a host of pressures and influences from other institutions. Whatever party is in power will face the same constellations of interests in the country. The pressures which will direct the actions of politicians will be, first, these interests; second, the particular interests with close links with the particular party in power; and third, the hopes and prejudices of the individual politician. Labour has been naive in

over estimating the ability of this third to hold sway, and it has probably also over estimated the effect of the second. Thus Labour has concentrated its energies on building up the party as such, and has been less concerned with broadening its base within the society as a whole in order to ensure that, whatever government is in power, it has to respond to pressures broadly sympathetic to those concerns which are central to Labour.

To a certain extent this process has gone on, almost unnoticed by the Labour Party. Thus, the education service, the welfare state and the housing programme have established a weight of their own which makes them a pressure on all governments. Labour supporters often have valid cause to complain that the policies of a Labour government are frustrated by entrenched views within the civil service; but it is less often noticed that many of the civil servants and other employees in housing, education and welfare have a commitment to the growth and progress of the services for which they work. This can be a considerable hurdle to a Conservative administration attempting to cut back on social spending. Pressure of this nature, from within the service is, of course, slightly different from that of pressure groups, although when one is dealing with such a matter as the commitment of much of the teaching profession to comprehensive education, the distinction between in-service lobbying and pressure group activity becomes fine. The major lesson, however, is the same. The degree to which the policies of a government, any government, will be in line with those interests associated with the Labour Party will not depend simply on the strength of the party itself, but on that fine web of pressures, influences and prejudices which exist in the society at any particular time. Some of the complaints from within Labour's ranks that Conservative and Labour governments seem to do very similar things, overlook the fact that the compromise is not all one sided. Conservative governments may often have to take certain actions because of the way influence is brought to bear upon them.

This point could be taken as an argument for forgetting about competing for national office and for concentrating on building up points of pressure within the society which can operate on any government; this is a line of argument which some on the young left of the party are beginning to adopt. But I do not intend that the argument should be read that way at all. It must be clear that a Labour government will, on the whole, be closer to pressures sympathetic to the interests of the Labour movement than will a Tory administration, and I am more concerned to ensure that the right pressures exist to keep a Labour government to its policies than to force a Conservative government occasionally to change its own.

conclusion

By calling for a more sympathetic approach from Labour towards pressure groups, one is not necessarily advocating formal links; these may frequently spell doom for the group concerned. However, local Labour parties and trades councils are frequently in a position to create friendly and co-operative relationships with such groups, and there is also scope for individual members of the party to devote effort to working with them. Frequently this kind of activity is taken over by the Conservatives or, with groups of a different kind, by extremists of the far left. The former is partly the legacy of Labour's former introspection and suspicion of all local organisations outside the tight ranks of the party and the unions; the latter is the result of a more recent estrangement between Labour and activists for various causes which occurred while the party was in power. Of course, for some years now there has been a considerable change in the pattern of Conservative domination of pressure groups. Many local Labour parties have noticed that several of their members have preferred, for example, to work for the local Association for the Advancement of State Education than to propose futile resolutions on education at their local Labour Party meetings. Provided this extension of activity does

not weaken the party's election machine, this development is wholly to the good.

Thus the Labour Party should change its traditional attitude to voluntary pressure groups. This is important because politics is the interplay of various pressures, influences, values and prejudices and there is a need in a technological society to reaffirm the variety of all of these. But it could not be argued that changes in this area alone are sufficient to make the task of government equal to the problems of such a society. Rather, the position is that we shall only be able to tackle the central problems effectively if at the same time people at all levels of the party are working to establish, or re-establish, the crucial roots of political power.

4. Labour's future strategy

If Labour's strategy over the coming years is to meet the requirements of our time, it must grapple with some difficult issues. First, it must assert clear priorities over the use of a significant proportion of the future growth of wealth. Second, it must create an awareness among the poor and the moderately affluent population of the real inequalities and social divisions within our society, and of the important social needs which cannot be met by a private economy; it must then produce policies to tackle the problems. Third, it must attempt to alter the balance of power between the corporate economy and the consumer. Fourth, it must ensure that the priorities of political choice are asserted in the state's support for industry and technology. And finally it must create the framework for the operation of free trade unions in a complex and interdependent economy.

It would be an extraordinary party indeed which could establish, and then in government implement, appropriate policies on each of these difficult areas. If the next Labour government is successful in half of them it will be cause for immense satisfaction; but at least an attempt must be made on the whole front. The policies which appear to be needed to overcome these difficulties are, first, the reduction of economic inequality; second, the continuing improvement and expansion of the collective social services; and third, the use of state power to assert social priorities over the practices of industry and the development of technology.

reducing inequality

It is preferable to speak of the reduction of inequality rather than the pursuit of equality, first because it is impossible to define the state of economic equality, and second because it is by no means certain that if we were to know it, we should necessarily find it desirable. The practical British politician is on ground that is both happier and stronger when he tries to identify particular inequalities which are becoming unacceptable and

then acts on those. The area of unacceptability which is now becoming relevant is that which relates to the policies of income restraint and discipline on trade union activities which appear to be demanded by the modern integrated economy. It would be a delusion to believe that incomes policy was a passing issue now that we have a Conservative government which professes not to believe in one. Tory incomes policy works in subtle and sinister ways through various pressures and threats.

The whole ideology of incomes policy makes certain assumptions about the responsibility for restraint of different groups within a modern economy. It speaks of "justifiable" and "unacceptable" rises, it makes much use of "criteria" and "norms". In other words, there is a basic assumption of collaborative national effort and of the existence of standards for deciding on the level of remuneration "deserved" by various groups of income earners. (Two valuable discussions of this problem, from somewhat different standpoints, are A. Fox and A. Flanders, "From Donovan to Dukheim", *British Journal of Industrial Relations*, 1969; and J. H. Goldthorpe, "Social inequalities and social integration in Britain", *Advancement of Science*, 1969.) But at present no acceptable basis for such an assumption exists. The extent of inequity, not only in the distribution of wealth and income, but in the different ways of treating the different types of such income, is staggering. Manual workers tend to have to fight for annual increases, and in the case of large groups of workers their demands and the size of their income is considered a fit matter for public discussion. The higher salaried earners, by contrast, are likely to receive increases by the effortless operation of annual increments, and no one is sufficiently indiscreet as to inquire publicly into their circumstances. When we reach the highest levels of salary earning, or even more so earnings from rent and capital, the very notion of raising questions of "justifiability" is simply held not to apply; and if we consider inherited wealth, the notion of "desert" could not even begin to be used. What is happen-

ing is that policy makers are attempting to apply standards and disciplines "in the national interest" to the lower paid sections of society which no one would ever contemplate applying to the wealthier members. For refusing their co-operation in this exercise, the leaders of the lower paid are accused of selfishness and gross irresponsibility by those very wealthier members who have never in their lives been expected to make out any kind of justification for their level of remuneration. If a modern economy needs a closer degree of national integration and discipline, and uses the state to foster and enforce the process, then it will be impossible to do so and continue to make any claim to being a fair society, so long as we maintain such manifestly unjust and arbitrary attitudes.

Efforts must therefore be directed at finding new ways of reducing these inequalities, and of subjecting the wealth of the rich to the same kind of scrutiny as the incomes of the poor. In some ways the first will follow from the second. For example, it would be possible to enforce far more publicity concerning the distribution of incomes, including all the details of fringe benefits, within individual firms. A good start was made by the last government, when Peter Shore's bill on the disclosure of directors' incomes was implemented, but the initiative needs to be followed up far more vigorously. The distribution of remuneration within a company should be one of the issues which unions should use in their pursuit of wage increases for their members. A future Labour government re-establishing mechanisms on the lines of the Prices and Incomes Board could well decide that among the criteria to be assessed when judging a claim for a wage increase would be the general distribution of rewards throughout an individual company (including fringe benefits) and their justification according to criteria of productivity and so forth. It could well be considered that a firm with a particularly elongated income hierarchy would be expected to concede higher wage demands than a company with a more egalitarian structure. This might in itself have a salutary effect on such intra-firm

income distributions, but it would also bring other benefits. It may make possible the gradual extension of criteria of justification to income levels at the higher ends of the income scale, which is necessary to an acceptable incomes policy. But there is a second very different outcome.

One of the problems for left wing politics in Britain is that people tend to have extraordinarily limited reference groups for comparing their own economic position with others. Most manual workers asked to name groups earning more than themselves tend to name other groups of manual workers; more surprising there is a tendency for non-manual workers similarly to name manual workers. Such a habit of the generally lower paid to limit their comparisons and their jealousies to each other is one of the great political advantages possessed by wealth and Conservatism in this country. The reasons for it are complex and many of them are rooted deep in history, but one possible continuing cause is that it is only manual workers' earnings and increases which are constantly held up to public scrutiny. A successful attempt to direct attention to the entire wealth hierarchy, and to translate this attention into the language of wage bargaining and incomes policy, could have an important impact here. Wider knowledge of, and political concern for, the levels of high incomes could only assist a Labour Party which was making a reduction of inequality one of its major themes.

A further area of policy central to the reduction of inequality is taxation. It is also crucially important to the second major strategy theme, the expansion of the social services. The first reason for making taxation policy an area for re-examination in Labour's strategy is that no matter how far up the scale the scrutiny of incomes is extended, the holders of the largest wealth will still escape.

The case for a wealth tax really must be re-examined within the party if it is hoped ever to establish a fair and acceptable policy on incomes. (The basis for this already exists in O. Stutchbury, *The case for capital taxes*, Fabian tract 388,

1968.) Every attempt by governments to control the attempt by workers to secure wage increases only heightens the gross injustice of this continuing gap in taxation.

Such a re-examination needs, however, to be set in the context of a general re-appraisal of income tax and its impact on different sections of the population. Socialists have at present the dilemma that, while needing a high level of general taxation to finance social policy, they are aware that it is becoming increasingly unpopular with the ordinary people who are expected to vote Labour. Part of this discontent is inevitable, but much of the irritation with taxation is caused by the many niggling injustices and harshnesses with which our system confronts the earner of little means. Despite the welcome reforms in Labour's last budget (April 1970), there are still workers on only moderate incomes who are paying taxation because of the failure of tax rates to catch up with inflation and the eroded value of the pound. There are also the many wretched penalties which taxation imposes on, say, widows and pensioners who seek to increase their meagre earnings by doing paid work.

No doubt our present income tax system is superbly rational according to the strict logic of accountancy, but the operation in practice of this formal justice has effects which are probably not desired by anyone in authority, which serve no useful purpose and which could easily be avoided. Our net of taxation provides exquisitely for trapping harmless tiddlers while the big pike bite straight through it. A re-examination is required which must ask a whole range of taxpayers on different incomes and in different domestic circumstances: "How does the income tax system confront this person? What does it do to him? Do we really need it to do this? How can it be amended to make it more fair and humane?" In other words, we must consider taxation policy from the perspective of its *effect* in practice, attempting to reconcile the need for a given level of revenue with the twin goals of fairness and overall reduction of inequali-

ties of wealth. Such a policy would be a contribution to the reduction of inequality required by the needs of closer social integration in a modern economy, and would prepare the way for winning a commitment by the majority of British people to a continuing high level of social spending.

the social services

The future of the social services will always be a major concern of the Labour Party; but there are new and important reasons why this must continue to be the case. If politics is to influence the direction taken by the future growth of our economic resources, it will be done primarily by the action of the state in this area. Those matters which we label "social policy" are those aspects of provision which have emerged as being the most basic to civilised life, but which the market cannot be depended on either to provide or to provide adequately for everyone. It is only a wealthy society which has conquered the problems of basic scarcity which can make major improvements and take initiatives in this area. This is one of the major opportunities for political choice with which industrial society has presented us. To assert that the state must always make strategic decisions of this kind is to invite the charge of *dirigisme*; but a series of decisions on the general direction to be followed to achieve a society's future prosperity has to be taken, sooner or later, in every wealthy society.

If the issue is not brought into the centre of political debate, these decisions will be made by small groups of powerful but unaccountable men. Indeed, no one may ever consciously make such decisions. They may simply emerge from the operations of various economic corporations whose activities in the market determine the shape assumed by the economy and, consequent on that, by the society as a whole. To demand that the state continues to intervene in this question of allocation through its policies on the social services is therefore not *dirigiste*. It is advocated in order to ensure that

such decisions are taken deliberately in the sphere where they belong: the sphere of politics.

There can be no doubt that this is an area where major and urgent decisions will have to be made during the next few years. (Several of these problems were discussed in **R. H. S. Crossman, *Paying for the Social Services***, Fabian tract 399, 1969.) Technological advances in medical treatment and the increasing proportion of dependents in the population make demands on the National Health Service far in excess of the expected increase in economic growth, and this will be necessary simply to maintain existing standards of service. Similar increases as a result of demographic changes and commitments to protect those on fixed incomes from the full brunt of inflation are expected in social security. In education there is not merely the inevitable growth in the school population and the pressing need to deal with slum schools, but it now seems inevitable that there will be a doubling of the proportion of school leavers admitted to higher education by 1980.

In housing, the experience of recent years has shown that we shall never cope with the problem unless at least the public sector can be assured of several years uninterrupted progress in building.

Some of these demands, particularly some of those for higher education and progress in health technology, are the product of a technological society itself; others emerge among the populations of all societies which have moved away from the preoccupation with mass poverty; others again are the result of the continuing unresolved evils of an earlier industrial age. A policy will have to be adopted on all these questions. No doubt at the margin there is room for improvements in efficiency, minor savings and the extension of acceptable forms of charging; but this should not delude us into ignoring the need to take one of a small number of available options. We may accept a wide deterioration in the standards of service. We may accept a great increase in charges for services and

therefore increase the burden on the poor. Or we may accept the need for higher public expenditure. Both the latter options must involve a reduction in the amount of money available for other kinds of private spending, such as on consumer goods. All these alternatives have different implications for the kind of society Britain will be. If the Labour Party is still committed to the social services and to the reduction of inequality, it will need to gain public support for the kinds of decision it would make on this problem when again in power.

At present it is possible that the option of maintaining the social services primarily out of public spending is the least popular in the country. Obviously hard work is needed by the party in this area. The first task is to persuade people to regard the social services as the "social wage", aid to encourage them to view improvements and regressions in the social wage in the same way that they regard such changes in private income. Reforms in the taxation system will be crucial to the success of such a policy, but by themselves they are not enough.

A major effort of publicity, taking advantage of the excellent work already being done by the various pressure groups, will be needed in the coming years. Paradoxically, a source of assistance in all this will be the Conservative government. In the early 'sixties it was neglect of the social services, housing and education which undermined much public confidence in the Tories and accounted for a proportion of Labour's new support in the 1964 election. Given that the policies of this new Conservative regime are aimed, not simply at neglect, but at the deliberate worsening, of essential services, it seems highly likely that similar scope will be provided for Labour to launch its attack along similar lines between now and the next general election. From this basis it will again be possible to establish the case for major improvements in various services.

Now is the time to work on a new series of major policy initiatives in the social field and to secure public enthusiasm for

them. Unless we are able to win back public support for the social services we may drift into a situation like that in the United States, where the superiority of private over public spending is elevated to a position of almost religious faith. The present Tory administration contains many men who are of a very similar view. Their success in Britain would be a major political tragedy, and the Labour Party is the only institution capable of reversing the trend.

industrial and technological accountability

It is likely that the modern economy will be increasingly dominated by massive corporations, and that there will be a complex relationship of interdependence between state and industry. The need is therefore to ensure that the political sphere is able to assert some of its priorities in this mutual dependence. It is not likely that problems in this field will ever attract the same degree of public attention that is possible for the reduction of economic inequality or for improvements in the social services, but it is nevertheless crucial that Labour works out its policies in preparation for its return to office.

To a large extent Labour had already established the framework for some surveillance over the activities of industry in the examination of prices by the Prices and Incomes Board. But the board rarely tackled a price rise of major importance in the private sector. Most of its activities were confined to rises in the nationalised industries or to minor private increases. In a new Labour administration these activities of the NBPI need to be maintained and expanded, but there is need for it to be supplemented by surveillance of a different kind. In conditions of limited competition and advanced technology, the individual customer rarely has the opportunity to ensure he buys goods of quality and good workmanship. The slogan of apologists for *laissez faire* (*caveat emptor*—"Let the buyer beware") has little meaning where many modern products are concerned. The purchaser would need a knowledge of mechanical

and electrical engineering, chemistry and biology before he was in a position to know what he needs to beware. In a way this situation is recognised by the existence of such bodies as the Consumers' Association and the Consumer Council. (Since this was written the Conservative government has abolished the Consumer Council. This act may be considered a highly significant one against the background of the Tories' renewed dedication to unrestrained and unsupervised private enterprise. This should certainly make it possible for consumer protection to become a party political issue, to Labour's considerable advantage. But all that these bodies can do is warn and receive a fleeting and soon forgotten burst of publicity. The kind of testing of goods on the consumer's behalf which has been pioneered by the Consumers' Association needs to be placed on a statutory basis. A system of positive and negative sanctions over manufacturers would be the **only way** in which the quality of industrial production could be increased and poor workmanship reduced. Action of this kind will become increasingly important as corporations grow more and more oligopolistic and many ordinary goods become more scientific and complex. Firm action in this area would be meeting a felt need of many people; for a Labour government there is the added advantage that more public concern on this kind of issue would do something to dispel the illusion that the irresponsible use of industrial power is a sin of which only workers and unions are guilty.

Research on new policies is also required in the area of new technological developments, particularly where Government sponsorship is concerned. There is a tendency for governments to become committed to sponsoring major developments in advanced technology which then assume their own powerful logic and impose decisions on government. (See J. K. Galbraith, *How to control the military*. A Fabian NCLC publication). A useful example is the Concorde aircraft. During one of the great crises of early 19th century France, the state kept men from unemployment by having them dig a great hole in the centre of

Paris and then fill it in again; in some ways the Concorde is a modern technological example of this. One of the best justifications for building the Concorde is that if it were not built many men in the aircraft industry would be made redundant. Most of the other reasons for building it are of a similar nature: the need to beat the Americans at something; the need to make friends with the French. The curious fact about these arguments is that they are all by-products; few people are prepared to defend the case that the Concorde was built in order to fly a small number across the Atlantic in two hours less than they do at present.

We produce in order to maintain the capacity to produce more. It is of course possible that this is a valid justification. It is possible that, when all is weighed in the balance, the incidental by-products of building Concorde will outweigh the costs involved. This would be a beautiful irony of technological man; possessed of a more immense capacity than any of his forefathers could even conceive of, he needs to keep producing new things, not because he wants them but because if he did not do so the society would begin to collapse. But is it not possible to be able to direct investment in technology in such a way that it gives us the valuable by-products and also gives an end product which we have consciously chosen? This would be the task of technological assessment and indicates a further example of the scope for political choice in technological decision making.

In the case of a machine like Concorde the case for such assessment is made stronger by its many side effects. It has been, and continues to be, a massive and virtually open ended commitment of public expenditure; its noise levels will cause damage as yet unrealised. The problem, as the Labour government found, is that once a commitment of this kind is entered into, it is extremely difficult to escape; hence the need for careful assessment in advance. Considerable progress was made on this by Labour while in office. Through the establishment of a Ministry of Technology a closer political eye could observe what

was going on in such fields. Under Labour, Britain pulled out of the European rocket development programme, ELDO; reduced the amount of nuclear research; declined to authorise a number of aircraft projects; and entirely eliminated research on hypersonic aircraft. This marked an important contribution to the negative aspects of a responsible policy on technology, to some extent matched by positive contributions in expanding research on noise, the environment, and so forth. Since governments will, and should, continue to be involved in the sponsorship of research of this kind and on increasingly sophisticated levels, it is important that the process of technological assessment be taken up as a political question by those competent to do so.

It is also important that the social services and other neglected areas benefit from the progress of technology. When these matters are left to industry alone, there is no assurance that certain important social needs will be met by massive investment in product development and research. We hear frequently of industry's needs for technologically trained staff, but there is rarely any inquiry into how many of these expensively educated people with valuable skills are being engaged on marginal improvements of little practical importance, designed merely to give a product a temporary publicity lead over its rivals. Possibly the biggest example of what is meant here is the motor industry. Only in very recent years has this industry begun to direct research into safety improvements to vehicles rather than trivial amendments to design and amenity. The sophistication of current research on car safety, most of it in the USA, only indicates the appalling failure to make such progress in the past. It is only through politics and government that priorities such as safety will be imposed on the process of technological research and development.

Similarly with the social services, it will require government action to make possible the improvements that technology can bring. An important example of past success in this field, started by a Conservative government and continued by

Labour, is the development of industrialised building techniques in local authority housing. There is great scope for collaboration on future policy among those concerned for the future of technology and those involved in the improvement of the social services. The valuable work that already goes on in this field indicates the potentialities for the future if such a collaboration is made an area of political priority.

Finally when the news media have grown tired of exploiting the issue of pollution and environment, immense problems will still remain. The control of pollution and industrial damage to the natural and social environment will require considerable political will. This is an area where Britain has one of the better records among the industrial countries. Part of the reason, no doubt, is that our small size has pressed upon us the imperative of taking action; we just do not have thousands of square miles to waste. Considerable political skill, however, will also be required if progress in control and regulation is to continue to keep pace with technological advance. First, all control and regulation involves a cost, and it will sometimes require a straight choice by government whether to control an abuse and forego certain economic advantages, or whether to give economic growth the absolute priority.

The original factory acts were opposed by industry on the grounds that they would impede our export trade. There will need to be an alert public opinion, expressed in parliamentary concern, if continued progress is to be made. A second argument for the importance of politics in such issues is that government and industry normally react positively to them only in the face of crisis and disaster. The Clean Air Act of 1956 followed heavy London smog which took a toll in death and sickness; New York is only starting to face up to its traffic pollution after a similar experience this summer; the Torrey Canyon led to action on oil pollution of seas; and at a more local level, pedestrian crossings are frequently only installed after an accident has occurred near the spot. It may be that the

function of politics in such affairs is to bring to bear an effective warning of impending crisis so that action is taken before disaster actually strikes. We shall need increasingly to develop such warnings as technology develops in further and more complex ways.

Perhaps the most striking aspect of the harmful effects of technological development involving difficult political conflict is the case of urban transport. (An excellent analysis of the problem of urban transport will be found in J. M. Thomson, *Motorways in London*, 1969.) Indeed uncontrolled use of the motor car has been shown to involve high costs in terms of deaths and injuries, pollution and congestion. Given a political commitment to such transport, vast amounts of urban road building become essential. These are massively expensive (an urban motorway costing over £4 million a mile to construct) and involve vast demolition of housing during a period of housing shortage. Their effect on urban life and architecture is damaging; they will entail the death of the town centre as we have come to know it, as pedestrians are forced into a rabbit warren of subways and the urban landscape is darkened by overpasses. Meanwhile it has also been demonstrated that patterns of major urban road building such as that to which London has now committed itself, will do little to alleviate congestion; they merely encourage more traffic on to the roads. Further, a commitment to the private car of this kind normally entails, as is occurring in London, a policy of deterioration in the public sector; declining and expensive public transport drives people yet further to private cars and causes more congestion, while the poor find it difficult to travel at all. In great contrast to all this, stands the policy of imposing controls on the use of private cars in central areas and, more important, major subsidised improvements in public transport, with the use of the various new modes of urban travel like the electric car which at present remain on the drawing board, unwanted. Such a policy reduces the immense cost and disruption of road building, and would also reduce the deaths and pollution.

This is an excellent instance of what is meant here by the choices made both necessary and possible by modern technology—choices which are political and which require the firm hand of central decision making by either government or the large city council. A decision to produce a humane transport policy for British cities would offend an extraordinarily powerful combination of interests: the motoring organisations, the road manufacturers and the motor industry itself. To tackle such a constellation would require extraordinary political skill, and could only be undertaken by a government either in the wake of a major urban disaster or when convinced of the wide popularity of its plan among the public. It would also involve a discriminating policy of public investment in technology; there would need to be a government decision to sponsor research, and alternative modes of urban transport to the internal combustion engine would have to be developed. That would be the kind of planning and technological commitment which could justly claim to be the hallmark of a socialist government, as opposed to the simple open ended commitment to “more technological growth” that masqueraded as such a hallmark in 1964. Further, the issue of urban transport is one which deserves to be at the centre of wide political debate, since it will impose increasing and profound problems on all of us over the coming years.

It is, therefore, clear that the solution to the problem of government's relationship to industry is not to be resolved either by the Tory approach of simply releasing the energies of private ownership or by the desire of the new left to abjure all connection with advanced technological management. The policy of Labour's 1964 manifesto was far nearer the mark than either of these. Once government and industry had been brought closer together by the Ministry of Technology, government policies began to assert some priorities in their area. What is now needed is more explicit and direct concern with establishing policy aims on the applications of technology under government supervision.

What is required now is a series of detailed practical blueprints to give effect to the policies outlined above, if Britain is to take advantage of the opportunities of technological society, while remaining a civilised and pleasant society. We need research on the structure of a universally applicable incomes policy; on ways of making our taxation system more humane and egalitarian; on winning public support back to the social services; on plotting the next advances in the various social services; on protecting the consumer among the complexities of modern products; on the assessment of candidates for state investment in modern technology; on steering scientific and technological progress in directions relevant to our social priorities. If we can develop policies in at least some of these areas, we may be able to reverse the decline of politics which threatens in the future. For these are policies which are relevant to current problems.

the Tory challenge

There is, however, one final argument in favour of Labour directing its energies towards these issues: on virtually every one the Conservative government seems likely to move in a reverse direction. The essential message of the Heath administration to the working people of Britain is as follows: “If you work hard and obediently in your factories and offices, and accept a deterioration in state provision for your children's education, your housing and social security, you will be entitled to a share in the prosperity which may accrue to the country as a whole. Your aspirations for more private wealth are commendable, provided they do not involve taking action at work over your employers' privileges and perogatives, and provided you do not resent the increasing economic inequality which our taxation reforms are intended to introduce.”

It is not obvious that such a stance will be successful in easing industrial unrest and quietening popular ambitions for a continuously increasing personal income irrespective of national productivity. The

easiest circumstances for the success of this policy would be a return to the situation of the 1950s, when a population accustomed to mass unemployment, world war and post-war austerity gratefully received the affluence that seemed to flow effortlessly and with near full employment. Barring a major economic miracle, it is unlikely in the extreme that such a situation will return. First, future growth will not be gained as easily as it was when the industrial world was busily filling the vacuum left by the devastation of war. Second, people have now grown accustomed to continuing rises in prosperity; gratitude no longer accrues automatically to a government which presides over a reasonably stable GNP. There is, therefore, likely to be continuing unrest in industry as people strive towards private wealth for the pursuit of which Mr. Heath has promised to liberate them. One assumes and hopes that the situation will not be made easier by union leaders, official and unofficial, bringing home to their members the regressive nature of the Tories' proposed taxation reforms. It therefore seems likely that the Conservatives will depend for continued success on continuing public support for a deterioration in the social services and a public willingness to blame strikers and unions for all their ills. In other words, the Tories will benefit from a continuation of the erosion of earlier patterns of solidarity and class consciousness, as the population becomes fragmented into privately ambitious but politically docile factions.

This should serve as both a warning and an encouragement to Labour. The warning is that, whatever may have seemed the case in the past, there is now no scope for "me tooism". In a race to cut back the social services and restrict trade unions, the Conservatives must always win; and if they are now trying to pull Britain's consensus in this direction, Labour's stance must be to steer it back the other way. It will be a deep tragedy if we fail to recognise the flexibility and fluidity of present political opinion in this country. Some evidence of this flexibility has been presented in the previous discussions of social stratification. Fur-

ther evidence is to be seen in the rapid and wide variations recorded in surveys of intended voting behaviour over the past few years; such rapid changes were intimately involved in Labour's defeat of June 1970. (An excellent discussion of the political implications of this fluidity is to be found in Goldthorpe, Lockwood, *et al*, *The affluent worker in the class structure*, *op cit*, pp187 *et seq.*) The encouragement for Labour lies in the innate contradictions of the Conservative approach. For economic and political reasons the Tories cannot accommodate the unrestricted pursuit of private wealth by ordinary people which superficially they are advocating. They will therefore rely heavily on their policies of restriction in industrial relations and regressive taxation. They can no longer rely on the constraints of social deference or mass unemployment, or on the growth of affluence easily keeping pace with aspirations. There is therefore ample scope for strife, bitterness and dissatisfaction under the Conservatives' formula.

Disraeli's concern with building "one nation" was linked with measures to alleviate in some small way the inequalities within his society. Heath uses the same concept to refer to an attempt to increase inequality beneath a myth of national unity which masks real divisions of interest. The difference between Disraeli's concept and that of Heath is the difference between a conservative and a reactionary. If reactionaries cannot achieve their spurious unity through a general rise in prosperity, they may do it by identifying politically dissident or racially distinct minorities as the real enemies of such unity. This is precisely what is happening at the present time in the US; it will be recalled that on his election as president Mr. Nixon made a "one nation" speech. Some Conservatives showed signs of doing this before the 1970 election, but the party's confidence of success with the economic issues prevailed and in the event we heard little of "law and order" in the election campaign. However, if the Conservative Party fails to achieve the docile consensus it needs . . . unofficial strikers do still occupy the role of hated minority group!

The situation is therefore one in which Labour needs to direct attention to the real problems, the real sources of conflict and dissatisfaction. If political opinion is to be rescued from either the docility of prosperity or the antagonisms of the kind of social division favoured by the Tories, it is important that Labour adopt the position which is being advocated here.

the challenge for the unions

It is also urgent that, if industrial unrest is to characterise the immediate future, Labour is seen to be in possession of the only acceptable approach to these problems. A modern economy requires an incomes policy and some form of restraint on industrial action, but such restraint only becomes acceptable within a generally egalitarian framework. The tragedy of the Labour government's efforts at such a policy were that they accepted this principle in rhetoric but not in practice. If an appeal at collaboration is to be made again to the trade unions, it must be in the context of a fully elaborated social policy. The essentials of the necessary policy have been spelt out by Lord Balogh. (T. Balogh, *op cit.*) One may quarrel with his emphasis on the responsibility of trade unions for Britain's continued inflation (see, for example, the alternative analysis of N. Bosanquet, *Pay, prices and Labour in power*, Young Fabian pamphlet 20, 1970) and one can dispute the historical appropriateness of the term "social contract" to describe what he is advocating. But he is right in stressing the need for a whole "package" of egalitarian reforms as the only acceptable context for an incomes policy. Therefore, an essential task for Labour, in preparing itself again for national office, is to establish a common approach with the unions. Given acceptance of reforms of the kind advocated both here and in Balogh's pamphlet it will be possible for the Labour movement to claim before the public that it alone can provide a sane and just approach to the problem of industrial relations which the Tories are tasking so disastrously. But there are conditions.

Although the challenge faced by the political wing of the Labour movement is the greater, it is appropriate at this point to comment on the challenge for the union leaders as well. Frank Cousins's cry: "If there is going to be a free for all, then we are part of the all" is entirely justified and irrefutable. It is also entirely justified if unions refuse to collaborate in an incomes policy which is manifestly unjust and only applied to certain sectors of the community. But if the central government is genuinely attempting to render our society more just, the problem of union "responsibility" becomes a difficult issue. Some of the more militant unions are at present developing a policy of "grass roots" initiative, where the national leadership tries merely to respond to the aspirations of members rather than to guide them and lead them. In the present political context this may appear a valid left wing socialist policy; there is little other way of using working class strength. But it involves two elements which, in the event of a government pursuing as a political goal social justice and the improvement of the welfare state, would imply a very different political image. The fragmentation of activity into localised occupational groups does not encourage wider concepts of class loyalty, and since virtually the only goal open to grass roots industrial action is a small increment in earnings, such an approach does nothing to direct attention to major political goals or to problems of the social services. I do not wish to undermine the real and important efforts being made to enable workers to encroach on managerial prerogatives in individual plants, but the point at issue here is a major one. Is the will there in the union leaderships to direct the attention of their members to wider political objectives of social policy and income redistribution, on the assumption that the pursuit of such objectives will involve collaboration in an incomes policy? The challenge to qualities of genuine leadership which this raises are considerable. The present drift to local industrial preoccupations is explicable as part of the general predicament of true politics in Britain; the reversal of the decline of politics therefore has many implications for the unions.

Union leaders may well reply that they have never yet been faced with the opportunity of collaborating in such an incomes policy; and they would be right. They may also argue with conviction that the 1970 conference of the Labour Party was too early for the party leadership to try to re-commit the movement to an incomes policy; but before too long the challenge will have to be faced. If agreement is possible on this central question, the party will be well equipped to confront the electorate when the opportunity next arises.

traditions is on the health of the welfare state, the reduction of social inequality and the use of economic resources for social ends. Whatever has been said here in criticism of the party's effectiveness in the past, it is the only major party in Britain to have the essential serious concern on the major issues which confront us. The task should be within Labour's capabilities if it possesses the political will. And it is certainly the case that if the Labour Party cannot equip Britain with the policies needed for a just and civilised technological society, no one else can.

conclusion

A Labour Party which adopted this approach would have contributed much to facing the problems of politics in technological society. It would have taken up its major political stance on the very issues which most need the attention of political decisions. It would have tackled the problem of the relation between government and industrial power; and it would have avoided the errors either of being identified with an outdated and declining class base or of trying to free itself from any class base at all; and finally, the decline of politics would have been reversed.

We have now left the period of the late 1950s, when various writers were proclaiming the "end of ideology" and the exhaustion of political conflict. New and urgent conflicts are emerging on economic and racial issues, but so far political institutions have failed to grapple with them. In the USA this failure has led to a new violence and contempt for politics. The British problem is by no means as severe as this but complacency at the present time will be no solution. And no solution lies in the ugly appeals of the newly vigorous right, whether it takes the form of the US Republicans under Nixon and Agnew, or the more subtle form of the British Conservative Party.

Even though the extent of rethinking required by the Labour Party is considerable, the party starts with many advantages. The whole emphasis of Labour's

young fabian group the author

The Young Fabian Group exists to give socialists not over 30 years of age an opportunity to carry out research, discussion and propaganda. It aims to help its members publish the results of their research, and so make a more effective contribution to the work of the Labour movement. It therefore welcomes all those who have a thoughtful and radical approach to political matters.

The group is autonomous, electing its own committee. It co-operates closely with the Fabian Society which gives financial and clerical help. But the group is responsible for its own policy and activity, subject to the constitutional rule that it can have no declared political policy beyond that implied by its commitment to democratic socialism.

The group publishes pamphlets written by its members, arranges fortnightly meetings in London, and holds day and weekend schools.

Enquiries about membership should be sent to the Secretary, Young Fabian Group, 11 Dartmouth Street, London, SW1; telephone 01-930 3077.

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