



The Labour Party is in a serious state —

how has this
situation come
about and what
are the prospects?

The Labour Party - why the decline?

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Introduction¹

The result of the General Election in May 1979 was a major defeat for the Labour Party and the left. The swing against Labour was the biggest ever, apart from that of 1931, and the Communist Party's results were amongst its worst ever. Labour's share of the poll was 37%, representing the votes of only 28% of the electorate, its worst performance since 1931. However, the substantial shift to the right in British politics that was reflected in the election showed itself in the form more of a dramatic recovery by the Conservative Party than of a dramatic collapse by Labour². For the truth is that the Labour Party has been in decline as a political force, at least in terms of electoral support and membership, since the early 1950s. The proportion of the electorate voting Labour reached its maximum in 1951, over 40%, and since then has declined in every election except that in 1966. Individual membership of the Labour Party, as officially recorded, fell from its peak of 1 million in 1952, to 675,000 in 1978, with some unofficial estimates putting the actual figure below 300,000.

This article is concerned with the reasons for this post-war decline of the Labour Party as a political force as a basis for an assessment of its prospects. The central argument can be summarised as follows. Labour's political strength has been at its greatest when its policies were seen as the only or best way forward for Britain for sections of the people far wider than its traditional social base, the manual working class. This political hegemony occurred above all in 1945 but to a lesser extent also in 1964/66. However, the two situations differed markedly in their outcome. The 1945 Labour government, on the basis of a widespread consensus, was able to carry through successfully a major programme of economic and social reform. This was possible because the structural reforms were necessary for the post-war stabilisation and recovery of British capitalism and yet at the same time benefited Labour's traditional supporters. Although, as the political climate changed with the onset of the Cold War, Labour lost some of its wider support, its solid achievements enabled it to consolidate the support of its traditional manual working class base. By contrast, the 1964/66 Labour Governments' attempt to modernise British capitalism could only have succeeded at the expense of Labour's traditional supporters and, although it initially enjoyed widespread support, in the event the attempt failed. This failure resulted in some loss of Labour's wider support but most strikingly it led to a renewal of the long-term process of erosion of Labour's traditional base which had been temporarily halted by the promise of success in 1964/66. This erosion of Labour's traditional electoral base has occurred for two reasons. First, because the manual working class is becoming a smaller proportion of the population as a whole due to

long-term economic and social changes. Second, because within the manual working class there has been significant flight from Labour as a result of long-term political and ideological changes reinforced by reactions against the policies pursued by Labour Governments from the mid-1960s onwards. The outcome of these developments has been predictable. The right response has been to stress the need for Labour to be a national party, unfettered by traditional class and socialist preoccupations. The left response has been contradictory but a predominant theme has been an insistence on a return to the working class base and a reaffirmation of socialist principles. However, to be effective, the left needs to come to terms with two crucial problems. First, there is the tendency on both left and right to confuse class and sectional interests, with the right misrepresenting sectional concerns as class concerns and the left often defending sectional interests as if they were class interests yet not demonstrating any connection between the two. Second, there is the historical problem for the left of socialism having become identified in popular consciousness with bureaucratic 'statism' rather than with the extension of democracy in the sense of the creation by the people of the conditions enabling them collectively and individually to control their own lives.

The next section examines briefly some central characteristics of the Labour Party. The following two sections discuss the experience of the periods 1945-mid 1960s and mid 1960s-1979, with particular reference to changes in Labour Party ideology and Labour's relations with the unions, with the manual working class and with social strata other than manual workers. An attempt is then made at an assessment and certain tentative conclusions are suggested.

Central Characteristics of the Labour Party

Historically, the Labour Party is the party of the manual working class and its trade unions. This has been especially the case as far as financial provision and electoral support are concerned, but it has also been true to a lesser extent of the Party's activists. The relationship between the Party and the unions has always been and remains central. Even at the height of constituency party representation at the Labour Party Conference in 1953, the trade union vote was 80% of the total, and in 1977 it had reached 90%. At the same time, the Party historically has been a political alliance between non-socialist reformers, reformist socialists and fundamentalist socialists. Much of the tension within the Labour Party stems from its dual role as the means through which the organised working class has sought to further its interests at the political level within capitalist Britain and the vehicle, at least in the eyes of its politically advanced members, for achieving socialism in Britain. The co-existence and interdependence of these two roles has given the Labour Party tremendous strength, for while the former has predominated in fact, the latter has provided the moral vision and basis for constantly renewed commitment and enthusiasm.

The interests of the organised working class at the political level have been furthered by two broad categories of legislation. First,

¹ This article draws heavily on the work of L Minkin, especially L Minkin and P Seyd, "The British Labour Party", ch 5 of *Social Democratic Parties in Western Europe*, edited by W Paterson and A Thomas (Croom Helm, 1977); L Minkin, "The Labour Party has not been hi-jacked", *New Society*, 6th October 1977; L Minkin, "The Party Connection: Divergence and Convergence in the British Labour Movement", *Government and Opposition* Autumn 1978; and P Seyd and L Minkin, "The Labour Party and its Members", *New Society*, 20th Sept. 1979. I should like to thank D Howell and L Minkin for valuable general discussion and helpful comments on an earlier draft.

² Between October 1974 and May 1979 the Conservative's share of the poll increased from 35.8% to 43.9%, while Labour's share fell from 39.2% to 36.9%.



there is the legislative framework concerned with democratic rights and liberties, with trade union organisation and collective bargaining, which determines the legal rights available to people in organising and working to defend or improve their conditions of life. Second, there are the legal provisions relating to conditions of employment and work, and the state's activities in providing housing, education, health and welfare services, social security, and so on, which determine the 'social wage'. The record of the 1945-51 Labour governments in both categories was impressive, albeit to a considerable extent on the basis of bipartisan policies worked out during the war. On the foundation of this solid achievement, Labour's mass support was consolidated and increased. Of course, these Labour governments, like all Labour governments so far, were firmly controlled by the centre-right of the Party. Historically, the Labour Left, particularly when Labour has been in office, have acquiesced to an oppositional role acting as the socialist conscience of the Party. The emergence of Benn and the forces around him represents something relatively new — a left challenge of a non-traditional character with considerable experience of office and a determination both to win the Party for left policies and to assert Labour Party control over the Parliamentary Labour Party and Labour governments. Labour governments.

1945 To The Mid-960s

Although Labour's 1945 Manifesto has been described by Benn as 'radical in analysis and socialist in content' (*Marxism Today*, Feb. 1978, p51), the position of the Labour Party in 1945 was very contradictory. On the one hand, there had clearly been a major reorientation in the period since 1931, from preoccupation with the relations between the Labour Party and the Liberals to emphasis on the relationship between Labour and socialism. There was a widespread enthusiasm and radicalism about which, among other things, contributed to the political regeneration of Labour in the post-1945 period culminating in its highest ever individual membership in 1952. On the other hand, the programme contained in the 1945 Manifesto, and largely carried out, was in fact a series of widely agreed measures for modernising the economic and social structure of British capitalism and restabilising it economically, socially and politically after the ravages of the 1930s and the war. By about 1948 the constructive work of the post-war Labour government was over and with the change in political climate resulting from the onset of the cold war Labour began to lose some of its middle strata support. At the same time, the solid post-war achievements resulted in a consolidation of Labour's traditional manual working class support. The net result was that although Labour lost the 1951 election it obtained more votes than the Conservatives, indeed its vote of 13.95 million was the highest ever received by a party in Britain. It also obtained its highest ever percentage of the poll, 48.8%, and the highest percentage of the electorate to have voted for any party in the post-war period. The Conservatives won the 1951 election not because of any overall desertion of Labour by the electorate but because of the

defection of much of the Liberal vote to the Conservatives and the bias of the electoral system.

Thus, at the start of the 1950s and what was to be thirteen years in opposition Labour enjoyed its highest ever electoral support and its highest ever individual membership. However, these were based on foundations that were to be steadily undermined. First, Labour's support was essentially based on the manual working class and their trade unions, sections of British society that were to become smaller as a result of technical, economic and social change. Second, the Labour Party was explicitly a 'socialist' party, although the definition of socialism advocated varied greatly, in a society that was evidently not and was to become even less so.

Between the mid-1950s and the mid-1960s developments occurred within the Labour Party in both these areas. In an attempt to broaden its appeal the Party's leadership sought and to some extent achieved a change of electoral identification from a 'sectional' to a 'national' party, partly by distancing the Party from the unions. At the same time the unions themselves were also adopting an increasingly neutral tone as they began to be incorporated into the process of policy determination through the National Economic Development Corporation established by the Conservatives in the early 1960s. During this period conscious moves were made to separate Labour Party from trade union membership. In 1962 it became necessary to be an individual Labour Party member in order to be a union delegate to the Party Conference, and in 1965 this requirement was extended to delegates to Constituency Labour Parties.

Running parallel to this differentiation of the Labour Party from the unions was a fierce ideological struggle between 'traditional' socialists, the Left, and 'revisionist' socialists, the Right. The essence of the argument was about policy but it was symbolised by the struggle over the attempt to redefine socialism and to drop Clause 4 of the Labour Party Constitution, with its reference to the 'common ownership of the means of production, distribution and exchange'. It is important to note that the debate was conducted in terms of competing claims for the mantle of socialism. The traditional socialists emphasised the class basis of the Party and public ownership, whereas the revisionist socialists, notably Gaitskell and Crosland, argued the case for the Party to become a national party, to espouse the mixed economy and to move away from narrowly economic issues. Despite the victory of the Left in the struggle over Clause 4, the policy battles were largely won by the Right and the 1964 election was fought by Labour on the basis of the white-hot technological revolution, strengthening the economy, and an appeal not to the working class but to the people as a whole.

The Weakness of British Capitalism

In the event, Labour won the 1964 and 1966 General Elections, approaching in 1966 the level of support enjoyed during 1945-51. However, the 1966 result is the sole exception to the continuous decline in Labour's electoral support over the period 1951-79. It is



important to try to identify the reasons for this exception. By the mid-1960s, the underlying weakness of British capitalism had been uncovered as its major rivals recovered from the war and then forged ahead. It had become clear that a change of direction was unavoidable and the three part strategy that was to dominate British politics until the late 1970s had already taken shape. Internationally, the strategy involved the attempt at a new alignment by joining the European Economic Community. Domestically, the strategy had two aspects. First, there was the attempt to regulate the labour market, through incomes policies, higher levels of unemployment and legislative curbs on the trade unions. Second, there were the determined attempts by the state to modernise and restructure the economy. These attempts took various forms, from the NEDC, the Industry EDCs and the National Plan, through the Industrial Reorganisation Corporation, to the 1972 Industry Act, the NEB and the 1975 Industrial Strategy. The most convincing explanation for Labour's exceptionally good 1966 election performance, quite out of line with its otherwise unbroken decline since 1951, is that between the 1964 and 1966 elections Labour, notwithstanding its ambiguity on the EEC, came to be widely accepted as the only party that might be able to regenerate the British economy at a time when the crisis of British capitalism had become acute.

In fact, of course, the crisis was so deep-seated as to prove intractable. Whereas in 1945 there had been a broad consensus for major structural change, this was not so in the second half of the 1960s. Labour's policy came up against insuperable class and ideological obstacles. The Labour government lacked the mass pressure and consciousness that would have been required to make significant inroads into the power of the private sector (or into the autonomy of public sector enterprises, for that matter). Instead, it concentrated on policies that challenged the interests of its traditional support, the manual working class and the unions, and their successful defensive struggles prevented a resolution in that direction. The result was a decade or more of class stalemate and a paralysis of effective decision-making, with the mid-1960s strategy of long-term 'modernisation' degenerating into a pragmatic exercise in the hand-to-mouth management of British capitalism. And as the promise faded so did the brief period of Labour recovery, to be replaced by a resumption of the Party's long-term decline. However, to the underlying long-term trends undermining the traditional base of the Labour Party, were now added the consequences of the policies pursued by Labour governments between 1964 and 1979, in particular an accelerated rate of defection from Labour of its manual working class support and a further marked weakening of its constituency organisation.

The Mid-1960s to 1979

Of the fifteen years between 1964 and 1979, Labour governments were in office for eleven. Although able initially to mobilise widespread support for the three-part strategy of 'modernisation' outlined above, the deep-seated and worsening crisis of British capitalism meant that the Labour government in the late 1960s was forced to adopt policies that challenged the corporate interests of the

trade unions, most notably the *In Place Of Strife* proposals. It is frequently argued that the policies of the 1966 and 1974 Labour governments were responsible for the erosion of Labour's support from 1966 onwards³. Certainly, by 1970 the gains made in 1966 had been lost and Labour's vote and percentage of the poll had fallen back to somewhat below their 1964 levels. But it may help to focus attention on longer-term trends if the gains made in 1966 and lost by 1970 are seen as temporary exceptions to a process of decline in Labour's political support that has been underway since the early 1950s.

Consider the three interrelated factors of Labour's relations with the trade unions, with manual workers, and with social strata other than manual workers. First, Labour-union relations have had a chequered history. Between 1966 and 1970 the Labour government in its attempts to deal with the deepening crisis sought to curb the autonomy of the working class by invading its 'reserved areas' ie, the domain of the unions as the institutional embodiment of the economic interests of the working class within capitalist Britain, in particular the areas of union organisation and free collective bargaining. This led to the most serious confrontation ever in the history of the Labour-union alliance, with victory, at least in the short run, going to the unions. The period of Conservative government, 1970-1974, saw the rebuilding of the alliance, but on a new basis. In 1972 the Liaison Committee was set up, bringing together the Parliamentary Labour Party, the Party's NEC and the TUC. In February 1973 the agreed statement *Economic Policy and the Cost of Living*, the origin of the social contract, was published. The significance of this development as representing a new departure in Labour-union relations was partially obscured by the anti-Tory militancy of the time. The statement's strength lay in its ambiguity, being susceptible to both left and right interpretations. In the event, after the October 1974 election, and especially after the defeat of the Left in the June 1975 EEC referendum, the unions found themselves involved in responsibility for policies they found increasingly unacceptable. The modernising strategy of the mid-1960s, the attempt to reverse the century-old relative decline of British capitalism by active state intervention supported by 'both sides of industry', was visibly failing. Although the Left had developed its alternative economic strategy, which was widely supported within the organised labour movement, it had virtually no popular support. A new brand of radical rightism has been building up during the late 1960s and surfaced briefly in the first eighteen months of the 1970 Tory government, during the period of disengagement, only to disappear again as a result of the 1972 U-turn. It reappeared on a more solid basis with the victory of Thatcherism over Heath in the Tory leadership contest, reflecting the major shift to the Right under way in British politics. But the Labour government's 'corporatism' had neither material rewards nor vision to offer in exchange for the sacrifices it demanded. Pressure for a resumption of free collective bargaining mounted and in the Autumn of 1978 the 'winter of discontent' centred in the public sector set in. However, although in 1978 the unions came out in opposition to the Labour government's policies, the break in the Labour-union alliance was nothing like as serious as it had been in the late 1960s, became very clear in the 1979 election campaign and the subsequent opposition to the newly elected Conservative government.



Labour and the Traditional Working Class

While Labour-union relations were repaired after the 1966-70 confrontation and survived the collapse of the social contract in 1978, this was not the case with the electoral relations between Labour and the traditional working class. Between 1966 and 1970 the swing away from Labour was greatest among 'unskilled workers', followed by 'skilled workers' and 'middle class, other than lower'; among the 'lower middle class' there was actually a minute swing to Labour. In 1974 Labour's share of the traditional working class vote fell further, as did its share of the trade union vote which for the first time since the war fell below 50%. By 1974 Labour no longer commanded the support of the majority of the manual working class and this position was reinforced in the 1979 election. Between 1974 and 1979 the swing to the Conservatives was greater among manual workers, especially the skilled, and was also greater among trade union members than non-members. It has also been suggested that within the Labour Party there has been a decline in the involvement of manual workers, with activists being drawn increasingly from other sections. Systematic evidence of this is hard to find, although it is obviously the case at the level of MPs and members of Labour Governments⁴.

Declining support for Labour from the manual working class has not been accompanied to any significant extent by increasing support from other social strata. Trade union affiliations to the Labour Party remain predominantly by the manual unions. Largely as a result of the rapid increase in white collar unionisation and in the tendency for white collar unions to affiliate to the TUC but not to the Labour Party, a situation has been reached in which the majority of TUC members are not affiliated to the Labour Party. The extent to which the structure of the trade unions as a national movement has failed to reflect this is evident from the following figures. In 1977 there were 115 unions, with a membership of 11,515,920, affiliated to the TUC, and of these 59, with a membership of 5,800,069, were affiliated to the Labour Party. Thus, almost half the union members affiliated to the TUC were not affiliated to the Labour Party, yet in 1977-78, of the 41 members of the TUC General Council, only 5 were from non-LP affiliated unions⁵.

An Assessment

It is too simple to argue that right-wing Labour policies result in electoral failure. The success of Labour in the 1951 election, when the post-war consolidation of British capitalism had been achieved and any promise of socialist advance had faded with the onset of the Cold War, belies this, as does Labour's temporary recovery in 1966 on the basis of championing the strategy of 'modernisation'. What seems to have been crucial is not so much whether policies were left or right, but the extent to which they were seen as likely to work or actually did work when carried out. In 1945 the Labour Party clearly achieved hegemony in the political sphere as the only party seen as capable of carrying through the post-war reconstruction of British society that was generally accepted as being necessary. It united behind it much wider sections of the population than its traditional manual working class supporters. In the conditions of post-war Britain, what became the traditional social democratic package — state administered reforms that strengthen capitalism for a time while conveying real

benefits on the mass of people, with an ideological wrapping of egalitarianism and social justice — worked, and despite some middle strata drift in the post 1948 Cold War climate Labour consolidated its electoral support even though it was defeated in the 1951 election. Again, in 1966 Labour's support was from much wider sections than its traditional manual working class base. However, this time the programme was directed towards the 'modernisation' of British society, was much less explicitly ideological and in the conditions of Britain in the late 1960s the policies carried out failed. This failure resulted in some loss of middle strata support and, most noticeably, in a renewal of the longer-term erosion of Labour's traditional support that had been temporarily halted by the short-lived belief in potential Labour success.

Thus, Labour's political support has been affected by two distinct factors in the post-war period — the erosion of its traditional base and its ability, or more to the point inability, to achieve political hegemony and then to maintain it on the basis of successful policies. When in 1945 and more briefly in 1966 it was able to emerge as the party which offered or appeared to offer a realistic programme for dealing with the problems of British society, it was able to consolidate the support of its traditional manual working class base and win support well beyond that base. When it failed to do this it appeared as a sectional party and was thrown back primarily on the support of its traditional base, which, however, was being eroded by longer term socio-economic and ideological changes. From the mid-1960s onwards, state administered reforms that strengthened capitalism while at the same time benefiting the mass of the people became decreasingly possible. The Labour governments of 1966-70 and October 1974-79 were unable to win conviction that their policies were relevant to the serious problems facing British society, with the exception of incomes policies, particularly the social contract, which for a period did command very widespread support. Furthermore, they increasingly adopted policies that antagonised their traditional supporters. Even so, it is far too simple to attribute the decline in Labour's support to these policies. It is true that the sharpest decline between any two post-war elections was between 1966 and 1970, with Labour's share of the electorate falling by 5.3% and its share of the poll by 4.9%. But Labour's electoral support fell by more during the four years of anti-Tory militancy between 1970 and 1974 (share of electorate — 1.7%, share of poll — 5.9%), than it did during the five years of

³See, eg, M Jacques, 'Thatcherism — The Impasse Broken?' *Marxism Today* October 1979, pp1 1-12, where although the long-term trends are recognised the predominant emphasis in explaining Labour's post-1964/66 decline is on the policies of the post-1966 Labour governments.

⁴The data in this paragraph are taken from Minkin and Seyd (1977), *op cit*, pp131-3, 145; Minkin (1978) *op cit*, pp460,475; and *New Statesman*, 18 May 1979, pp704-6. The first two studies both cite unpublished data that now has appeared in I Crewe, B Sarlock and J Act, 'Partisan Dealignment in Britain, 1964-74', *British Journal of Political Science*, April 1977.

⁵Taken from Minkin (1978) *op cit*, p473. There is some ambiguity in this area. The figure of 5,800,069 was the number of members on which the relevant unions paid affiliation fees to the Labour Party. Most unions pay affiliation fees on only a part of their political levy paying membership. Thus, the proportion of trade unionists paying the political levy is greater than would appear from these figures.

Labour Government between 1974 and 1979 (share of the electorate — 1.3%, share of poll — 0.1%). It was not so much that the October 1974 Labour government's policies deterred Labour's traditional supporters, although the long term process of erosion that had been resumed after 1966 did continue, as that Labour appeared increasingly incapable of offering any solution to the problems of British society and the initiative passed to the new radical rightism of the Tories.

The Shift to the Left

Within the Labour Party the period from the mid-1960s to the mid-1970s saw a shift to the left. This was largely the result of the impact of trade union resistance to Labour government attacks on the corporate position of the unions, coupled with a revival of interest in socialism in response to the developing crisis of capitalism. However, this left shift needs careful assessment. Although clearly of great importance, it was contradictory and in certain crucial respects limited. Although obviously an over-simplification, two distinct tendencies can be discerned within the left revival. On the one hand, there was a backward-looking response appealing to a narrow, traditional working class base, advocating fundamentalist socialist policies, and ignoring or displaying hostility towards significant new movements, like those for women's liberation and Scottish and Welsh devolution. On the other hand, there emerged a loose grouping around Benn which sought to come to terms with the changing reality of British and international capitalism and to develop policies which challenged the existing distribution of power and yet stood some chance of being implemented in the foreseeable future, well short of anything recognisable as fully fledged socialism. This grouping sought to integrate class with national democratic perspectives, most notably in the 1975 EEC referendum. The referendum became primarily, though not exclusively a left-right struggle in which for the first time the Left emerged as a genuine national force, bidding for hegemony on the basis of an alternative programme in which left policies were presented as the only effective way of furthering the interests of the British people.

That this bid failed was due to the fact that at the same time as the Labour Party was moving to the left, the spectrum of opinion among the population as a whole was moving to the right. The basic reason why the Labour government from 1975 onwards was able to ignore the demand from the Labour Party for the implementation of its left policies was surely the more or less total isolation of the Left from the mass of the people. But if the Labour government leaders were able to ignore the threat from their left because it lacked a popular base, they were vulnerable to the threat from the right precisely because of a populist radical rightism had crystallised and received political expression with the capture of the Conservative Party by Thatcher and Joseph. It became clear in the 1979 election, if not before, that traditional social democracy had for some time been running into the sand. All it had to offer was bureaucratic, corporatist management of capitalism, relying on statist measures and the *realpolitik* of Labour's special relationship with the trade unions. It is widely, though not universally, argued that the Conservatives won the ideological battle hands down, tuning into an increasingly pervasive desire on the part of the people for greater control over their lives and channelling this in an individualistic direction. An additional consideration may have been a growing disbelief in the possibility of any rational solution to any problem at the national level and a corresponding reinforcement of the ever-present tendency to seek individual ways out irrespective of the social consequences.

The importance of ideology is, perhaps, reflected in the geographical split existing in the 1979 election results. Labour did

best in Scotland and the North of England. It has been suggested that in Scotland the impact of the labour movement, particularly the success of the unions in linking traditional working class concerns with the national democratic question, has a marked effect, despite the hostility of the Scottish Labour Party itself to devolution. In many parts of the North it is likely that the ideology of 'labourism', loyal support for Labour based on long standing municipal achievements, remains stronger than in the South. By contrast, some of the inner-London areas, where unemployment levels were as high as anywhere in the country but ideological commitment to Labour had been undermined, saw the largest swings to the Conservatives.

Conclusions

The Conservative victory in the 1979 election reinforced the obvious point that the revealed bankruptcy of traditional social democracy produces no automatic swing to the Left. All the evidence suggests that Labour Party policies, for the most part left, were more unpopular among the people than the Labour government's policies, by the large right. The challenge this presents is for the left to reject any posing of class, national or democratic concerns against one another and instead to develop policies and political practices that integrate class and national democratic interests and perspectives.

At the ideological level it is essential for the left to avoid recourse to a backward looking advocacy of traditional socialism. There is, however, a vital need for a sustained and passionate argument for a vision of what is possible based on socialist values and presented in a non-sectarian way. The possibilities here are illustrated by the success of Benn's recent book titled *Arguments For Socialism*. This is linked to the need for the left to find ways of overcoming the deadening legacy of statist Labour government policies which have resulted in the Labour Party coming to be widely regarded as part of the establishment. It is significant that in 1974 the massive swing away from the Tories went not to Labour but to the Liberals and the Nationalists who in that context were seen as anti-establishment parties. Although developments at the level of national politics can help in this, the task is not one that arises primarily at that level. Changes in Labour Party government policies are likely to endure only if they are based on the development of participatory forms of economic, social and political organisation at grass roots level. For it is in the process of people themselves changing the actual structures within which they live that consciousness itself most effectively changes. The Left's alternative economic strategy provides an example of the direction in which change is needed. At the moment the strategy is primarily framed in terms of actions appropriate to the national Government. As a result it has had little more resonance outside the organised Labour movement than appeals to socialism, perhaps even less since in its present statist form it lacks any vision of an alternative way of living. What is required is the development of specific movements around concrete, positive alternative policies for particular workplaces, services and communities, with the unifying perspective and moral vision of extending the democratic control of all those involved over the decisions that affect their lives. Such mass, popular politics, leading to the renewal or development of participative political organisation and associated political consciousness, is probably a necessary condition for the winning of permanent left hegemony within the Labour Party. In 1979 Labour Party Conference decisions seeking greater accountability of the Parliamentary Labour Party and Labour Governments to the Labour Party in the country represents an important advance for the left. But it is only beginning and there is no guarantee that the initial promise will be fulfilled. In the end, developments at the level of mass politics and popular consciousness are likely to be the decisive factors. •