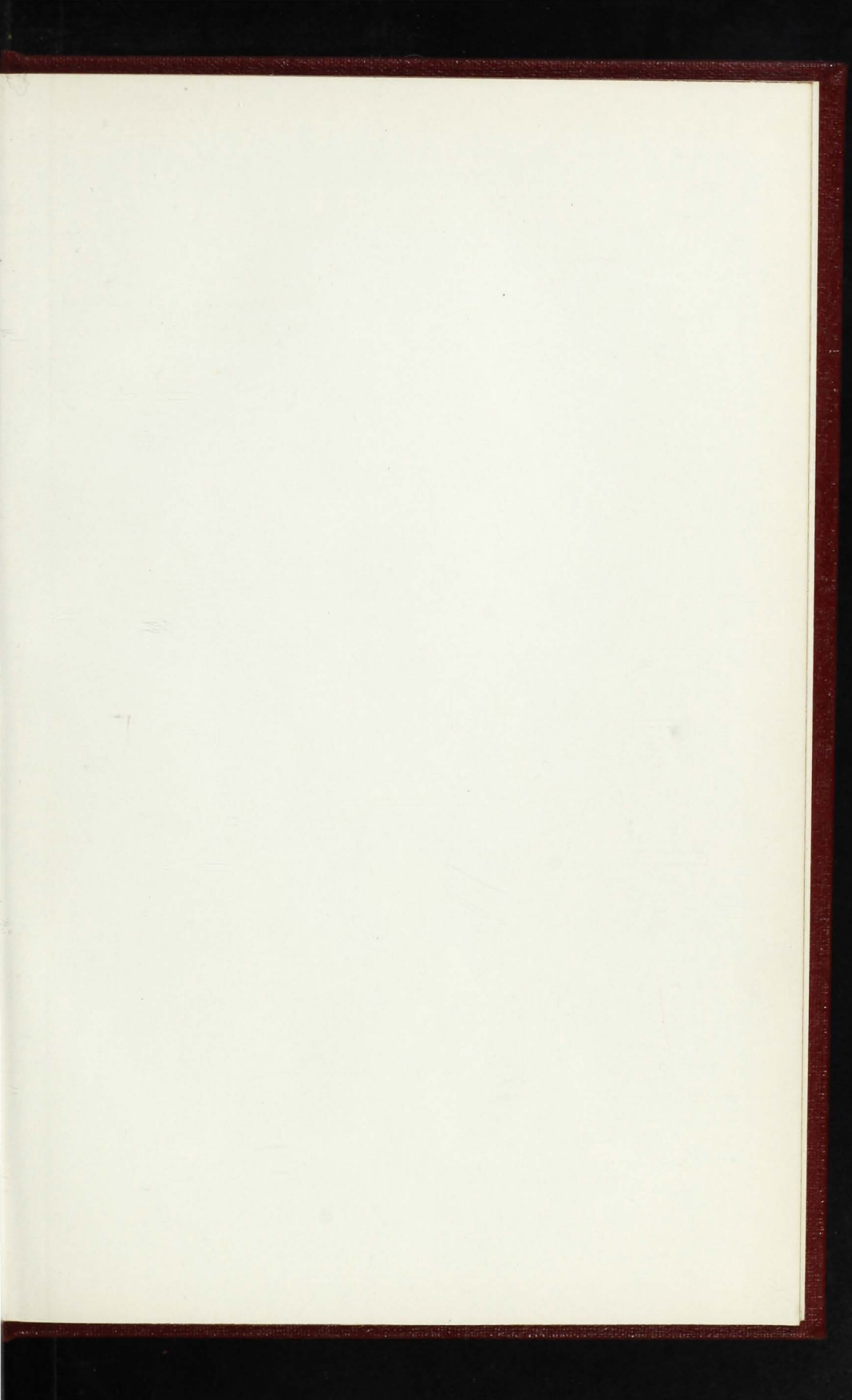


BRITISH LIBRARY
OF POLITICAL AND
ECONOMIC SCIENCE



LONDON SCHOOL OF
ECONOMICS AND
POLITICAL SCIENCE
10, PORTUGAL STREET,
LONDON WC2A 2HD

Tel. 01-405 7686

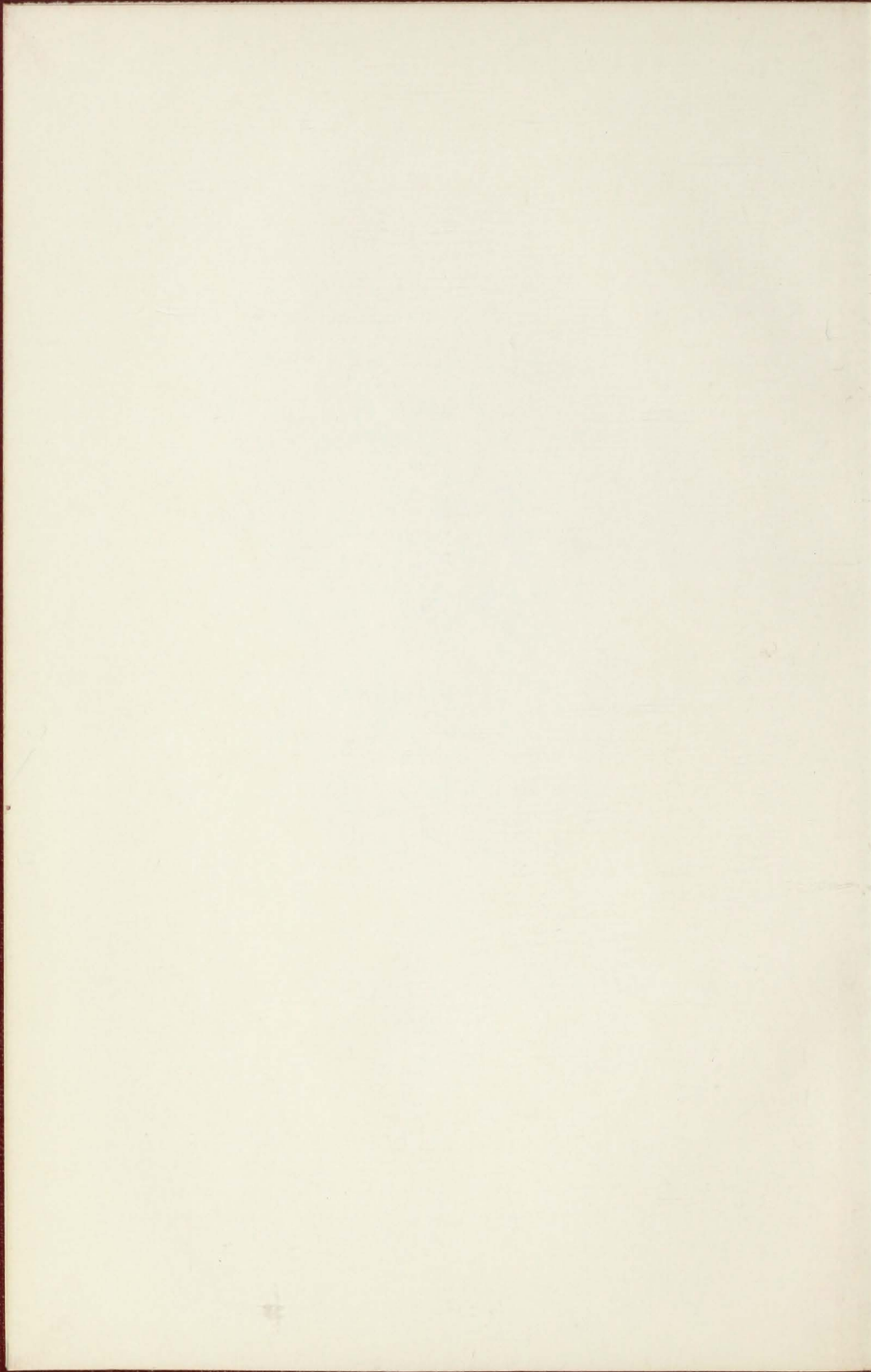


REPORT
OF THE
COMMISSIONERS
OF THE
LAND OFFICE
FOR THE YEAR
1887

CONSTITUTION OF THE MASS BOTS

By the Land
No. 468 650

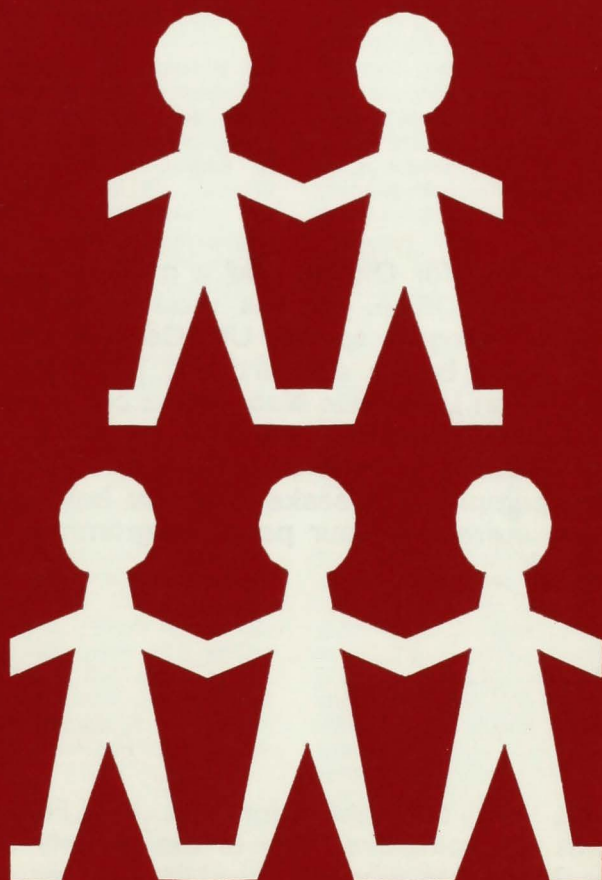




socialism at the grass roots

Evan Luard
fabian tract 468

65p



fabian tract 468

socialism at the grass roots

chapter	1	the need for new thinking	1
	2	the diffusion of political power	6
	3	the role of non-official organisations	13
	4	socialism at the workplace	16
	5	conclusion : micro-socialism and macro-socialism	19

the author

Evan Luard was MP for Oxford and a minister in the Foreign and Commonwealth Office. He has worked in the diplomatic service and was delegate to the UN General Assembly. The author of numerous books and articles, particularly on international affairs, Evan Luard has also been a councillor in Oxford. In his recent book, "Socialism without the State", he set out arguments in favour of a more decentralised form of socialism. In the present pamphlet he seeks to show how this might be implemented in current Labour party programmes.

this pamphlet, like all publications of the Fabian Society, represents not the collective view of the Society but only the views of the individual who prepared it. The responsibility of the Society is limited to approving publications it issues as worthy of consideration within the Labour movement. Fabian Society, 11 Dartmouth Street, London SW1H 9BN. April 1980 ISSN 0307 7535 ISBN 7163 0468 6

1. the need for new thinking

With at least four years of opposition ahead, there has never been a better opportunity for a fundamental examination by the Labour party of its purposes and policies. Defeat in the last general election provides the opportunity for a reassessment not only of the constitutional issues which have so dominated discussion in the last few months, not only of immediate policy dilemmas, but also of the whole character of the party's philosophy and its approach to the problems of a rapidly changing society.

Both within the party and amongst the public, such a reassessment is now felt to be badly needed. Within the party there is beginning to be an awareness that neither the simple reiteration of our traditional appeal of the last 50 years nor the attractive simplicity of the so called "alternative economic strategy" may be sufficient (even with the swing of the pendulum that can be confidently expected over the next year or two) to regain lasting public support. Within the public there is a feeling that many traditional policies of the Labour party, for all its noble aspirations, belong in some way to the past and are irrelevant to current needs. Our policies appear to involve the continuing proliferation of bureaucracy, a continuing deference to the pressures from powerful trade unions, a continuing necessity for high taxation, a continuing enhancement of the power of the state. These are not universally appealing. There is ample evidence that the attractions of a policy based mainly on calls for more public ownership and more public spending are limited by the willingness of the public to vote for the former and to pay for the latter.

Among both public and party there is a feeling that the party has run out of new ideas, that the programme it is offering today is not different, in its essentials, from that proposed 30 or 40 years ago, and is increasingly remote from the concerns and aspirations of ordinary people. If the party is to have any chance of regaining power, therefore, it is essential that the re-examination which takes place of the party's objec-

tives should take account of the feelings of the man in the street as well as those in the party committee room.

the party's dilemma

In common with socialist parties elsewhere, the Labour party today is faced with a major contradiction. We are concerned above all to create a more equal society, in which both wealth and power are more evenly distributed. We have traditionally sought to bring this about by two main means: by the extension of state ownership, so that major industries are no longer run for private profit but in the interests of the people as a whole; and by the creation and development of a welfare state designed to redistribute resources, through a progressive taxation system, especially to benefit the less well off. These have become the basic purpose of the Labour party and the aims with which it is mainly associated in the eyes of the public.

Yet the sad fact is that Labour policies in office, though explicitly devoted to these two aims, have succeeded in bringing about no significant equalisation, even in the distribution of income in our society over the last 35 years, let alone in wealth or power. Successive studies have shown that inequality in income is almost unchanged since the early post-war period. The only periods in which there has in practice been some reduction in it have been those when an incomes policy has been in effect: between 1971 and 1976, for example, the combined effect of the £8,500 ceiling and the flat rate £6 increase for the rest was to reduce inequalities in income significantly for a time. But as soon as such a policy has been abandoned and "free collective bargaining" restored, the situation has been reversed and traditional differentials re-established. This suggests that, if the Labour party is genuinely committed to the creation of a more equal society (rather than the preservation of the traditional role of trade union leaders), it must also be committed to the institution of a permanent incomes policy. This is as necessary for bringing

about the "irreversible shift of wealth and power" to working people to which the party is committed as it is to the containment of inflation. It would be sensible if the need for an incomes policy was proclaimed and justified more explicitly on these grounds. It is as the party which stands for equality as well as the party of the planned economy that Labour must inevitably also be the party of incomes policy.

The traditional Labour policies of extending public ownership and the welfare state have not only not significantly reduced inequality in income. They have probably *increased* inequality in power and influence. For both the extensions of public ownership and of the welfare state have involved the creation of vast organisations in which power is very heavily concentrated at the top and which those affected by them have few opportunities to influence. This has increased the sense of helplessness of people in the face of the powers that be. Decision making is less democratic than ever. Paradoxically, the more successful we are in achieving both aims by these traditional means, the greater the role that will be played within society by these vast organisations which so monopolise authority and by those who control them, and the more helpless individual citizens will seem to be in the face of them.

Further progress in each direction is anyway heavily conditioned by attitudes within contemporary society. Though many members of the Labour party would wish to see a greater proportion of British industry in public hands, it is undeniable that this is not a prospect which appeals much to most British voters. This limits the extent to which proposals to that end can be included in Labour manifestos. Similarly, though most people, both within the Labour party and without, would like to see a more effective and comprehensive welfare state, they are often not enthusiastic about the increase of taxation which may be necessary to finance this. What this has meant is that the extensions in both areas which the Labour party in power

is able to introduce become more and more marginal. The essential advances that have been made in this country in both respects, the extension of public ownership and the establishment of the welfare state, were made thirty years ago during the first Labour government of 1945-1950. Though there have been two subsequent periods of Labour government, each lasting for more than a single term, the additions that have been made to the essential structure have been on each occasion fairly marginal.

It may be therefore that if we are going to be able to offer the electorate an appeal that is not simply a rehash of former programmes whose attractiveness is clearly already in decline (more support for declining industries, more import controls, more industrial strategy and bigger and better state agencies of all kinds) but which is genuinely new and radical, then we may need to look in a new direction. It is not the ends that are in question—the creation of a more equal society and of greater public control over economic affairs—but the means of attaining them. The main contention of this pamphlet is that throughout its history, but especially in recent years, the Labour party has been over concerned with the questions of organisation at the top (the transfer of economic power from one oligarchy in private industry to another in state concerns, the proliferation of councils and committees within the Whitehall jungle, the mechanisms of ministerial control) and not enough with how all this impinges on the everyday life of people, whether the worker in the nationalised corporation, the council house tenant or the applicant for supplementary benefit. Above all, we have neglected what to many early socialists was the essential and fundamental core of socialist thinking and concern: the creation of a sense of community within society, which must mean the strengthening and enriching of communities at the lowest level, the level that matters most.

The fact is that most of the policies which the Labour party has introduced over the last thirty years have had, except

in the crudest financial sense, very little impact on the lives of ordinary people. The transfer of authority within the rail, coal or steel industry from private directors to public directors appointed by a Labour government, the creation of the Land Commission and the establishment of BNOC have brought certain benefits but they are not visible to most men and women. Control over British industry has not been democratised; it has been shifted from one elite to another. The extension of public ownership by Labour governments has not been accompanied by any diffusion of power within state industry, still less within industry as a whole. It has certainly not done anything to transform the lives of those who work within such industries. We have increased welfare benefits, and even created new ones, but we have done little to improve the way in which benefits are distributed and to reduce the inhumanities and hardships to which this often gives rise. Above all we have given people no greater capacity to influence the events and decisions which are of most concern to them. In other words we have totally failed to bring about the diffusion of power which is one of our fundamental aims.

Many people will conclude that this reflects the balance of priorities of our party. They will have noted for example that, while the last Labour government successfully put through all its programmes concerned with extending the power of the government and changing industrial structures at the top, those parts of our programme concerned with giving the public a greater opportunity to influence the way the country was run—the proposals for industrial democracy, the freedom of information act, parliamentary reform, the proposed charter for council house tenants and so on—all fell by the wayside. The result is that the actual distribution of power and influence, like that in income and wealth, was very little different when we left office from when we came to power. This can leave the public with the impression that our primary, even exclusive, concern is with the organisation of power at the top rather than

with making it possible for people to acquire a greater control over their own lives, still less with providing the opportunities for a satisfying community life, in which the sharing and comradeship of socialism may truly be experienced.

Of course we can easily make up for some of these deficiencies. We may eventually introduce the industrial democracy measures that we promised and failed to provide last time. We may be able to humanise the welfare services. And so on. But it is not sure that we can entirely overcome the difficulties in this way. For the problem results partly from the entire manner in which our aims are conceived. The achievement of social ownership and of redistribution through public services will continue to be our objectives. What we must now do is to re-examine the means that have traditionally been worked out for achieving them. At present, it is still taken for granted that social ownership must be achieved through *state* ownership, that welfare services must be provided by the welfare *state*. In fact, our ultimate aims may be attainable by other means.

Social ownership may take other forms than state ownership; and welfare services may be provided by other means than state handouts. Thinking in the Labour party has (at least since the decline of the syndicalist strand represented by the Coles—even then a minority view) always been mesmerised by the traditional concept of socialism at the state level.

socialism for people

It is towards alternative approaches and alternative systems of organisation, corresponding better to the real community feeling of men and women today, that we should now be directing our thinking. Of course some measure of state power will need to be retained. There will—at least for the foreseeable future—need to be national ministries implementing national policies, state industries with at least a framework of national organisation, some system of national

planning and a state wide system of social services.

But there are huge variations possible in the way these are organised and in the degree of decentralisation in decision making which the system can permit. Even many of our immediate neighbours in Europe operate far more decentralised societies than we do in Britain—as in the federal structure of West Germany for example. But an even greater degree of decentralisation than is practised anywhere today is feasible if the will to achieve it is there. This requires determination and commitment. The centralising pressures—the demand for “efficiency”, for coordination, for organisation—from civil servants, politicians and many others are such that, without adequate countervailing power, they will always prevail. Perhaps the most sinister (because most persuasive) of these pressures is the suggestion that centralisation is required to secure equality. This is a simple fallacy: though central *funding* will always be required for this purpose—to create equality between regions as much as between individuals—this can very easily be reconciled with a high degree of decentralisation in the way services are organised and run.

It has always been difficult for the Labour party to reconcile its genuine concern with increasing personal freedom and its concern for democracy, participation and grass roots sentiment with its simultaneous desire to see an increase in the power of the state. Socialism, we have always said, is not something desired for its own sake but for the sake of individual men and women, as a means towards a more satisfying social existence and a deeper human fulfilment. But so long as the achievement of socialism is seen as always demanding an increased role and power for the national state, those latter ends become more difficult of attainment. State enterprises and state agencies presuppose organisation on the largest possible scale, with a very large degree of concentration of power at the top. This is seen in its extreme form in communist countries, but it is also visible

on a lesser scale in democratic socialist countries. The result is that the worker in socialist industry, even in democratic states, far from being liberated and dignified by the change in ownership, sometimes becomes an even smaller cog in an even larger machine, with no greater control over his own destiny or the decisions that shape his working life.

For decades, British socialists have been concerned with this problem. They have talked about “industrial democracy”, “workers control”, “participation” and so on. Consumer councils, community health councils and similar bodies have been established, or proposed, to represent a form of countervailing power to that of the elite at the top. But we should not delude ourselves that these create for the vast mass of the public (or of the workers, consumers or patients) any genuine sense of “participation” in decisions that are reached. Few in practice can participate in this way and it is a handful of (mainly middle class) people who man such committees. It is thus merely a *shift* in power, not a genuine diffusion, which results. (This is also the case with many of the proposed changes in the structure of the Labour party that have been recently discussed: a reduction in the power of the Prime Minister may give greater power to the ministers in the cabinet, but not to the public as a whole; the writing of the party manifesto by the NEC will increase the power of the members of that body but not that of party members generally; the compulsory re-selection of MPs will increase the power of party activists within the general committees but not that of ordinary party members, still less of Labour voters.) The only way to increase the power and influence of ordinary people is to ensure that more decisions are reached at a lower level, in smaller scale organisations which can be influenced and directed by their own members.

At the state level, power is inevitably concentrated because decisions affecting many millions of people must be taken by a few in positions of authority. Similarly, social ownership imposed at

the level of the state will inevitably be in a form that is remote from the mass of the people that will be affected by it. 55 million people cannot be in any meaningful way the "owners" of British Steel, BR or British Electricity; still less can they be the controllers of them, which is what really counts. So they are bound to delegate authority to tiny cliques in board rooms, as remote and impervious to influence as the boards of capitalist societies which they so exactly resemble.

If power is to be genuinely diffused, therefore, it is not enough to create new channels for participation, new "councils" and "committees" alleged to be "representative" of workers, consumers, council tenants or whatever. Such councils are just as much an oligarchy of a favoured few as those which they replace. The root of the problem is the scale and system of organisation of the modern state.

Seeking to regulate every detail of the lives of its populations, this state machine spawns an ever growing bureaucracy which continually expands with the increasing responsibilities placed on national ministries and with the infinite series of rules and regulations that central government manufactures. This process cannot fail to threaten some of the traditional values for which socialist parties have always stood. Democracy becomes more difficult because governments become more remote, decisions more technical, rules more detailed and bureaucrats more powerful. Participation becomes more difficult because, with the complexity of government, few will take the trouble to take part in the bewildering array of committees which are needed to influence those at the top. Equality becomes more difficult because large scale organisations need a concentration of power at the top with diverse incomes to match.

Freedom becomes more difficult because the smooth running of the machine requires that every cog within it must be adjusted to conform to the decisions which those at the top believe to be

required by "public interest". And the sense of community, perhaps the most fundamental of all the aims of socialists in previous ages, becomes impossible: because a national state with a population of millions or tens of millions, whatever else it may achieve, can never in itself represent a meaningful community.

2. the diffusion of political power

It is sometimes implied that it is impossible to diffuse power or to decentralise government in Britain effectively because we are a small country and the efficient running of the machine requires a strong centralised government. Socialists, because of their concern with maximising state power, have been particularly inclined to dismiss the idea of decentralisation of power, especially if it means transferring significant powers down from Whitehall and Westminster.

How important is it that political, economic and other types of control should be so concentrated in our capital cities as they are today? Is this essential for the efficient management of our affairs, and for achieving the task of planning and redistribution in which all socialists believe? Or is there room for a degree of decentralisation which would provide more scope for local decision making, local economic management and local control of essential services?

The first point to be made in reply to those who claim that the running of a modern state demands strong central control, especially in a socialist state, is that there are a good many other countries which prove the reverse. Power is already far more decentralised than in Britain in West Germany, Yugoslavia, the US, Switzerland and India, to name only a few. Such countries are not demonstrably worse run or more inefficient than Britain. Nor is their scale always different: Yugoslavia, Switzerland and Canada are far smaller in population than Britain but they practise a federal system effectively. They remain able to implement effective economic policies for the country as a whole. And, as the case of Yugoslavia shows, such a system is by no means incompatible with the running of a fully socialist state.

Over the last decade or two, there has been a fair amount of discussion of regional government in Britain. It was considered at some length by both the Redcliffe-Maud Commission on local government and by the Kilbrandon Commission on the constitution. The majority

of the Redcliffe-Maud Commission, while they did not recommend a major tier of regional government for Britain, preferring sixty or so all-purpose counties, did propose the creation of five indirectly elected provincial councils for England which would undertake strategic planning on the basis of structure plans from the counties. Against this, the memorandum of dissent presented by Derek Senior strongly recommended the creation of around 30 or so "city regions" corresponding to the social geography, especially the work and leisure patterns, of the population. Failing that, he favoured a dozen or so regions created by putting together two of these "city regions".

The majority of the Kilbrandon Commission were also unenthusiastic about regional government in England, even of a purely executive kind, suggesting only the establishment of regional co-ordinating and advisory councils, partly indirectly elected and partly nominated, with few responsibilities except for formulating strategic plans. But again the memorandum of dissent of Lord Crowther Hunt and Professor Peacock, which many felt presented a far more powerful case, favoured the creation of a regional tier throughout the UK, including five in England, with each having its own assembly enjoying quasi-legislative power, that is the power of making "ordinances" or byelaws. A minority within the majority (Lord Foot and Sir James Steel) proposed *executive* devolution to elected regional governments for the whole of the UK. Many people would regard the two brilliantly argued minority reports as presenting a better prescription for local government in this country today than the ideas of the two majorities.

On the whole the views of the majorities have prevailed nonetheless. Regions were given no powers in the local government reforms introduced by the Conservative government in 1972. While there has been considerable support for the notion of a regional tier within the Labour party (including on the NEC), the last Labour government concluded that it would be

wrong to disrupt local government once more so soon after the previous re-organisation; thus nothing was done. Detractors of regional government, including many within the Labour party, have used a number of arguments to criticise the idea. Regional governments exercising significant power have been held to be the divisive; to be administratively unnecessary or inconvenient; to lack any roots in local loyalties; above all, to make it more difficult for a national government, especially a Labour government, to implement its plans for economic development for the country as a whole. Such arguments have been used with a special force by centralisers (including central government officials) who rightly see that regional administration would come to represent a challenge and counterweight to Whitehall power that was far more significant than that of existing local government.

Yet none of these arguments carries much weight. National loyalties are so powerful, and the habit of thinking in national terms so deeply ingrained, that there seems little serious risk that the regions, whatever powers are given to them, could become a serious threat to national unity. A regional tier would not be administratively inconvenient if it is accompanied (as will be argued later) by a reorganisation of local government at other levels. On the contrary, it could reduce the excessive burden at present placed on the government machine at Whitehall. So far as regional loyalty is concerned, despite the ambiguous evidence quoted by the Kilbrandon Commission, it is arguable that there is today at least as great a sense of regional identity and loyalty as there is to the county, especially to the new, largely artificial counties now created. In the case of some of the regions—the South West, East Anglia, the North West and the North, for example—that sense of identity is undoubtedly greater.

Indeed the arguments used against the creation of regions in England could as well have been used against devolution for Scotland and Wales, which the last Labour government was perfectly pre-

pared to contemplate. The danger of creating disunity and the difficulty of maintaining coordinated economic policies were even greater in those cases. Conversely, the argument in favour of devolution in those cases—the apparent remoteness of Whitehall and Westminster, the need for adaptation to local conditions and tradition, the delays and difficulties in implementing effective regional policies at present—are equally cogent in the case of the English regions.

Moreover there is an obvious case for uniformity. It would always have been far better if the question of devolution for Scotland and Wales, and even the future government of Northern Ireland, had been considered, not as the short term response to immediate challenges, but as part and parcel of a deliberate programme of decentralisation for the whole of the UK. As it was, the feeling was given that the Labour government's proposals stemmed not so much from any careful consideration of the administrative and political needs of the two countries but as a purely political response to the electoral successes of the nationalists, as a bending to the wind of Scottish and Welsh nationalism. If a form of devolution—of regional government—were to be introduced for the whole of the UK, on the other hand, many of the problems encountered over devolution—the accusation that we were making a special case for Scotland, the "West Lothian" question (concerning the imbalance between the rights of Scottish and English MPs at Westminster), the charge that we were paving the way for the break up of the UK and creating a perfect platform for Scottish Nationalists—would all carry far less weight. There would in the eyes of the public be much more logic in a system that was applied uniformly for the UK as a whole.

the need for devolution

The fact is that there is a good case for a general devolution of power throughout Britain at this time, not just in Scotland and Wales, especially if the general case suggested here is accepted

(that what is needed most to allow our people a greater sense of control over their own existences is a wider decentralisation of power), then there is much sense in thinking of the creation of a tier of regional government throughout the UK.

There has never been a better time for a move towards a system of regional government than the present. There will anyway be a need for another major reform of local government in the UK (as well as, probably, for a new assault on the problem of devolution for Scotland and Wales) in the next few years. There may well be a reorganisation of the Health Service in the light of the Royal Commission's recent report. There is a fairly universal agreement, even among Conservatives, that the last local government reorganisation was a failure and that the system it introduced is unwieldy, costly and inefficient. That system has concentrated far too much authority at the county level and, outside the metropolitan areas, reduced the power of major cities, relegated to the status of districts, to absurd insignificance. Peter Shore's proposals for transferring some power, especially education and social services, to the larger districts recognised some of these difficulties. But those proposals were essentially only tinkering with the system and were only proposed because of the difficulties of introducing more sweeping reforms at that time. Now there is an opportunity for a more satisfactory and comprehensive reorganisation. It is very much to be hoped that the Labour party will come down firmly in favour of the creation of a regional tier.

Even if this is accepted, there will no doubt be much discussion of the size and type of region required. What is necessary is the creation of ten or twelve regions (including Scotland and Wales) with boundaries which correspond as far as possible to existing traditional loyalties or administrative practice. It is important to stress that this is not to create something totally new, since there already exists a tier of regional government in the purely administrative sense. Most of

the major government departments already have regional offices, though at present they operate within different boundaries (there are said to be 20 different regional structures currently operating, only three or four of which use the same boundaries). Traditionally, the most important of these (until their recent abolition) have been the regional economic planning councils. Much discussion in the past has assumed that these would be the regions adopted for regional government in England (North, North East, North West, East Midlands, West Midlands, East Anglia, South East and South West). There is no necessary reason, however, why the new regions should correspond exactly with this framework. There is a good case, if the South East is not to be totally out of proportion to the rest, for the creation of a separate region for Greater London (though in this case some joint body would be needed for strategic planning purposes); there is something to be said for dividing the South West between an Avon region, based on Bristol, and a genuine South West, based on Exeter.

A structure of 12 regions of this sort, with an average population of about 4 million, is probably about right. But consideration should at least be given to the alternative of the "city regions" favoured not only by Derek Senior but by the Ministry of Housing and Local Government in their own evidence to the Redcliffe-Maude Commission at that time. These would be very much smaller (with 35 regions in England alone) and very varied in size, with populations ranging from 300,000 to 4 million, though mainly between 500,000 and 1,500,000. They would be based on a single major city and would correspond to the way most people conceive of their own locality. The system would also have the advantage of making even the regional tier of government seem somewhat less remote from the citizens than the type of region normally discussed, and for this reason is at first sight a more attractive pattern for a decentralised system.

In practice, however, the experience of recent local government reforms shows

that even counties of the present size, far smaller than the proposed "city regions", nonetheless still appear infinitely remote to most people, so that the "city regions" would have no real advantage in this last respect. On the other hand, they would be administratively inconvenient, and the wide variation between their sizes would cause considerable problems. Above all, they would be far too small ever to become an effective counter weight to Whitehall: the smaller the size of the regions the less likely it is that effective power would be transferred to them from Whitehall (which should perhaps be the main purpose of decentralisation) and the more likely it is that the grandmothing from Whitehall would continue as today. This is a decisive argument against the small "city region" though it would still be possible to adopt the "large city region", or sub-province, proposed by Derek Senior, of which there would be 12 to 15 in England (usually joining a strong "city region" with a weaker one). Whatever the size of the regions adopted, it is to be hoped that they would be given real names (Tyne, Mersey, York, Wessex) rather than the grim and forbidding geographical titles normally used today.

the distribution of powers

The major difficulty is the exact distribution of powers. The main danger in moving to regional government is that it could be used as the opportunity to transfer powers upwards from the present counties (so making local government even more remote than today) rather than down from Whitehall. It is essential to avoid this danger. The major purpose must be a genuine diffusion of effective power from the centre to the regions.

Ideally the new regions should be given powers as extensive as those previously proposed for Scotland under the Scotland Act. What this means is that they should be more than purely executive bodies carrying out within their own region policies formed in London. The attempt during the devolution debate to make a strict distinction between legis-

lative and executive devolution was always misconceived, since no precise dividing line can be drawn. As the Kilbrandon Report pointed out, the policy making function is the important one; once it has been agreed that the regions have a role in determining policy in their own areas, they begin to exercise a quasi legislative power, even if it is exercised by the passing of regulations, byelaws or ordinances, rather than "laws". Even in a fully federal state, such as West Germany, the distinction is blurred: though formally the Länder have legislative power, this is only in three carefully specified fields—on most other subjects they act as executive agents on behalf of the federal government. In our own system, ultimate sovereignty would always remain at Westminster, but considerable power in particular areas would be delegated to the regional authorities. In practice, whether the system is called federal, "legislative devolution" or "executive devolution", what always results is a deliberate *sharing* of powers. What is important is not the precise definition of the division of powers, but the spirit in which the system is operated; and this will be equally the case however the system is labelled.

There is thus no reason why, with sufficient goodwill, a fully federal system should not be practicable in Britain: the outraged horror which is sometimes expressed about the idea within the Labour party seems often to reflect an imperfect understanding of what that term applies. But for the same reason—because it is the spirit rather than the letter which is important—it is doubtful also whether there is much to be gained by establishing such a system in the UK. In practice there could be a greater degree of effective decentralisation without a precisely defined sharing of sovereignty such as a federal system presupposes; and the experience of federal states in recent years, notably in Australia, Canada and the US, has indicated that a rigid division of authority laid down in statutory form can lead to many problems when a changed situation indicates the need for adjustment. In practice a division of powers which is estab-

lished only through the normal legislative process and can be amended in the same way—rather than through the special procedures normally provided for “constitutional” amendment—provides the greater flexibility that is required.

What are the powers that the region should exercise? At the minimum the region should have control of regional development, strategic planning (including the location of industry), police, fire services, water and sewerage, major roads (except motorways), public transport, airports and possibly ports, further (not higher) education and specialised education (for the mentally and physically handicapped). The regions should also exercise certain overall powers in the field of health and hospitals. But it is doubtful whether the regional authority should take over direct responsibility for health service planning: more likely there should continue to be a separate regional health authority (in identical regions) which would be responsible for planning, with some provision for mutual representation. The regions would take over, or at least coordinate, the work of the regional arts and sports councils. The existing regional offices of central government departments (for example environment, industry, trade, employment and DHSS) would be taken over. There would be a number of other areas in which some power should be transferred from Whitehall to the regions: these would include police and the probation service (where Home Office interference at present often causes strong local resentment), part of the administration of environmental health, agriculture, education and employment.

In other words, the regional authorities would not only be exercising functions now undertaken by local authorities, they would take over some at present undertaken by central government and others undertaken by *ad hoc* bodies, often not accountable, created for the purpose. It is often forgotten that it is only since 1945 that local authorities lost control of hospitals, gas, electricity, trunk roads, water, sewerage and environmental health, with their responsibilities being

given to national or *ad hoc* bodies. This is one of the many ways central government has proliferated (since 1900, the number of civil servants has increased twelvefold). Yet two thirds of civil servants already work at regional or local level. What is needed is a tier of elected regional government to take responsibility for them.

If there is to be any genuine decentralisation of power, it is essential that the regions should enjoy independent revenue raising powers. Without these, they would lack the independence which is the essential purpose of decentralisation and which local government at present so conspicuously lacks. Thus the regions should have the authority to raise money through a local income tax, a sales tax and/or possibly taxes on motor vehicles and petrol. At the very least, there should be a system by which a particular proportion of central revenues was automatically allocated to the regions (not granted through discretion as at present). The total revenues of the regions would then be made up of an assessed share of national taxes, locally levied taxes, equalisation grant and perhaps loans. It might be necessary for central government to retain some power to limit the total level of expenditure or at least of loans, as part of its general powers of economic management. But such powers should be used only with great discretion. Decentralisation has little meaning unless it includes a considerable independence of local bodies from central control. (The Conservatives who once preached the virtues of local government autonomy are now busily trying to destroy it by abolishing financial independence.)

There would be a directly elected regional assembly or council; a regional government or administration (just as the regions in West Germany or Yugoslavia have their own “governments”), and a regional leader of the assembly or “chief minister” (as in West Germany) with his own cabinet.

One of the main purposes of this type of decentralisation is to encourage a far

greater *diversity* in government. Regions with effective powers and adequate financial resources could create their own type of society within their own regions in their own way. A far greater variation in the character of different regions might emerge than exists today. Labour regions might be in a position to introduce a significant measure of socialism within their own area, whatever type of government was in power in London. "Regionalisation" in some cases could be a substitute for "nationalisation". Regional activities of many kinds could be promoted: industrial, commercial, artistic. Such diversity between regions need not involve *inequality*: central government action would still be required on a considerable scale to ensure (through regional policy, rate support grants or other measures) that inequalities in wealth between regions were counteracted.

community councils

Beneath the regions the counties would be abolished. There would be 150 to 200 districts in England, with populations of about 150,000-250,000 (though there would be no need for uniformity, and boundaries should be based on local realities). The districts would be responsible for education, social services, housing, all local planning, environmental health, community health and GP services, consumer protection, roads apart from major roads, libraries, refuse disposal and lighting.

The only controversial question here concerns education. The DES, in its evidence to the Radcliffe-Maud Commission, claimed that there was some evidence that efficiency of educational administration was less in the smaller authorities. But the DES admitted that there were good education authorities throughout the size range. One of the research papers commissioned by the Commission concluded that size was *not* a factor determining effectiveness and that educational *policy* was the only factor that could be regarded as decisive in determining the performance of different authorities.

Many who have lived in the former county boroughs can attest that the standard of educational administration and provision has often seriously declined since responsibility was taken over by a county council with a much larger population. Moreover, even if there was some sacrifice in "efficiency" (which can only be judged on highly subjective criteria), that price may be worth paying for more genuinely local control, with greater accessibility of the authority to parents and public (which itself represents a form of efficiency).

The system should be a two level and not a two tier system: that is, districts would be autonomous in their own spheres and not subject to control by the regions, though in the field of education a possible variation would be to give general education policy (as well as specialised education) to the regions, and educational administration to the districts.

But to most people today districts themselves, though the lowest tier in the existing system, appear remote and inaccessible. They do not represent "local" government in any meaningful sense. And they certainly do not reflect any real sense of community. This was shown by research carried out by the Redcliffe-Maude Commission, which revealed that more than 50 per cent of people in towns (except small towns) regard a group of streets, and not the town, as representing the home area or their community, whilst in the countryside almost everybody regarded either the parish or part of the parish as their community. It was for this reason that almost the only thing on which all members of the Commission agreed was for the establishment of "local councils" which would be closer to the community and more directly representative of local feelings. Yet though this was one of the only unanimous recommendations, it was also almost the only one totally ignored in the subsequent local government reorganisation.

There is a strong case for creating a new, lower tier of "community councils" which would correspond with people's

sense of community, serving populations of only a thousand or two, the village in the countryside, the urban parish or similar districts in the city. These would act primarily as the voice of their community on all matters which affected it. On any question concerning amenities or rights, proposals of higher authorities concerning schools, roads, street lighting, sewerage, traffic, development and so on, their duty would be to call public meetings for local discussion of the matter and subsequently to transmit the opinion of the community to the appropriate authority (which would have the corresponding duty to consult such community bodies) and represent it in discussions at the higher level. These are the matters on which most people have the greatest concern and are most anxious to have their say, and about which they find the remoteness of present day authorities most frustrating. The community councils might also nominate members to serve on local institutions, such as schools management boards, amenity societies and so on. They would attend meetings of the district councils to present local views where necessary. Finally, they would have the power to spend money, locally raised, for local community purposes: on parks, gardens, lighting, museums and theatres (perhaps shared with other communities), benches, footpaths and community festivals.

It is to be hoped that a local government structure of this sort—with *regions* wielding significant powers and financially independent, *districts* performing many of the tasks of the present counties but far closer to the people and *community councils* at the lowest level corresponding to the real living community—could make possible a genuine diffusion of power and influence of the kind the current centralised system makes impossible. At present, the universal power of central government, the continued control by the various Whitehall ministries of nearly all the activities of councils, the large size of the existing counties and above all the strict financial control by the Treasury mean that there scarcely exists any true local government. The type of structure proposed here might

do something to break this stranglehold of centralised authority. In Labour controlled regions, it might even make possible the introduction of some partial measures of socialism, whatever the government in power in Westminster. It would certainly bring government in many important fields closer to ordinary people.

3. the role of non-official organisations

Most people have little contact, for most of their lives, with official organisations. The reorganisation of the structure of government, even a significant decentralisation of government, would make little difference to the day to day existence of most of the population. The interests and aspirations of many, probably the majority of people, are directed towards activities and organisations that do not fall within any governmental structure.

Neither decentralisation nor increasing the opportunities for people to influence government will therefore much affect ordinary people. All are today in favour of wider "participation" of the public in decision making. However, the number of people anxious to participate in official bodies, or in the formal structure of local government, is limited. More opportunity to share in decisions could be given by a wider resort to referenda or other forms of consultation at national and local level. There is a great deal to be said for carrying out referenda, especially on local matters, such as the system of education, traffic control or the social services. But such consultation can at best be only sporadic and occasional. It can scarcely be said to represent the type of participation to which many attach most importance.

What is, however, far more significant is the ability to take part in a range of activities that do not fall under official auspices at all: to have a share in the local residents' association, women's institute, consumer group, amenity association, the local sports club, the pigeon fanciers association, the darts league, the chess club and any number of other activities at the grass roots. And it is partly because they *are* unofficial that participation in such activities is so much valued and enjoyed.

These are the activities which most determine the quality of life of most people. Yet they play no part, or very little part, in party political programmes. However the ability to take part effectively in such activities can be affected by official policies. In part this is a purely financial question. Some of these groups could

not function without assistance from local authorities and central government, and would function far better if they had more help. A Labour government of the future must recognise that expenditure devoted to assisting such activities may be more relevant to people's needs, and therefore money better spent, than much presently spent by local government, for example on bigger and better town halls, on larger road building programmes or some official junketing. It would be seen by people as better spent, not only because its benefits would be more immediately visible but because the encouragement of local groups corresponds more closely to their own aspirations.

Secondly, and more important, such activities often require or benefit from premises which it is difficult or impossible for local groups to provide for themselves. It is here that public action is most required. No programme in a local or central government manifesto would arouse greater enthusiasm than a commitment to establish new or improved facilities, in community centres or purpose built clubs, for activities of this kind. In some cases there may be a need for paid organisers or for other assistance to enable such activities to flourish; here too it would be wise for Labour groups to cater for such needs. It is, for example, less costly and in some ways more beneficial for a council to provide facilities for playgroups run by parents, with an organiser to assist them, than to provide full scale nursery provision for preschool children (a lesson which some areas are now being obliged to learn in the wake of Tory cuts).

Finally, what some of these organisations most require is simply recognition. A local amenity group may be able to achieve something merely by publicity for their case in the local press, or by lobbying local councillors. But they can achieve much more (and the concern and dedication of their members can secure a far better reward) if they receive some official acknowledgement from the local authority concerned, if they are regularly received by the planning com-

mittee, if they are consulted by the chief planning officer whenever a matter about which they are concerned comes up. The parent-teacher association may achieve something by meeting once a term at the local school; it can achieve much more if it has regular official access to the chief education officer, or if the local education committee consults with such associations as a routine matter. So it is not only a commitment to provide financial resources which a party concerned with such activities should make. It is, far more, a commitment to take seriously the role such organisations can play within society and to give them a recognised place: to acknowledge, in other words, that the official structure cannot always do everything, and that there is a need to give greater support and recognition to this vast unofficial network of activities which provides so much satisfaction to those involved in them.

community organisations

The organisations which have the most valuable part of all to play are those which most fully represent the local community. In the countryside, there is already a focus for this in the village hall and in the activities that take place there (the women's institute, the choral society, the flower show and so on) though there does not always exist even here a genuine community body to which all in the village automatically belong. But it is in the towns that there is the greatest lack of community focus and activities, and the most need for public support to make them possible. Ideally there should be everywhere, in the cities as in the countryside, a community association with its own purpose built premises, serving a population of not more than a thousand, for, as we saw, it is a population of this size that most people regard as representing their own community. For the moment, probably, financial constraints may have the effect that such centres will cover wider areas and serve larger populations. But whatever the size of the population concerned, there should be community centres every-

where accessible to every individual who feels the need to play a part in them. They should provide the base for youth clubs, adult organisations, amenity groups, good neighbour schemes, community service organisations and all the hobbies and interest groups which may wish to use the facilities. Community service groups, based in such centres, could, at little greater cost than unemployment benefit, channel the energies of young people into activities serving the community as a whole.

Other informal organisations that may require encouragement or help are those that serve the school. Parent-teachers organisations, with sufficient assistance, could play a much bigger role than they are usually allowed to do. If parents wish to arrange extra-curricular activities under the auspices of the association, this should be encouraged. Fund raising activities could be organised. Given a larger role, the associations can represent a more significant base of support for the school within the community. Pre-school playgroups, using the accommodation that a declining school population leaves empty, can be given more equipment and other help, for the benefit of mothers and their children. There are often a number of parents ready and even anxious to help run such activities. It is the organisation and facilities that are needed and it is these that public assistance can provide.

There are comparable groups needing help in the field of housing: tenants' associations for council estates to enable them (as the Labour government's lapsed Housing Bill would have provided) to have a more effective share in running their own estates; housing associations, which should be made genuinely self-governing and democratic; housing cooperatives which may need financial or other assistance.

More self-help in running sporting activities should be encouraged. Public action may be essential in providing the necessary facilities and major equipment but even here some of the money required could be raised by locally organised

fund raising activities and appeals. The organisation of teams and training can normally be left to the devoted efforts of individual trainers and clubs so long as a minimum of financial assistance is provided.

There is even a case for some official stimulation of pressure groups of various kinds. Local consumer groups can do an invaluable job in surveying local facilities, shops, restaurants, schools, garages, servicing facilities and much else. However, they may badly require some assistance in cash or kind (such as secretarial help or office space) to get them off the ground, and a helping hand from the local council may be more effective as well as cheaper than the creation of official consumer advice bureaux.

A future Labour government is likely to be faced with serious financial restraints that will inhibit its ability to undertake too many costly commitments. But the kind of policy here advocated is not expensive: it may cost less in the long run to foster self-help and local initiative, which are self-financing, than to try to provide every service on taxes or rates. Moreover, this will also cut out some of the frustration and delays of an elaborate bureaucratic structure. The elimination, or the reduction, of unnecessary bureaucracy should be one of the main objectives of any future Labour administration and developments of the kind described may be one way of achieving it.

Socialism was once supposed to be all about community and comradeship. Much of that spirit has now been lost, but it is towards the recreation of this ideal that the Labour party should now try to move. The encouragement of community organisations which use to the full the community feelings which happily remain still so powerful may be the best way of bringing this about.

4. socialism at the workplace

In the eyes of many members of the Labour party, probably the most important single element in any attempt to create a system of socialism at the grass roots is socialism at the place of work.

There is nothing new in the concept of socialising the individual enterprise. Many early socialists, such as Robert Owen, saw their ambition not in the creation of a socialist state but in the establishment of the socialist enterprise. Their concern was to ensure, by establishing self-managed cooperatives, that the worker was given the sense that he was working not for others but for himself, that he was a partner in an undertaking run as a joint effort in the interests of all its members and not therefore the instrument of the capitalist, running the company for his own private profit or that of absentee shareholders.

Many people would accept that this is the ultimate objective in creating a socialist society. Yet in Britain, though the Labour party has had 17 years of rule since 1945, and though large numbers of industries have come under state ownership during that time, it is doubtful if a single worker in any one of them has been given any more sense of working in a shared cooperative endeavour, or feels any less a cog in a vast machine run by a small elite beyond his own control, than do workers in private industry. In other words, we have failed in what is perhaps the main object in establishing a socialist society and a socialist organisation of industry. To use Marxist terminology, the workers' sense of alienation is no less in the enterprises brought under public ownership in Britain than in the bad old days before socialism was born or thought of.

In recent times there has been much discussion within the Labour party of measures to bring about some degree of workers control, industrial democracy of "participation". (A number of Fabian pamphlets have discussed aspects of this subject as has the present author in his book, *Socialism Without the State*, 1979.)

Everybody has always agreed in principle

that some form of industrial democracy is desirable, even if they have disagreed about how it should be implemented. The last Labour government commissioned a Royal Commission report and published a subsequent white paper on the question. But at the end of the day, more than fifty years after the Labour party first came to power and after three recent periods of Labour government, still nothing has been done.

Many of the changes and undoubted reforms which have been introduced by Labour governments have been far more peripheral to the heart of socialist thinking and endeavour. Yet this, the most crucial of all measures for changing the lives of the working population and transforming or at least modifying the control of industry, has not been put into effect. This failure could leave the industrial worker with the impression that the Labour party is more concerned with the mechanics of government and state control at national level than he is with the welfare and work satisfaction of the worker on the shop floor. Here too there is a need for a change in the emphasis of labour thinking and policies; towards the areas of most concern to ordinary people, their style of living and working, and away from the broad national issues by which Whitehall and Westminster are still so transfixed.

The way to achieve this is for the Labour party to become fully committed to the expansion of the system of industrial cooperatives. While the party has always in theory approved of cooperatives, while it has always had a close link with the cooperative movement and party, and while it has given incidental and temporary (but always insufficient) support to individual cooperatives (usually established in failing firms), the promotion of the cooperative system in industry has never played a major part in Labour thinking or policy. Traditionally, the party has thought always in terms of "nationalisation", the taking into public ownership of entire industries, or occasionally entire enterprises such as BL, and then running them in practice almost the same way as before: that is, they have

been placed under the control of boards every bit as remote, inaccessible and immune to influence by the workers, or by the public outside (even sometimes by the government), as those of private companies. No steps have been taken in any of these industries to establish any effective system of industrial democracy. Still less have the workers in *individual* worker directors to existing boards, particularly coal mines, shipyards or power stations—been given any significant degree of industrial democracy. Nor, apart from short term financial assistance, have any great efforts been made to assist the cooperative principle to succeed, and be seen to succeed (as the Mondragon cooperatives have in Spain), even where cooperatives do already exist.

This may seem a strange record for a socialist party which has enjoyed several periods in office. For many, the cooperative enterprise, genuinely self-managed by all its workers, represents the peak of socialist organisation and one which more genuinely fulfils the ideals and aspirations of early socialists than the mammoth nationalised corporations which Labour governments have created. It is a concept that goes far beyond the "participation", the election of a few worker directors to existing boards, which has so much preoccupied and divided the party in recent years. Yet the record of other countries—Yugoslavia and Spain for example—show that cooperatives are not necessarily condemned to economic failure, nor need they be confined to small scale undertakings. Even the record of such organisations as the Glacier Metal Co and the John Lewis Partnership in Britain (started without any assistance from the government and run effectively on cooperative principles) should be enough to show that such undertakings are quite capable of being commercially viable once established. It is getting them off the ground that is difficult. It is here that a future Labour government will have a vital role to play.

A revival of proposals for "participation" on the lines suggested by Bullock would be no substitute for a commitment on cooperatives. The public debate that took

place on the Bullock proposals revealed the contradiction within them. Many unions were dubious about the weakening of their own bargaining role that might occur if they were given a shaky seat on the other side of the bargaining table. The concessions that were therefore given (making the unions the sole channel for representation of shop floor workers) appeared to most of the public to represent a negation of genuine industrial democracy, or indeed of any kind of democracy—that is, of the right of those being represented to choose for themselves who should be the candidates and to elect them directly. Ironically, moreover, these concessions only accentuated the difficulty expressed by many trade unions about the likely blurring of their own role since they ensured that it was they themselves that would be bargaining on both sides of the table.

Participation is in any case a poor substitute for the principle of the cooperative. Any meaningful attempt to create a socialist enterprise must begin with the system of ownership. A future Labour government should therefore ensure that the fiction that the enterprise is owned by the shareholders (who in most cases have never been near it, let alone understand its working or management) by virtue of purchasing a piece of paper is abandoned. Shareholders should be seen as what they are: lenders of capital to the enterprise. Whether they receive a fixed interest return on their investment, or a variable dividend according to the enterprise's fortunes, should not affect their status in this respect. In practice, they already only function as suppliers of capital since very few shareholders exercise any of the prerogatives of ownership, turn up at shareholders' meetings for example, to influence the way the enterprise is run. Even when they do, they are usually outvoted and out argued by the representatives of existing management. The most illogical effect of the present situation is that the profits, which are the rewards of successful effort, go not to those who have contributed effort to that success, in other words to the workers and management who brought it about, but to those who have

done nothing whatever to achieve it, the shareholders who have merely sat on their backsides and waited for the dividends to roll in.

Those who have a genuine "share" in the enterprise are those who work within it. It is these who should be, in fact and in name, the "shareholders". This could be achieved through a procedure under which a transfer of ordinary shares occurred, either immediately or gradually, from those who are only passively involved in the company to those who are actively involved. In time, the shareholders would become synonymous with the workers (which would include the management). The shareholders' meeting would bring together, as it does not today, those who have a direct stake in the company and a knowledge of its operations. Such a meeting could then genuinely become the sovereign body (which the present shareholders' meeting, which few shareholders attend and is dominated by a few financial institutions, can never be) that decides the destiny of the enterprise. No doubt such a meeting would usually, as today, content itself with a general discussion of the company's affairs and the election, or occasionally the replacement, of directors or managers who would in practice run the firm between whiles. The essence of control (as the financial institutions, which at present exercise power, know only too well) is not to be able to interfere with each management decision reached but to determine who it is that reaches them. And since the long term interest of the workers will be the same as that of the shareholders today (that is the overall success of the enterprise) there is no reason to suppose that they will interfere damagingly in the running of the firm any more than they do in the many successful cooperatives that already exist all over the world.

There may be cases—the transnational corporation, the very large firm generally, parts of the service sector—where there are difficulties about applying the co-operative system in the fullest sense. But here at least the basic principle—that the rewards for success should go to

those who have achieved it, those who work within the enterprise, rather than to those who have merely lent capital—should be implemented. Thus a future Labour government should at the very least be committed to the introduction of a scheme of universal profit sharing, throughout the economy, including the nationalised industries.

There is also a case, if industrial power is to be generally diffused, for decentralisation within the enterprise, to the shop floor and to groups of workers within the shop floor. Sweden has led the way in experiments in giving small groups of workers an autonomous existence even within larger enterprises, having their own tasks to perform in their own way and with the incentive of a group bonus. There are differences of view about how successful these have been in the purely economic sense (though it is difficult to believe that Volvo's recent difficulties have resulted from the use of this system). But from a social and industrial relations point of view they have undoubtedly been outstandingly successful in enriching the work of the individual employee and giving him a sense of control over his own activities. Nothing would do more to break down the oppressive character of large scale organisations and to recreate a sense of initiative within highly automated operations than to establish small self-sufficient units of this sort. If each such group of six to ten workers could send representatives to a workers' committee of the shop floor as a whole and if this in turn were represented in the factory works council, a far more genuinely democratic system within the factory would be created than through direct representation at the highest level alone through a trade union. It is building from the bottom to the top, rather than *vice versa*, which would provide the basis for a genuine diffusion of power to the grass roots level. If the Labour party is to appear to factory workers to be genuinely concerned about the betterment of their working conditions, it is to this, rather than to some of the forms of participation mainly discussed, that it should be devoting its attention.

5. conclusion: micro-socialism and macro-socialism

The gist of the argument so far put forward in this pamphlet can be expressed as follows.

1. The Labour party in the past has been excessively preoccupied by *macro-socialism* (the organisation of state power, especially its economic power) and not enough with *micro-socialism* (the rooting of socialism in the living community within which ordinary people live and work). What matters to people is not whether one or two more industries are nationalised, the precise structure of the health service, the organisation of government departments and parliamentary activities but rather what happens at the lowest level of all—the degree of satisfaction they can acquire at their work, how well the local school is run and how they can influence this, the organisation of affairs on their council estate, the preservation of local amenities within the village or street and so on. It is these, not the system of organisation at the top, which most determines the quality of life for most people.

2. Concentration on this level of activity would give a chance to the Labour party to re-focus attention on the question which was once the central concern of all socialists: the establishment of a sense of community. It is this which large scale organisations of all kinds, including the bureaucratic structure of the modern state, has threatened and sometimes even destroyed. And it is this which the activities of recent Labour governments, with their emphasis on the organisation of power at national level, have done little to foster.

3. Such a programme is not less but more radical than those which have been put forward by the Labour party in recent elections. The replacement of the capitalist system by a system of industrial cooperatives, the establishment of a new tier of regional government in Britain with effective economic powers, the regeneration of community activity in street and parish—these are not small but fundamental changes in our present social, political and economic structure. They are changes which will transform people's

lives more dramatically than tinkering with the structure of economic organisation at the top, than replacing a set of private directors with a set of public directors in one or two industries or firms, creating a new ministry or agency.

4. Although such changes are radical, they probably correspond far more closely with the aspirations of large sections of the public than a further programme of large scale nationalisation and much else which features so prominently in Labour party programmes. We should not adopt particular programmes simply because we believe they are popular. But we should certainly not be deterred from embarking on a strategy we believe to be desirable because it may also be popular. A programme on the lines suggested would prove popular precisely because it corresponds with the aspirations and beliefs of the bulk of the population.

5. A new emphasis on micro-socialism would also mean that it need not be necessary to await the re-election of another Labour government in Westminster before anything could be done. Some of the changes could be introduced at the local level, by Labour county or district councils, or Labour regional assemblies (if the regional tier is created as here suggested), regardless of what government was in power nationally.

6. Under such a policy, the Labour party would remain the party that is committed to higher levels of public spending and better welfare services. But much of the money would come to be levied at local level and the services would be organised on a local basis (though some kind of equalisation grant would still be required—perhaps more than ever—to remedy the inequalities between different areas).

This pamphlet has attempted to outline the essential features of such a programme: a policy concerned with people rather than power, with the community rather than the country as a whole, with creating socialism at the grass roots, rather than in vast state structures and

national organisations which do little to improve the quality of people's lives.

Of course, our programme cannot consist only of such proposals, nor can we forget altogether about the exercise of power at the national level. Even if power can be decentralised, as it should be, the state will continue to exist and electors will be concerned about what political parties intend to do at the state level. During the next few years, therefore, the Labour party will need to hammer out policies to convince the public that we can solve the country's most serious problems, above all those of the economy. We shall need to show that we can produce the growth the country has so lamentably lacked (and which will be necessary to finance the increases in public spending we shall also rightly be proposing). We shall need to come forward with a credible incomes policy, such as will be required both to keep inflation under control and to bring about a fairer distribution of income (a proposal which successive opinion polls show the mass of the electorate favours). We shall need to have policies to deal with the problems of energy conservation and the environment generally, the importance of which more and more electors are rightly recognising.

It has not been my purpose to cover here the whole range of policies a future Labour programme will need to include. Other pamphlets and party documents will amply cover these. My aim has been simply to show that if we are to come up with a policy which will appear relevant to the deepest concerns and aspirations of our people and if we are to hope to resolve some of the most difficult problems of our age—those of the alienation and frustration created by large scale organisation—we shall need a programme designed to create not only a more socialist state at national level but the type of socialism at the grass roots which will also provide the satisfactions felt to be most important by the man and woman in the street.

recent fabian pamphlets

research series

327	Howard Glennerster (ed)	Labour's social priorities	55p
331	Chris Ralph	The picket and the law	60p
333	Nicholas Bosanquet	Economic strategy: a new social contract	75p
334	Carl Wilms Wright	Transnational corporations	75p
335	Vincent Cable	Import controls: the case against	70p
336	Christopher Parsons	Finance for development or survival ?	75p
337	Robin Cook, Dan Smith	What future in NATO ?	75p
338	Alan Fox	Socialism and shop floor power	60p
339	Peter Archer	The role of the law officers	75p
340	Deepak Lal	Poverty, power and prejudice	75p
341	Tom Sheriff	A deindustrialised Britain ?	60p
342	David Scott Bell	Eurocommunism	80p
343	J. Goode, D. Roy, A. Sedgewick	Energy policy : a reappraisal	80p

tracts

438	Anthony Crosland	Social democracy in Europe	55p
448	Lisanne Radice	Reforming the House of Commons	50p
451	Dianne Hayter	The labour party : crisis and prospects	60p
453	Nicholas Falk	Think small : enterprise and the economy	75p
455	David Watkins	Industrial common ownership	65p
457	Tom Crowe, John H. Jones	The computer and society	50p
458	Robert Taylor	Labour and the social contract	65p
459	A Fabian Group	Deserting the middle ground	50p
460	Walter Jaehnig	Family service for mentally handicapped	60p
461	A Fabian Group	Creating a caring community	65p
462	Bryan Gould and others	The politics of monetarism	60p
463	Austin Mitchell	Can Labour win again ?	75p
464	Giles Radice	Community socialism	65p
465	Peter Scott	What future for higher education ?	70p
466	C. Pond, L. Burghes, B. Smith	Taxing wealth inequalities	65p
467	Trevor Barnes	Open up !	65p

young fabian pamphlets

37	David R. Allan	Socialising the company	50p
42	Martin Smith	Gypsies : where now ?	40p
44	Melvyn Westlake	World poverty : the growing conflict	70p
45	Geoff Harris	A wider Europe	50p
46	David Elliott	The Lucas Aerospace workers' campaign	60p
47	Tom Schuller	Education through life	65p
48	Mark Swift	A regional policy for Europe	70p

books

R. H. S. Crossman and others	New Fabian Essays	cased £1.75
Brian Abel-Smith and others	Socialism and affluence	paper £0.60
Peter Townsend and others	The fifth social service	paper £2.50
George Cunningham (ed)	Britain and the world in the 1970s	cased £3.00

socialism at the grass roots

The Labour Party, in seeking to achieve both greater equality and more public control over economic affairs, has been preoccupied by the organisation of power at the level of the state and has virtually ignored the meaning socialism should have in the living community in which people live and work. Evan Luard therefore suggests that in future the party should turn its attention to the establishment of a sense of community. In particular, power should be devolved so that decisions are taken where their effects are felt. In local government, this would mean the creation of a regional tier below which many decisions would be devolved to district and to community councils. The informal, voluntary sector should be recognised and encouraged so that local groups either providing services or meeting for recreation can flourish. At the workplace, priority should be given to putting cooperative principles into practice.

As a councillor, MP and minister, Evan Luard has seen how government works. Here he suggests how changes could be made so that the lives of ordinary men and women can really be improved and enriched and a sense of community created within society.

fabian society

The Fabian Society exists to further socialist education and research. It is affiliated to the Labour Party, both nationally and locally, and embraces all shades of socialist opinion within its ranks — left, right and centre. Since 1884 the Fabian Society has enrolled thoughtful socialists who are prepared to discuss the essential questions of democratic socialism and relate them to practical plans for building socialism in a changing world. Beyond this the Society has no collective policy. It puts forward no resolutions of a political character. The Society's members are active in their Labour parties, trade unions and co-operatives. They are representative of the labour movement, practical people concerned to study and discuss problems that matter.

The Society is organised nationally and locally. The national Society, directed by an elected Executive Committee, publishes pamphlets and holds schools and conferences of many kinds. Local Societies—there are one hundred of them—are self governing and are lively centres of discussion and also undertake research.

April 1980

Cover design by Dick Leadbetter
Civic Street, Glasgow G4 9RH

Printed by Civic Press Limited (TU),
ISBN 7163 0468 6 ISSN 0307 7535

