

Ken Coates

LABOUR'S FIRST YEAR

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The record is almost too dismal to bear recital. Few of Labour's major spokesmen have had the intellectual or political courage to assess it clearly. One who has is Ian Mikardo, perhaps the most significant Parliamentary leader who has been left to the Left by the recent events. Speaking at a conference of Labour students at the end of June, Mr Mikardo was able to list three achievements on the credit side of the Government's performance. It had properly flouted the opinion of the bankers in order to augment pensions; it had laid out a commendable programme of legislation in the Queen's speech; and the prime minister had properly decided to govern as if he had a majority of fifty. But when the Government's pledges were compared with its actions, there were most serious deficiencies.

In at least thirty important sectors election promises had either not been sustained, or had actually been dishonoured. In the field of economic policy the failure to apply physical controls, even such obvious ones as exchange control, import controls, or effective regional development controls, forced the Government to rely upon fiscal manoeuvres, bribery and exhortation as its main 'planning' weapons. Of course these are totally insufficient. No rational overall fuel and energy policy was being elaborated. No transport plan was being counterposed to Beeching's measures. Taxes were not being used selectively. Concerning public ownership, no measures had yet been announced to take over water, and more important, the pledge to start new public enterprises on a competitive basis in

* This article was written before the Labour Party Conference; however, apart from excising an introductory paragraph, we have thought it best to leave it as it stands. Ed.

growth areas of the economy was not yet being taken up. In the field of exports, the promised long-term contracts with Commonwealth territories, based on state trading, had not materialised. Neither had any significant expansion of East-West trade. As for the question of incomes policy, no attempt whatever had been made to synchronise wage-planning with overall planning, which thus made Mr Brown's policy quite unfeasible.

Concerning social policy the balance-sheet was no less unhappy. The minimum income guarantee was to be deferred until the next session¹. While this could be understood, it provided no reason at all for the deferment of action to rectify outstanding injustices. Many severe hardships existed which could be alleviated by administrative action which was not being taken. Educational expenditure was being curtailed. As for housing, which had been Mr Wilson's central election issue, the pledge to repeal the Rent Act was being honoured by a measure which threatened to introduce a most dangerous element of decontrol in rents, while building was being thwarted by sky-high interest rates. A two-tier system of finance, or cheap money, was essential to the housing problem. In the field of equal pay, no steps were to be taken to ratify the ILO Convention on that question. The policies which had been expected on immigration had not materialised.

Lastly, in the foreign and defence policy sectors the picture was alarming. The defence estimates had not been subjected to serious overall cuts, whilst the Polaris base and the British nuclear arm were both being preserved in flat contradiction to party policy. If anything Labour's foreign policy showed an even closer dependence on the USA than did that of Sir Alec. This had revealed itself in innumerable areas: apart from Vietnam, in Guiana, in the total abandonment of disengagement in Europe, and in the equivocation about the supply of war materials to South Africa among many others.

Since Mr Mikardo elaborated this most discouraging catalogue, conditions have deteriorated with malicious speed. Yet further draconian and debilitating economic measures have been brought forward by Mr Callaghan. Far from getting Britain moving, the Government has moved round to a new and resounding stop phase in its economics. With incisive unsentimentality, *The Financial Times*

¹ Soon after Mr Mikardo had spoken, it was, of course, deferred still further by Mr Callaghan's measures. Mr Callaghan had, it must be said, warned us in advance. He told a Fabian gathering at the 1963 TUC that "A Labour Government must not rush its fences... its first job is to get industry moving again. Then we can start paying ourselves a dividend." *The Guardian* reported that Mr Callaghan felt this interval might be eighteen months. In this most dire case, which deals with Labour's pledge to the least fortunate, most penurious of its supporters, the time limit has now more than doubled, and is still extending.

led its account of these savage new restraints with the headline 'The Pound Before Politics'. Small wonder that epithets like 'Ramsay MacWilson' have begun to appear, in *The Economist*, in columns by Malcolm Muggeridge, and among the maverick political commentators. Just how far before politics Mr Callaghan has thrust the pound has scarcely begun to filter through to the understanding of Labour's rank-and-file, but it can be clearly discerned in the extraordinary outcries of the liberal business press. *The Economist* reacted pugnaciously with a leader entitled 'Labour Men — Tory Measures' which speculated whether Mr Wilson may be heading towards an October election on 'what is virtually a National ticket'. The weight of these measures falls on precisely the people who returned Labour to office. If anything, a Conservative administration would have moved with greater caution, and would have placed heavier burdens on the business community, because it would not have been labouring under the same drastic imperative to regain the lost confidence of the City. This elusive pursuit of the trust of the very people whom he had recently most fiercely denounced as economically parasitic and restrictive gives Mr Wilson the aspect of a latter-day Tantalus, or Sisyphus: with the significant difference that his prototypes were, before they began their penal labours, able to dine awhile with the gods on ambrosia and nectar. Mr Wilson arrived at the olympian banquet to find a feast of rinds and gristle, and his unrewarding labours began at once. Perhaps he has the time, as he sees the pound lurch away again to the bottom of the hill, and prepares anew for the exhausting push to the top, to ponder on the fact that such travails are only the lot of those whom the gods find guilty of breach of faith. In any event such time for thought will not be lacking for the homeless, as they await crash programmes of building, or to the administrators of welfare and health services, as they again retrench and hang on for the day of the triumph of public priorities over private affluence. Hardest cut of all are the local Labour councillors, chafing at the reins of more than a decade of central restraint, and now, just as they thought the race was about to open out for them, savagely bridled in. The only truly astonishing thing about this raging mayhem of Labour's election pledges is the solemn quiet which has descended on the backbenches. The only substantial revolt which the Callaghan measures precipitated was the demand for cuts in military expenditure. To an outsider, it looks as if this upheaval was outmanoeuvred without a shot being fired. True, the Parliamentary Party accepted a motion, carefully filleted of any specific dates or figures which demanded substantial cuts.

The fate of this entirely proper decision will probably be found to turn upon the definition of 'substance': and Mr Wilson will pro-

bably not need to call in Professor Ayer in order to establish that in a context of disquiet about the pound this quality may be found to be very variable indeed.

While Mr Callaghan was immobilising the production drive, Mr Brown's attempts at acceleration in the control of incomes and prices were not abated. The fact that the members of his own union brusquely rejected the Incomes Policy, while neglecting to invite him to observe the event, was widely remarked. So was Mr Cousins' flying visit to the conference of the T&GWU, during which he received the ovation of a hero for discreetly congratulating his members on the stand they had taken. But the really ominous accompaniment to these events was the statement that Mr Wilson made after the Callaghan measures had been revealed, that should the Prices and Incomes Board be found to fail in securing volutary co-operation, it might quickly be given co-ercive legal teeth. Although in theory such sanctions might apply to refractory employers, the record of the Government does not encourage the hope that their main effect will tell in that direction. As one surveys the ruins of Labour policy, and the cautious and entirely orthodox pattern of Mr Callaghan's economic policy, one cannot but conclude that Mr Wilson's warnings are aimed pre-eminently at the unions. Such a confrontation would be the *reductio ad absurdum* of the Wilson strategy.

As significant as these unhappy portents is the blow which Mr Bowden has administered, on the eve of the adjournment. From the principled opposition to the immigration controls of 1961 which had been evinced from Mr Gaitskell, Labour had already slid, before the election, into postures of equivocation, dissembling and vagueness. But Mr Bowden's White Paper on Immigration, far from remaining equivocal, unleashed a truly shattering blow. Immigration from all commonwealth territories was restricted to a maximum of 8,500 a year, including the 1000 quota which had been guaranteed to Malta. Worse: the White Paper established a fine and sharply screened double mesh through which would-be immigrants must filter. This imposed checks along both national and occupational lines, establishing a sharp class preference for skilled and professionally qualified labour.

Abroad, everything but the cost of Mr Wilson's commitment East of Suez has been crumbling around him. His farcical and demagogic peace mission to Vietnam was exploded before he had finished the blueprints. Mr Davies, who bravely put in jeopardy all his friendships in Hanoi in a loyal effort to voyage to the rescue, returned, chastened, home to the muzzle. Trouble in the Rann of Kutch has been transferred to Kashmir. Cruellest indignity of all, Malaysia, that most streamlined essay in neo-colonialist intrigue, ca-

refully assembled to the credit of the pound and as a fearful deterrent to Indonesian bolshevism, suddenly and without warning blew up, with a small bang and an infragrant smell. Britain's autonomous imperial zone revealed its true crisis level of instability. Meanwhile, President Johnson intoned sympathetic dirges about the agonies of sterling, as he fortified the dollar by the slaughter of Vietnamese children.

In unrelieved gloom, this record may be left where it stands, incomplete and undocumented, because, partial though it is, it establishes beyond reasonable doubt the most important thing about the government: its *tendency*: the line of march, the main drift, which implies with stern rigour that unless there is a sharp reorientation, amounting to a complete reversal of policy, the Fourth Labour Government will be the most catastrophic ever. Later, socialists will have to itemise this balance-sheet with miserly precision, and analyse its every grey nuance. Now, the key question is not the charting of each stunted, grizzled tree, but the appreciation of the wood in all its dank and slimy foreboding.

II

New Left Review has already begun the labour of analysis and explanation which is urgently required. In the introduction to the July-August number, after quite rightly indicating that 'Few regimes have so immediately lost all credit or respect', the Review went on to insist:

"The first task is ... to try to understand the logic of the political experience we have witnessed since October 1964. Why has the Labour administration performed so badly, even in its own terms? Why has it abandoned so much of its programme, so soon? ... The Labour Party's abysmal record since October reveals much about its own character; but it has also revealed, more clearly than ever before, the real secret of the impasse of British society today — the at once indispensable and insupportable heritage of imperialism."

In elaborating and refining this insight, the article by Tom Nairn, *Labour Imperialism*, makes some extremely telling points. Tracing the structural integration of industrial capital into the nexus of finance capital's interests, as all the major industrial giants like ICI, BMC, Unilever expand their networks of direct foreign investment and association, Nairn shows that this "annulment of old frontiers" leaves an insoluble dilemma: whereas Wilson had aligned himself with the dynamic soul of industrial enterprise against the restrictive spirit of conservative rentiers and bankers, the two ghosts in fact inhabit one machine, and there, in torment, savage one another. This must lead direct to the question, succinctly posed by Nairn:

is it possible for any government to master the British dilemma in quite the way which seemed entailed by Wilson's original approach? May it not be too late even for a "radical" solution of that kind, *given the effective unity between financial and industrial capital*? May it not be too late, in other words, for any solution to the problem which remains within the terms of the national capitalist system itself, in any of its forms?

This is clearly a central question. Part of the answer, though, was offered years ago by Lenin, when he remarked that there were no "final crises" from which capitalism could not escape, if its replacement was not at hand. And there are other contradictory features of British capitalism which need an examination as careful as that which Tom Nairn has begun to devote to the relationship between industrial and finance capital, if all the potentialities for capitalist survival are to be thoroughly evaluated. Principal among these is the prolonged and apparently inexhaustable intractability of the British Trade Unions, which are proving markedly defiant about the degree of integration into neo-capitalism which Mr Brown is attempting to secure with the Prices and Incomes Board. In most European countries the trade unions have been far more effectively assimilated into the structures of neo-capitalism than their English equivalents. It is true that with the exception of the Germans, European workers are cursed with sectarian and political fragmentation in their unions. It is equally true that there are repeated resurgences of militancy in the labour movements of practically every common market nation. But if we are to search out the basic distinction between labour in Britain and Europe, it is not to be found in the hallmark of sturdy independence which is branded on every British buttock. Careful examination of the appropriate limbs of Sir William Carron or Mr Jack Cooper would be likely to reveal a quite cosmopolitan clarity of skin complexion on their part. The basic reason why British capitalism has shown a marked inability to restrain and contain the appetites of its labour force is that it has had no long-term counterweight to full employment. Wage drift has thus constantly pushed to take up the diminishing slack that an ailing economy had to offer. In Italy, large-scale unemployment with a large declining rural population have produced effective disciplinary force during much of that nation's postwar history. Before Herr Ulbricht's wall intervened, the Federal German Republic had abundant labour quarries in the East. Since, it has threshed about for substitutes as far afield as Greece and Spain, but without effectively replacing the East as goad and stimulant to a loaded labour market. De Gaulle, too, in his agrarian rationalisations, and above all with the *pieds noirs*, has found easement for labour shortage. In the United States, the depressed Negro population has provided its reserves of labour.

But in Britain, only limited immigration has taken place, and that counterbalanced by constant outflow. As Labour has been forced to abort its housing programme, the pressure of a strident minority of xenophobic electors has brought it in a shamefully misguided way to staunch even that limited trickle, to the large discomfort of George Brown and the business press, whose liberal sympathies may not be large, but whose appreciations of the labour shortage in Britain are certainly realistic. Each stop that has been imposed on British economic growth has produced its momentary growth of unemployment, but the check to that growth has not been administered simply by renewed expansionist opportunities: rather it has flowed from the inevitable and sharp recoil that an independent and undefeated labour movement can administer in the political field². The work of rationalisation could not proceed uninterruptedly in such a context. Capital found itself confronted by persons who not only claimed rights, but were able to punish their violation. It was surely for this reason that successive governments were forced to tread into the most dangerous terrain of a search for a political solution to the problem of labour costs and wage-control. And Mr Wilson's usefulness to capital can scarcely be appreciated outside this field. What is most noteworthy in the record of this administration is the valiant way in which its opponents have striven to keep it alive. Tory chairmen who cast their votes in chivalry: Tory MPs who with touching gentility lose themselves between the bars and the lobbies when the fatigue of Government supporters proves greater than the will to rule: these remarkable phenomena scarcely signal a return to the sporting traditions of British Parliamentarism. They do appear to make sense in a context in which the opposition does not wish to prevail, until the Government has performed the role which has been allotted to it. As more and more of the unions' teeth are drawn, as the Prices and Incomes Board recruits first whips, then scorpions to its armoury, and as, all the while, the unions are disarmed by Mr Wilson's (increasingly imaginative) rhetoric, so the opposition can begin to flex its muscles and prepare for the resumption of control. Is this not a natural way for Mr Heath to think? Meantime, the Government continues fiercely to develop all the rationalisations of Dr Beeching on the railways, and to drive through the explosive reorientation of the mining industry, as if its one object in life were to establish the truth of this pessimistic view of its role. (It is even rumoured that, in order to secure the complicity of the railwaymen in the creeping denationalisation involved in the liner train scheme, Mr Wilson has promised extensive new nationalisation after the

² These points have been elaborated in detail in a paper which has been written by Pat Jordan, to which I am much indebted.

election. Alas: Mr Heath need scarcely repair to the druggist in order to quiet his sleep on this matter).

Incomes policy, cuts, rationalisations: all these amount to the classic solution which capital, sick, prescribes for labour, well. I am too ill; here, you take my pill... All that is new in this situation is the ministering physician. And what is astonishing is the way in which Mr Wilson plays the role. Malicious gossips even claim that he enjoys it...

III.

Yet this is not all that is strange. Perhaps the most truly amazing thing about the post-October situation is to be found in the becalmed tranquillity of Labour's back benches. After the storm of the unilateralist campaign, perhaps the largest left intake to any Parliament since 1945 has stormed the ramparts, only to discover that discretion is rather the more responsible part of valour. This strange event has staggered *The Economist*, which returns week after week to discuss the reason why, half in malice, half in pique. The leaders of the traditional left, Anthony Greenwood, for instance, were wisely co-opted by Mr Wilson into peripheral complicity in his arrangements. Their behaviour has been scandalous. Whether Mr Greenwood has gained a final victory over the schoolchildren he gassed in Bahrem, as they threatened to undermine the East of Suez design, it is too early to say. What does, however, appear quite clear is that he has finally routed and liquidated³ his own conscience. Perhaps this is the most significant political victory Mr Wilson has scored: he has benumbed, confused, and outwitted the Left in a manner that outbids the most bizarre predictions of the most hostile opponents of that grouping. Perhaps the fact that the Government had its own left cover has given other members of parliament pause. With very few very honourable exceptions, the Parliamentary left has bought every dud Peace Mission, every hoax and placebo that has been offered. The flight of Steel Nationalisation through the lobbies is a significant case in point. If Mr Gaitskell had attempted such manoeuvres as those which Mr Brown (and presumably Mr Wilson) have accomplished, he would have been denounced from every platform in the land. Instead of raising hell, the Left has melted into the landscape³.

³ On August 6th, Michael Foot wrote in *Tribune* about this question. He spoke of the potentially deadly gulf between leaders and led, and called for sustained left pressure. "Sustain the left pressure, but also sustain the Government." This in itself is not an objectional call: nobody would suggest that "the Government should be torn to pieces by the action of the Left within the Party", as Mr Foot put it. What the left *should* do is move towards an integrated focus

The significance of this must not be under-estimated. Had the Left spoken out, the constituencies would by now be in a turmoil. The unions are already full of bewildered, often bitterly disappointed men. At local level, the party preserves its peace, because loyalty is the first rationality of one who knows rightly that unity is strength. Monolithic in its piety, the traditional left leadership defers to that peace, as if it were the ultimate in political wisdom. In fact it is the reverse. If there were any hope for Mr Wilson, it would lie in an outcry from the Labour movement. Only the strongest pressures from his supporters could prevail over the ruthlessly implacable logic of the bankers, which grows more persuasive each day as the vacuum left by its application yawns wider through the party. If anyone had spoken earlier, perhaps the first fatal steps might have been turned aside. But *if* is no answer: the problem of the Left was not shortage of force, lack of numbers, or even lack of faith and goodwill. What the left lacked was any sense of programme, any notion of the direction of events, any first faint beginning of a strategy. It fenced in the foggy lobbies of the politics of previous decades, bound by the imagined supremacy of institutions which were in fact at their last gasp⁴, while the real rulers enmeshed its protectors and champions in their own completely alien objects.

Recriminations are the very last thoughts that this sad history should inspire. What does emerge is the paramount need for a strategy of socialist advance which rests on solid theoretical foundations, and which lives in the present world.

both in terms of policy and organisation. What the "sundering of the left into sectarian fragments" which is a present fact, not, as Mr Foot seems to think, a future possibility, involves is the continued fostering of the illusion that there is no alternative to Wilson's policies. The Left must look to its own problems: it must collectively hammer out its own suggestions, and then promote them. This is the only realistic way of "putting pressure" on the Government, and until it happens the incidental outbursts of resentment at this or that intolerably reactionary measure will all be met and deflected by Mr Wilson, without occasioning him the need for any significant change of policy.

⁴ Parliamentary cretinism is a polite term compared to that which is necessary to characterise most of today's left. Not the slightest attempt has been made by the overwhelming majority of MPs to do anything at all to mobilise external pressure on the Government. For years more and more of Parliament's prerogatives have passed away from it: to the banks and oligarchies, to the executive, to the international organisations, above all to Washington. Parliament no longer knits the bourgeoisie into a coherent grouping: the concentration of economic power does this outside its confines. In a world in which their leaders were hemmed in and surrounded by such hostile forces, one would have thought that MPs would have sensed the need to mobilise some effective countervailing power at the grass-roots. Not so. The only significant demonstration of socialist activists, that on Vietnam, was carefully handed over by its parliamentary spokesmen to Mr Wilson almost as a thanks offering for his risible peace mission.

IV

The work of elaborating a programme is not one which can be passed across to three part-time research workers. It involves a whole protracted labour of discussion and education within a very wide area of the Labour Movement. Precisely what has gone wrong with the fourth Labour Government has been this old, elitist conception of programme. Policy is left to the wise, to the ones who know⁵. Everyone else knocks doors. In the event, the knowledge of the wise was insufficient: what they needed was no longer an insight into the wickedness of the world, but the social understanding and the political staff with which to assault that wickedness. This can only be created in painstaking political agitation and organisation, starting from the fundamental premise that the richest source of socialist potential is the self-confidence and self-activity of the workers themselves.

The natural tendency which will emerge from the accumulating disillusionment of Labour's activists will be to seek immediate, partial solutions to what are global problems. There is diminishing scope for effective, purely local, trade union militancy, though. Labour *needs* a socialist perspective, designed for practical application. To those who see the impossibility of piecemeal solutions, there may arise the alternative of self-immolation in a purely abstract and doctrinal socialism. The failure of Labour to meet its immediate, bread-and-butter, commitments may impel many on the left to reject *all* bread-and-butter demands as a deluding distraction, and to seek in their place to elevate a purified and spiritualised vision of commonweal as the motivating goal of socialist activity.

While it is acutely important to discuss the idea of socialism, and to widen constantly the circle of people for whom its problems are already a living reality, this can never be a sufficient answer to the difficulties in which we find ourselves today. It will not help the railwaymen to be told that "socialism is the only answer to Doctor Beeching", true though that aphorism may be. Unless we can offer some practical immediate steps to socialism, our railwayman

⁵ They *haven't* known, anyhow. The complete mental laziness of empirical British socialism was sharply revealed by Emmanuel Shinwell in his autobiography, when he wrote that in 1945 he arrived at his desk in the Ministry of Fuel and Power, with a mandate to nationalise coal, electricity and gas, expecting to find that someone had prepared detailed plans for these operations. They had not. He had to start from scratch. This tradition has continued into the Wilson epoch. In spite of all the noise about integrated transport and fuel policies, the new ministers have carried on in the grooves established by their predecessors, because new plans were not yet ready. Cynics will say that it is a good job the plans were not ready, because the bankers could not have let Mr Wilson use them, anyway.

is likely to choose either to belt hell out of someone in the union, or, more probably, to look for another job. Even slogans which in themselves could contribute to the growth of an explicitly socialist awareness, like the demand for an integrated transport policy, need to be linked inseparably with a whole series of complementary conceptions, which taken together can form the mental bridge over which the workers may pass from capitalist to socialist forms of reasoning and action. Simple reiteration of demands for nationalisation alone do not form such a bridge.

The programme which we need to elaborate, neither maximalist and entirely abstract, nor minimalist and blind, needs to lead from the particular ills of capitalism as it is to the general solution we have to offer, and from the partial, schizoid outlooks which are fostered by capital to a fully humanist world view. Such a programme must attack not only the organisational failures, but the *feel* of capitalism, of subordination: it must expose its alienating effects plainly, so that they are devoid of mystery and terror. Clearly, in the fight against the alienation which workers suffer as producers, the major answering socialist response is the demand for workers' control. This becomes increasingly urgent as neo-capitalist rationalisations gather force. Workers' control of job organisation, the speed of work, re-tooling, is no mere panacea. It can be very well understood by shop-stewards and local union officers of fitting present needs. But neo-capitalist reorganisation extends from new practices in the shops up to the attempt to elaborate a comprehensive policy for incomes: and for complete and democratic accountability, the opening of the books, and the abolition of business secrets. All the work of elaborating a detailed campaign on such lines can only be done in the creation of a movement for industrial democracy: no amount of blueprints will replace its living agents in the factories. At the same time, the struggle for self-management in the nationalised sector can feed and inspire such a movement. This already began to shape up in the Steel Industry in the discussions around the new Bill: and its embryos can be clearly seen in the mines, the railways, and among the white-collar staffs in particular in other nationalised industries.

Outside the sphere of production, the New Left has frequently documented the manipulation of men as consumers. Here, too, the socialist movement has a traditional answering response: the transition to welfare forms of distribution. Free public transport: free housing: these are no more utopian in modern Britain than the national health service or free compulsory schools. To a nation embarking on the structural change from capitalist to socialist organisation, they would be not frills, but essential means of obtaining a human focus on the inherited economic difficulties. If the Bown

Group can put forward the notion that the roads be metered as a counter to the fact that rail computes its costs comprehensively while roads do not, cannot we respond by demanding the opposite kind of parity? Here surely is a real answer to Beeching, which would enable some true picture of the travelling needs of Britain to be compiled.

In a context of public welfare, norms of consumption, the pressure for extended public control of industry becomes enormous. Arising out of the pincer movement of a fight for more welfare and a fight for workers' control at every level, the arguments about the need for more nationalisation cease to be ritual incantations, and take on a more and more immediate necessity.

Around the central core of such a programme as this, there are many issues to be resolved. But if someone speaks out, to say that socialist options *are* possible and practical, then there will be an answering call from very many people in the unions and the workshops. Only if the left is silent is there danger: for then each worker feels alone, his doubts his own, his conscience an isolate, and, therefore, his will paralysed. Voices must be found to enunciate the new socialism.

AFTER THE CONFERENCE

The sharp sense of frustration, of loss, of having been outwitted, cheated and blackmailed, has settled upon many delegates. Where, before, our leaders had been revered, now they appear as men for whom, while respect is not totally forfeit, it has been transmuted into baser sentiment. Now they are admired for their skill, for their cunning, for their appearance of being powerful. Before, they had been thought of as honest, as forward-looking, and principled. A dead weight of nerveless withdrawal, a mood which expects the worst, a coolness, has fallen on much of the party. Enthusiasm has given way to resignation, hope to submission, high expectation to fidgety compromise. Mr. Wilson thinks he has achieved the impossible. He thinks he has turned the Labour Party around on its heels, so that it is the party of racial discrimination, of trade union emasculation, of neo-capitalist corporate "planning" against the interests of the working people and for the monopolists. But to assume that this unlikely transformation has been made at this conference is to mistake the omens.

Before the Conference, the Left was fragmented, disoriented, scattered. Numb, it sat through infamous debates on immigration, foreign policy (Vietnam), the incomes policy. But you cannot make such inroads as these into the consciences of men without creating a reaction. This reaction is now sharply under way. Mr. Wilson is uniting the Left, as it has never been united before. The imperative necessity of defeating the Government's chosen course on all these crucial matters *requires* a new movement of the Labour Left. From the grass roots in the constituencies and the union branches, up to Parliament itself, the Left moves over to defiance.

No socialist can support the Government on these questions. All must fight for a reversal of its direction. We must call upon every honest MP to cast his vote against legislation on the monstrous White Paper on immigration, against Mr. Brown's attempt to draw the unions' teeth, and against the Vietnam massacre. We of the Left have in the past years helped to secure the adoption of over sixty new leftwing MPs. We must associate ourselves again, on a clear basis of policy, to ensure that no MP who violates these basic moral criteria is ever selected to fight again for Labour.

At the same time, we must encourage our leftwing friends in Parliament to step up their fight for serious positive socialist measures, such as steel nationalisation with workers' control, the take-over of growth points in the economy, like the North Sea Oil and prefabricated building, and the honouring of our pledges to the miners and railwaymen for planned fuel and transport policies.

We must open up a nation-wide discussion through the *Voice* paper and *The Week*, help to elaborate sharp alternative policies to the Con-Lab Alliance which is now shaping up. With Mr. Warbey in Italy, the Government has no Labour majority. But it has a huge Tory majority for its most reactionary policies. Our aim is to stop the Con-Lab coalition, to turn Labour once again towards honest radical policies, and to save our movement from the shameful effects of this week's decisions.

The article from *The Week*

On Tuesday, 9th November, Ken Coates was expelled from the West Nottingham Labour Party, because of his 'activities and publications'. The decision was taken by 24 votes to 15, after much argument, in which many charges were laid against him. He was given ten minutes to reply, through a barrage of interjections from the leader of the Labour Group on the City Council, Alderman Foster.

This decision is unusual for a number of reasons. First, he is the President of the City Labour Party, of which West Nottingham constituency is a small part. Second, the motion was initiated by the secretary of the Council's Labour Group, Councillor Kirk, and enthusiastically if rather unscrupulously advocated by a number of Aldermen, who had clearly evolved a 'party line' upon the question. Thirdly, the Regional Organiser of the Party, representing Transport House, sat silent when charges which he knew to be untrue were laid against him, and did not intervene to prevent a procedural injustice at the beginning of the meeting.

There is no doubt that, whatever the ostensible reasons that were advanced, his expulsion was sought by the Labour Group Leadership in order to enable them to avoid being controlled by the City Labour Party. That they could not expel him from that party goes without saying: indeed, his election to the chair was by the largest majority ever recorded, and it was this very fact which compelled them to approach their objects by the back door, expelling him, at very short notice, from an organisation which represented a good deal less than one quarter of his total 'constituents'.

The charges which were voiced against him fell into three main groups. As evidence of his 'activities' it was charged that he was a partial chairman, ruling the meetings of the City Party with an iron fist, terrorising councillors. Such blatant lies could not be repeated by anyone who had ever attended a City Party Meeting, and consequently, they were fed into the meeting through the mouths of various stooges who had been assembled at the meeting for the purpose. One lady who repeated a grotesque account of the City Labour Party proceedings which someone had retailed to her, admitted that she had only ever seen him three times in her life, one of which was the present one. This lady had never been at a City

Party meeting. In fact, if there has been fault in his conduct of the chair, it has been of excess of tolerance, not of partiality.

The second, and by far the most insistent charge, was that his publications were incompatible with party membership. This meant that the articles he had written were judged to be grounds for expulsion. In particular, one article was quoted and misquoted, interpreted and mist-interpreted, a great many times (see above). It was an article which originally appeared in *Briefing*, the daily bulletin which was produced for the Party Conference at Blackpool. It condemned the war in Vietnam, the White Paper on Immigration, and the proposal to put 'legal teeth' into the prices and incomes policy. He called upon the Left to fight these policies, and to seek to reserve them. His points were strongly made, as many of us feel they needed to be. But if they constitute grounds for expulsion, then the Labour Movement is surely in a deep crisis, in which all its most conscientious members are liable to be evicted.

The last charge was elaborated by Alderman Foster, on the basis of allegations which have appeared in a book called *The British Political Fringe*. He said that the journals, *The Week*, which Mr Coates helped to found, and *International Socialist Journal*, of which he is a Board member, were the voices of a Trotskyist conspiracy. Mr Coates explained that these two journals were a part of the New Left, and that while they published informed articles from any source on the Left, to style them 'Trotskyist' was absurd.

There were several irregularities in the manner in which this expulsion took place. These should be outlined before appropriate judges. But there is no question that this decision is a straightforward witch-hunt. Mr Coates has been put out for his opinions, which are shared by thousands of Labour people.

P.S. Since this report was published two new facts have emerged: first, Ken Coates' own ward, Abbey ward, has repudiated his expulsion, and Nottingham City Labour Party has expressed its opposition. (from *the Week*, Nov. 25th).