PART V

16
The Future of British Socialism?

I

In 1932 R. H. Tawney published an article in which he reflected upon the events of the previous year: the collapse of the Labour Government and the massive electoral defeat of the Labour Party in which it lost 235 seats, with 30.8 per cent of the poll and 52 seats as against the National Government's 67.2 per cent and 554 seats. Tawney called his article 'The Choice Before the Labour Party'. The Party, he declared, needed 'a little cold realism' now it had 'an interval in which to meditate its errors'. His verdict on the late Government was 'pernicious anaemia producing general futility'.[1]

In 1984 we can look back on an electoral defeat that is, if less dramatic, more catastrophic.[2] Now, if ever, there is a need for 'cold realism' and meditation upon past errors. The verdict this time can only be suicidal self-absorption producing general non-credibility.

Indeed, the question must now be asked: *is* there a choice before the Labour Party? If there is, what, if any, are the party's prospects? And what, if any, are the prospects for socialism in Britain over the next decades? And what are the links between these? Despite the massive changes in the social and economic landscape, and even in the Labour Party, it is still worth going back to Tawney's essay as a reference point in seeking to address these questions. I do so because I agree with Anthony Wright that it is 'possible that it is Tawney rather than Trotsky who has more to contribute' to contemporary arguments within the Labour Party.[3]

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[1] Tawney, 'The Choice before the Labour Party', *Political Quarterly* 3 (1932), pp. 323–45.

[2] See D. Massey, 'The Contours of Victory . . . Dimensions of Defeat', *Marxism Today* (July 1983), pp. 16–19 and E. Hobsbawm, 'Labour's Lost Millions', *Marxism Today* (Oct. 1983), pp. 7–13; and B. Pimlott (ed.), *Fabian Essays in Socialist Thought* (London: Heinemann, 1984), chap. 1.

[3] Wright (ed.), *British Socialism: Socialist Thought from the 1880s to the 1960s* (London: Longman, 1983), p. 13.

It might, of course, seem widely optimistic to propose Tawney's 1932 essay as a reference point for discussion, since it might conjure up the prospect of a future Labour majority on the scale of 1945 (presumably without the benefit of another World War).[4] In current circumstances, on the left, it would seem that a pessimist is a well-informed optimist. If a pessimist is someone without illusions in a tough world, then we had better all be pessimists. Thus, for example, we had better reject the notion that all the Labour Party needs is a period of further bleeding to cure it of its surfeit of crypto-Social Democrats and thereby turn it 'into a socialist party free from the constrictions hitherto imposed upon it by its leaders';[5] or that it is basically healthy and only needs a period of time to recuperate under its bright, new leadership; or that, though its condition is probably terminal, the 'future of the left lies in the consolidation of a new strength outside Parliament', in 'the support and encouragement of factory occupations, peace campaigns, black struggles and women's resistance'.[6] Being pessimists, however, does not mean that we should be fatalists.

Consider, first, Tawney's very title: 'The Choice before the Labour Party'. There are various ways of looking at the Labour Party of 1929–31. One view is that it was just *unable* to rise to the demands of the time—for example, because of its 'commitment to a Utopian socialism which incapacitated it from effectively working the parliamentary system and prevented it from coming to terms with economic reality',[7] or, alternatively, because it was enmeshed in 'labourism'. Another view is that there was no such *opportunity*: the Labour Party 'could not . . . reorganise economic life through state intervention' because of deficient understanding, lack of theory, the physical incapacity of the state, and the opposition of 'the bureaucracy, the Bank of England, the banks, the great financial institutions, most of industry' and 'the dead weight of conventional

[4] See I. Crewe, 'How to Link up and Pick up Vital Seats', *Guardian* (23 Mar. 1984).

[5] R. Miliband, 'Socialist Advance in Britain', in id. and J. Saville (eds.), *The Socialist Register 1983* (London: Merlin Press, 1983), p. 116. Miliband holds that 'whether the activists can . . . achieve the conquest of the Labour Party is more open than I had believed' (p. 117).

[6] D. Coates, 'The Labour Party and the Future of the Left', ibid. 100.

[7] R. Skidelsky, *Politicians and the Slump: The Labour Government of 1929–1931* (London: Macmillan, 1967), p. xii.

wisdom'.[8] Tawney, by contrast, took the view, as did many socialists at the time,[9] that there were lessons to be learned from 1931, choices to be faced and alternative paths to be pursued—though it is true that as the 1930s progressed, the Labour Party had made no significant break with the past.[10] An analogous range of views exists today. On one view, the Labour Party could never be a vehicle for socialism: 'cart-horses', Ralph Miliband once wrote, 'should not be expected to win the Derby'.[11] On another view, increasingly advanced on the right, at different levels of sophistication, the socialist project is, for a variety of reasons, inherently unrealizable or only realizable at an unacceptable cost. Certainly, anyone disposed to dispute both views must offer a detailed defence of his own against some powerful current counter-arguments.

For Tawney, the choice was clear-cut. The Labour Party could either be 'a political agent, pressing in Parliament the claims of different groups of wage-earners' or 'an instrument for the establishment of a socialist commonwealth, which alone, on its own principles, would meet those claims effectively, but would not meet them at once'. But 'it cannot be both at the same time in the same measure'. If it continued to be the first, with programmes that were more 'miscellanies' than programmes, offering 'the greatest possible number of carrots to the greatest possible number of donkeys', then it would continue to lack a 'stable standard of political values, such as would teach it to discriminate between the relative urgencies of different objectives'. Lacking such a standard, it 'lacks also the ability to subordinate the claims of this section of the movement or that to the progress of the whole, and to throw its whole weight against the central positions'. In short, it lacked 'any ordered conception of its task'.[12]

Labour's fundamental weakness, according to Tawney, was 'its lack of a creed'. The Labour Party was 'hesitant in action, because

[8] R. McKibbin, 'The Economic Policy of the Second Labour Government 1929–1931', *Past and Present* 68 (1975), pp. 121–3.

[9] See R. Eatwell and A. Wright, 'Labour and the Lessons of 1931', *History* 63 (1978), pp. 38–53.

[10] Ibid. 51; but see also Ben Pimlott, *Labour and the Left in the 1930s* (Cambridge: 1977, and Elizabeth Durbin's essay in *Fabian Essays*, chap. 4, for the view that in the field of policy-making, the Labour Party was in fact changing in important ways.

[11] Miliband, 'The Labour Government and Beyond', *The Socialist Register 1966*, p. 23.

[12] Tawney, 'The Choice before the Labour Party', pp. 335, 329, 338, 329.

divided in mind. It does not achieve what it could, because it does not know what it wants'. Being

> without clear convictions as to its own meaning and purpose, it is deprived of the dynamic which only convictions supply. If it neither acts with decision nor inspires others so to act, the principal reason is that it is itself undecided.

This weakness was fundamental:

> If it continues uncorrected, there neither is, nor ought to be, a future for the Labour Party. A political creed, it need hardly be said, is neither a system of transcendental doctrine nor a code of rigid formulae. It is a common conception of the ends of political action, and of the means of achieving them, based on a common view of the life proper to human beings, and of the steps required at any moment more nearly to attain it.[13]

Why did Tawney believe that such an energizing creed was a possibility that could be *chosen*? Because he did not believe that the interests of its actual and potential electorate were independent, given facts to which the Party must simply respond. On the contrary, he held that until

> the void in the mind of the Labour Party is filled—till interests are hammered by principles into a serviceable tool, which is what interests should be, and a steady will for a new social order takes the place of mild yearnings to make somewhat more comfortable terms with the social order of today—mere repairs to the engines will produce little but disillusionment.

For,

> the dynamic of any living movement is to be found, not merely in interests, but in principles, which unite men whose personal interests may be poles asunder, and that if principles are to exercise their appeal, they must be frankly stated.

It was, of course, objected that, by taking such a course, the Labour Party would alienate many of its supporters:

> It may, for the time being; New Models are not made by being all things to all men. But it will keep those worth keeping. And those retained will gather others, of a kind who will not turn back in the day of battle.[14]

This raised the question of attitude or (a word he liked) 'spirit', which Tawney's essay both exemplifies and describes. 'If there is the right spirit in the movement', he wrote, 'there will not be any

13 Tawney, 'The Choice before the Labour Party', p. 327.
14 Ibid. 327–8, 336, 335.

question of the next Labour Government repeating the policy of office at all costs which was followed by the last.' The Labour Party, he wrote, must put essentials before sectional claims, and it must create 'a body of men and women who, whether trade unionists or intellectuals, put socialism first, and whose creed carries conviction, because they live in accordance with it'. When socialists come to power, they must do so, not 'as diffident agents of policies not their own, but as socialists'; they must 'have created behind them, before they assume office, a strong body of opinion, which "knows what it fights for, and loves what it knows"'. The Party must 'create in advance a temper and mentality of a kind to carry it through, not one crisis, but a series of crises'. Instead, it has

> drugged itself with the illusion that, by adding one to one, it would achieve the millennium, without the painful necessity of clarifying its mind, disciplining its appetites, and training for a tough wrestle with established powers and property. It touched lightly on its objectives, or veiled them in the radiant ambiguity of the word socialism, which each hearer could interpret to his taste. So it ended by forgetting the reason for its existence. It has now to rediscover it.[15]

What, then, was the objective of a socialist party? The answer, Tawney said, was 'simplicity itself':

> The fundamental question, as always, is: who is to be master? Is the reality behind the decorous drapery of political democracy to continue to be the economic power wielded by a few thousand—or, if that be preferred, a few hundred thousand—bankers, industrialists and land-owners? Or shall a serious effort be made—as serious, for example, as was made, for other purposes, during the war—to create organs through which the nation can control, in co-operation with other nations, its own economic destinies; plan its business as it deems most conducive to the general well-being; override, for the sake of economic efficiency, the obstruction of vested interests; and distribute the product of its labours in accordance with some generally recognised principles of justice? Capitalist parties presumably accept the first alternative. A socialist party chooses the second. The nature of its business is determined by its choice.

That business was

> not the passage of a series of reforms in the interests of different sections of the working classes. It is to abolish all advantages and disabilities which have their source, not in differences of personal quality, but in disparities of wealth, opportunity, social position and economic power. It is, in short—it

15 Ibid. 343, 340, 331, 335–6, 332.

is absurd that at this time of day the statement should be necessary— a classless society.[16]

Those who accept this objective, Tawney observed, may do so for more than one reason:

> because they think it more conducive to economic efficiency than a capitalism which no longer, as in its prime, delivers the goods; or merely because they have an eccentric prejudice in treating men as men; or, since the reasons are not necessarily inconsistent, for both reasons at once. In either case, they are socialists, though on matters of technique and procedure they may be uninstructed socialists. Those who do not accept it are not socialists, though they may be as wise as Solon and as virtuous as Aristides. Socialism, thus defined, will be unpleasant, of course, to some persons professing it. Who promised them pleasure?

A future socialist government must 'apply to the affairs of its own country the principles which, it believes, should govern those of the world', aiming to extend the area of economic life controlled by some rational conception of the common good, not by a scramble, whether of persons, classes, or nations, for individual power and profit.[17]

In sum, Tawney's essay carries three lessons that are strikingly and urgently relevant to the present day.

The first is *anti-fatalism*. Of course, choices cannot be willed or conjured into existence whatever the objective circumstances. Nevertheless, Tawney's anti-fatalism provides a valuable antidote to a certain kind of electoral determinism that has prevailed in Labour Party debates ever since the 1950s, when the Revisionists embraced the *embourgoisement* thesis, and especially since the post-mortems on the 1959 election. It was then widely held that Labour's traditional working-class base was threatened by affluence.[18] Today, the opposite case is advanced: because of de-industrialization and the current recession, the proletariat is disappearing, as traditional proletarian occupations decline. Or it is argued, as by Eric Hobsbawm, that increasing sectionalism and public sector employment in the working class has halted the 'forward march of labour'.[19] Or labour support is said to be doomed by long-term social demographic trends.[20] Common to all such arguments is the assumption

[16] Tawney, 'The Choice before the Labour Party', pp. 332–3.

[17] Ibid. 333, 344–5.

[18] For example, see M. Abrams and R. Rose, *Must Labour Lose?* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1960).

[19] Hobsbawm, *The Forward March of Labour Halted*, ed. M. Jacques and F. Mulhern (London: Verso in assoc. with *Marxism Today*, 1981).

[20] See Crewe, *Guardian* (23 Mar. 1984).

that 'interests' on which the Labour Party essentially relies are fatally withering away. But, as Gareth Stedman Jones has well said, 'the "objective" realities of class discerned by social surveys and sociological analysis do not have any unambiguous bearing upon the fate of class-oriented political parties'.[21] And indeed, as Tawney shrewdly observed, the Labour Party is 'less of a class party than any other British party'.[22] It has, indeed, always relied upon substantial sectors of the middle classes for support to achieve majority governments.

Fatalism, however, extends far beyond the perennial analyses of Labour's prospects; it appears to have bitten deep into the electorate itself. The evidence from studies of public opinion and voting studies seems to suggest that Britain's apparently intractable economic problems have led to quiet disillusionment: people increasingly assume that widespread inequalities are unalterable and the economy beyond human control.[23] With such sentiments Thatcherism is peculiarly at home, and it has sought to nurture and breed them, while attempting to root out the very idea that social progress can be achieved through the rational exercise of political will. In this it has been outstandingly successful, propagating a fatalistic creed (the Hayekian canon banishes the very notion of social justice, seeking to replace a sense of injustice by the recognition of necessity, in the form of ill luck). In the face of such triumphant fatalism, the only option is, as Tawney proposed, 'to seize every opportunity of forcing a battle on fundamental questions'.[24] The only potentially effective means of resisting, and eventually rolling back, the present tide is to develop and propagate an alternative analysis of the present that reaches to fundamentals, and a vision of an alternative future to a 'society of go-getters' that is both appealing and feasible. That is the only way, if there is one, to stir and mobilize the deep and partly submerged counter-currents of our social and cultural life.

The second lesson concerns what we may call the *spirit of socialism*. For such a battle, there needs to be 'a body of conviction as

[21] Stedman Jones, 'Why is the Labour Party in a Mess?' in his *Languages of Class* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1983), p. 242.

[22] Tawney, 'The Choice before the Labour Party', p. 333.

[23] See H. Newby, C. Vogler, D. Rose, and G. Marshall, 'From Class Structure to Class Action: British Working-Class Politics in the 1980s'. I have greatly benefited from reading this excellent analysis, on which much in the next section of this chapter draws. For further evidence on fatalism see J. Alt, *The Politics of Economic Decline* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1979).

[24] Tawney, 'The Choice before the Labour Party', p. 337.

resolute and informed as the opposition in front of it'—a set of attitudes free of class hatred and aware that 'both duty and prudence require that necessary changes be effected without a breakdown' and that 'the possibility of effecting them is conditioned by international, as much as by domestic, factors'.[25]

What Tawney illustrates is something that has been all too rare in the history of the Labour movement and has never been more needed than today: 'moralism' with 'a hard cutting edge' that makes 'connections between moral valuations and social institutions with direct consequences for political practice'.[26] These consequences lie at different levels. One example, and it is not a trivial one, concerns personal life-style. If Labour leaders 'accept titles and other such toys, without a clear duty to the movement to do so', they 'widen the rift between its principles and practice', for 'livery and an independent mind go ill together'[27] and, in any case, 'how can followers be Ironsides if leaders are flunkies?'[28]

More generally, an 'ordered conception of its task' would enable the Party to cut a path through the jungle of conflicting sectional claims and, in particular, abandon its disastrous, self-defeating support for 'free collective bargaining'. It would encourage it to grasp the nettle of an effective incomes policy, instead of avoiding it, as in the last election campaign. Such support and avoidance can buy political allies and achieve famous victories (as over the Heath Government). But they have proved to be pyrrhic (as the Callaghan Government discovered) and they demonstrate beyond any question the Party's lack of any 'stable standard of political values' and 'ordered conception of its task'. For a real and effective incomes policy (such as the left *used* to advocate) is the only alternative to unemployment as a means of controlling inflation.[29] Achieving such control has long been a major preoccupation of the population at large. If a will and a way cannot be found to commit the unions to an effective incomes policy, within the Labour Party (the Social Democrats have a will, but no way), then not only will the prevailing fatalism about the inevitability of large-scale unemployment prove amply justified, but the Labour Party will finally show itself to be unserious about the pursuit of the socialist objective.

25 Tawney, 'The Choice before the Labour Party', p. 336.
26 Wright, *British Socialism*, p. 13.
27 Tawney, 'The Choice before the Labour Party', pp. 334, 341.
28 Ibid. 342.
29 See W. Beckerman, 'A New Realism', *New Statesman* (2 Dec. 1983).

Which leads us, thirdly, to Tawney's account of the *socialist objective* itself. His statement of this is an admirably clear, coherent, and compelling statement of essentials which still captures much of what distinguishes a socialist from a liberal perspective (and socialists from Social Democrats anxious to purloin the mantle of Tawney's name and legacy). As Wright observes,[30] Tawney's 'discussion of equality in terms of equal worth and social solidarity has different foundations from a liberal approach concerned with identifying the criteria of "fairness" and social justice'. It centres upon the notion of social unity based upon common ends and shared values—what Anne Phillips calls the 'social' in socialism—and is indeed fully vulnerable to her admirable critique (in its 'eccentric prejudice in treating men as men'[31]). It is true that it lacks a critical sense of the varied forms of solidarity and the conflicts between these. Nor does Tawney grapple with the relations between solidarity, pluralism, and individuality. These are urgent tasks for socialist political theory. But his account does register a clear sense of what socialist solidarity is not—the 'scramble . . . for individual power and profit' and the 'tyranny of money'[32]—and it forms, I believe, as good a starting-point as any for building a socialist (as against a liberal or social-democratic) theory of justice.

Of course, it needs reformulating and rethinking in the light both of new, or newly visible, forms of oppression, injustice, and unfreedom, and of new social movements with new vocabularies and concerns. It must also grapple, as Peter Kellner argues,[33] with the problem of reconciling the community's good with that of preserving, indeed expanding, the role of voluntary transactions within it: exactly *when* should market forces operate and how should they be constrained and guided? In essentials, however, it still offers broad guidelines for reshaping Labour's 'common conception of its task', after the deforming and dispiriting years, under Wilson and Callaghan, of pragmatic capitulation ('They threw themselves into the role of the Obsequious Apprentice, or Prudence Rewarded, as though bent on proving that, so far from being different from other governments, His Majesty's Labour Government could rival the most respectable of them in cautious conventionality.[34]) It embodies

30 In Pimlott, *Fabian Essays in Socialist Thought*, p. 88.
31 Ibid. 230.
32 Tawney, 'The Choice before the Labour Party', p. 345.
33 In Pimlott, *Fabian Essays in Socialist Thought*, p. 151.
34 Tawney, 'The Choice before the Labour Party', pp. 324–5.

a vision which is neither 'distributionist' nor 'productionist', but both together ('It is not a question, of course, either of merely improving the distribution of wealth, or merely increasing its production, but of doing both together.[35]) It is neither what is currently called 'libertarian', nor 'collectivist', in the manner of the Webbs, nor cautiously social-democratic, but begins to inject a distinctively socialist content into basic values central to (some of) our traditions, such as liberty, democracy, equal opportunity, justice and, indeed, solidarity. Kellner is right: it *is*

> a measure of the Tories' ideological ascendancy that they have so successfully clothed the pursuit of privilege in the rhetoric of democracy—and a measure of Labour's retreat that our opposition in the name of fairness and decency should be so widely construed as an assault on liberty.[36]

If we are to move 'beyond the fragments', one prerequisite is a coherent scheme of socialist principles, to order priorities and unify adherents—'a body of conviction as resolute and informed as the opposition in front of it'. It was needed in the 1930s and it is needed today.

II

Yet the world of today is one that has been radically transformed since Tawney wrote, and the scale and dimensions of this transformation must be understood and faced.

Tawney could plausibly analyse his world in time-honoured and well-tried categories. Thus he could write of the 'economic power' of 'bankers, industrialists and land-owners', of overcoming the 'vested interests' they imposed in the way of a socialist distribution, and that

> class-privilege takes more than one form. It is both economic and social. It rests on functionless property, on the control of key positions in finance and industry, on educational inequalities, on the mere precariousness of proletarian existence, which prevents its victims looking before and after.[37]

But this is a world we have lost, just as the Labour Party Tawney addressed was the Labour Party of yesterday. Economic power,

[35] Tawney, 'The Choice before the Labour Party', p. 333. Cf. Neil Kinnock's characterization of 'democratic socialism' as a '*productionist* philosophy': 'My Socialism', *New Statesman* (7 Oct. 1983).
[36] In Pimlott, *Fabian Essays in Socialist Thought*, p. 147.
[37] Tawney, 'The Choice before the Labour Party', p. 334.

vested interests, class privilege and class oppression seemed (whether to Marxists or Fabians) clearly identifiable, as did the agency that would bring them to an end (whether it be revolutionary workers or rational professionals). It was a world in which Britain still played an independent world role and its social structure rested upon the central geological fault of the distinction between manual and mental labour. In this world, the organized working class had 'the consciousness of an estate with definite interests to defend and advance within the existing polity', through the trade union movement, while the consciousness of the professional classes was 'the ethic of service, of intelligence and expertise, in pursuit of humanitarian ends, of a civilizing mission both at home and abroad'. Trade unionism was 'the vehicle of the poor and the underprivileged', while 'the self-esteem of the old professional middle class'—experts, teachers, scientists, doctors, civil servants, preachers—'stemmed from their sense of difference from the working class and of helping the labour movement from an unassailed privileged position'.[38] The Labour Party expressed and represented this alliance which culminated triumphantly in 1945. Tawney, from one point of view, may be seen as its finest and most articulate exponent. But since the 1950s, the parties to this alliance have largely fragmented, and their unifying forms of class consciousness largely dissolved; while the Labour Party has ceased to function as its natural embodiment (uniting workers of 'hand and brain') combining the largely defensive interests of the working class with the evangelical, Christian-based conscience of the middle classes, under the acknowledged leadership of the latter.

Furthermore, it is unhelpful to speak of resuming 'the forward march of labour which began to falter thirty years ago'[39]—as though the problem were to continue a (once magnificent) journey across territory which, though it may have been substantially transformed by various new developments, is still recognizable by the old familiar landmarks. It is not enough to take note of the 'changes in British capitalism' (the rise of mass production and the concentration of production units, the growth of monopoly capitalism and the public sector, the political determination of the capitalist market and the massive rise in workers' living standards) and the 'changes within the

[38] Stedman Jones, 'Why is the Labour Party in a Mess?' pp. 247, 248.
[39] Hobsbawm, *The Forward March of Labour Halted*, p. 18.

working class' (the influx of women workers and immigrants, and the growth of divisive sectional struggles) in order to explain why 'common working-class interests' have failed to prevail and why the movement 'in the right general direction' seems 'to have got stuck', and to conclude that we are today

> in a period of world crisis for capitalism, and, more specifically, of the crisis—one might almost say the breakdown—of the British capitalist society, at a moment when the working class and its movement should be in a clear position to provide a clear alternative and to lead British peoples towards it.[40]

Rather than resuming the 'forward march', the problem is now one of drawing up new maps, of regrouping the army and recruiting new forces. (Indeed the very metaphor of a 'forward march' will have to be abandoned. It never really fitted anyway, and it derives, as Raymond Williams has noted, 'from an antiquated kind of military campaign based on the poor bloody infantry'.[41])

For the truth is that the class structure has radically changed over the last decades, becoming both more complex and more obscure; that in consequence the parties to the old Labour alliance have fragmented in various cross-cutting, ambiguous, and contradictory ways; and that the complementary forms of class consciousness on which that alliance depended (the defence of unambiguous and shared collective interests allied with a middle class humanitarian conscience) have all but dissolved.

There have been massive changes in the nature of both capital and labour.[42] This has occurred within the context of an increasingly international economy, now dominated by international corporations, in which they have been restructuring the international division of labour, directing capital intensive production, research, and development to areas of high labour productivity and the best markets and labour intensive production to the Third World: as a result, Britain's economic decline, unemployment in skilled and semi-skilled occupations, and de-industrialization have been accelerated. The changes in capital have been in the direction of ever more complex forms of ownership and control, rendering them ever more

[40] Hobsbawm, *The Forward March of Labour Halted*, pp. 13, 17, 18.

[41] Raymond Williams, ibid.

[42] See Newby, *et al.*, 'From Class Structure to Class Action', and the refs. cited therein.

difficult to perceive and make sense of. It is no longer a question of Tawney's few thousand or few hundred thousand 'bankers, industrialists and land-owners' but of pension funds, multinational corporations, cartels, 'spheres of interest', and so on. Economic power and vested interests have become less and less representable: capitalism now lacks not so much a human face as a human form. As for the changes in labour, these have resulted from sectoral shifts in the economy between industries and from the restructuring and reorganization of labour within them.[43] Here the most notable effects have been the massive growth and diversification in the service sector, de-skilling and white-collar proletarianization and the increasing feminization of work. Furthermore, the de-industrialization and shedding of labour in the current recession has accentuated the division between those in work and the unemployed and underemployed. It is no longer a question of 'the mere precariousness of proletarian existence' but increasingly the precariousness of existing outside the proletariat—outside work and the organized working class.

Among all these developments, a number are particularly worth stressing. First, economic power has become more anonymous and invisible. Second, the contours of the occupational structure have become more difficult to discern. Third, the traditional image of the proletarian—as 'male, manual and muscular' (in David Lockwood's happy phrase)—is becoming increasingly inapplicable to the industrial scene. Fourth, the very distinction between manual and non-manual labour is less and less relevant. Indeed, fifth, labour or work itself, and the sphere of production, seems to be becoming less central to the identity and consciousness of workers, while consumption, especially with respect to housing and transport, has become more central to the definition of their basic interests.[44] A new dividing-line, between home owners and others, now cuts across older, fading class divisions, fragmenting the working class by dividing those with a stake in the financial and property markets from those dependent on

[43] See E. O. Wright and J. Singlemann, 'Proletarianization in Advanced Capitalist Societies; An Empirical Investigation into the Debate between Marxist and Post-Industrial Theorists over the Transformation of the Labour Process', Mimeo., Dept. of Sociology, Univ. of Wisconsin, 1978, cited in Newby, *et al.*, 'From Class Structure to Class Action'.

[44] See J. Westergaard, 'Class of "84"', *New Socialist* (Jan./Feb. 1984), 30–6 and Newby, *et al.*, 'From Class Structure to Class Action'.

state provision, and significantly affecting voting patterns, to the progressive disadvantage of the Labour Party, given its current policies. Consumption patterns increasingly shape and reflect how people view their interests, their reference groups, the welfare state, and the Labour Party. Sixth, those in employment, including the professional classes, have turned more and more to sectional distributional conflicts, exploiting their differential market situations and organizational resources to the full—a trend only increased under inflationary conditions, albeit tempered by recession. Seventh, the poor and the underprivileged are now to be found more and more outside the organized working class and the trade union bargaining process—among the unemployed, the unwaged, coloured immigrants, and one-parent families.

Finally, there appears to have been a reactive growth (encouraged by the combination of recession and inflation) of instrumental, pecuniary, egoistic, in short capitalist values and attitudes, and a disintegration of various moral frameworks within which these had a subordinate place and faced various countervailing forms of commitment, loyalty, and discipline—whether based on unionism, locality, or class. In part, these frameworks have been withering away as the industrial, urban, and social structure changes; in part, more recently, they are being stripped away in a systematic, ruthless and manipulative political onslaught on the organizations of the working class and the institutions of local government. In part too, this has occurred because of the successes of the welfare state and of Labour in power. For when Tawney wrote, the 'mere precariousness of proletarian existence' gave the ties of solidarity and community a clear instrumental point: the work-place, the union, the neighbourhood, the extended family, the Labour Party were vital means of defending, and advancing, shared interests in a hostile and uncertain world. Universal welfare provision, however inadequate and maladministered, has removed that context, further weakening the bonds of communal solidarity. In short, the moral background to the cash nexus may be fading away,[45] leaving us morally unencumbered in what Tawney, in his forthright way, called an 'acquisitive society'.

[45] See Westergaard, 'The Rediscovery of the Cash Nexus' in R. Miliband and J. Saville (eds.), *The Socialist Register 1970*.

III

If this is the world we live in, how, then, are the lessons of Tawney to be applied to it? Is it possible today to be anti-fatalist? Is it feasible to live by and to spread the spirit of socialism? How should the socialist objective be framed and pursued?

Certainly, the socialist project confronts some formidable obstacles in present-day Britain. Facing them with 'cold realism' carries several implications.

First, our social analysis must endeavour to grasp these hard realities, unencumbered by wishful and anachronistic notions of class and class structure. It must take seriously the consumption-related interests of people whose loyalties have already been alienated by the Labour Party's historically laudable single-minded commitment to state provision. It must accordingly begin to distinguish between capitalism and the market principle, and between different types of markets.[46] It must also address other forms of domination and powerlessness, injustice and unfreedom than the exploitative wage relation and particularly those rightly associated in the public mind with socialism and the Labour Party, such as the relation between welfare bureaucracies and their clients.

Second, there must be a renewal of the socialist educational tradition, in which Tawney, and the Fabians generally, played such a central part. There must be a massive effort to make the increasingly opaque and complex processes and relations to which I have alluded more widely intelligible to those caught up within them. This is partly a matter of fiercely campaigning against the cumulative and growing inequalities within the formal education system (in the 1990s there is likely to be a smaller proportion of working-class children than in the 1970s[47]) and resisting at every point the current drive to sharpen these. Within the curriculum the battle against orthodoxy and establishment-mindedness must be waged with new vigour: where are the radical and critical history books for primary

[46] On this intriguing question see e.g. C. E. Lindblom, *Politics and Markets* (New York: Basic Books, 1977); A. Clayre (ed.), *The Political Economy of Co-operation and Participation: A Third Sector* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1980); and A. Nove, *The Economics of Feasible Socialism* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1983).

[47] As Gareth Williams suggests in the *Times Higher Education Supplement* (30 Mar. 1984); see also *Democratic Trends and Future University Candidates* (London: Royal Society, 1984).

schoolchildren? And the systematic, though selective, onslaught on social science, and sociology in particular, by the present Government and friendly opinion leaders, must be taken especially seriously. Here is a major area in which the old Fabian tradition of research—of measurement and publicity—must be continued and renewed. It is also a question of returning to the innovative educational traditions of the past outside the formal system. But it is no longer mainly in miners' lodges, the WEA, and Ruskin College that such renewal will be found, but in the use of the media—both at national level (television, a labour national newspaper) and at local level, through the creative participatory use of new technology, above all videos, whose democratic possibilities can only now be glimpsed. Socialist education must awaken after its long, comfortable sleep.

Third, we must finally cast off the belief, shared by both the Fabian and the Marxist components of the British socialist tradition, that, whatever its setbacks, capitalist development somehow naturally culminates in socialism. This is not just a question of rejecting an antique, falsely reassuring evolutionary optimism, the Whig history of the left. In part, as I have suggested, the very pursuit of socialist objectives has made them less widely appealing and less easily attainable. It is also a matter of taking anti-fatalism seriously, looking hard to see how and where capitalism can be *socialised*—by diffusing the ownership and control of capital, both personal and industrial, and to discover what forms the 'organs through which the nation can control, in co-operation with other nations, its own economic destinies' can take in the contemporary world of internationally imposed inequalities. The dominating and growing role of multinationals makes this task all the more urgent and difficult, and all the more scandalous the Labour Party's relative traditional disinterest in the socialist parties and movements beyond our shores, and especially on the European continent.

Fourth, we should welcome, rather than regret, the passing of 'consensus politics'. This was a form of politics within which socialist advance was never going to prove possible. Now there has been a clearing of the decks, and we should see this as an opportunity to rediscover and redefine a 'common conception of the ends of political action, and of the means of achieving them, based on a common view of the life proper to human beings, and of the steps required at any moment more nearly to attain it'.

Fifth, among these steps must be the immensely difficult business of forging alliances between potential constituencies, building outwards from the Labour Party's shrunken base and upon various forms of solidarity, including those based on local and urban communities, regionalism, ethnicity, and social movements. In this process, particular attention should be paid to the rejuvenation of local democracy—a central Fabian concern, since the Webbs, much neglected by the Labour Party in recent times. For it is at the local and regional level that powerlessness and inequality are most resented and have grown most dramatically. Unemployment and deprivation, poor public services, the 'Thatchervilles' of inner cities, inadequate housing and transport, high crime rates, unsatisfactory policing—on such issues successful campaigning can be mounted, as part of the necessary task of seeking interests that may be 'harnessed by principles into a servicible tool' to build a new social order.

Finally, we need to rethink and restate those principles in a way that will evoke a response from people who are justifiably sceptical of the socialist record (while in countless unacknowledged ways its beneficiaries) and of the Labour Party's claims to their allegiance, but for whom the available alternatives offer bleak prospects indeed. And we must do so with the driving purpose of recovering and mobilizing a latent anti-fatalistic consensus of sentiment and belief: a sense of outrage and of justice, and a belief in the centrality of welfare rights to citizenship and of political will to social progress. This was the battle the Fabians fought. For a time it seemed to have been won. It has not. Now we must take it up all over again, with no certainty of victory.