

CAMPAIGN FOR LABOUR PARTY DEMOCRACY briefing

New threat to Labour's trade union link

Keep the Party Labour

The Labour Party's historic link to the trade union movement is under threat. Sir Hayden Phillips, appointed by the Prime Minister to carry out the review of political party funding, is considering making a series of recommendations that would dramatically undermine the trade union — Labour Party relationship. In particular he has indicated he favours capping donations from trade unions and undermining the collective voice of union members in the party.

The Labour Party unanimously agreed a submission to Phillips' review, at its 2006 Party Conference, that strongly argues against the Tories' proposal of statutory donation caps. An emergency National Executive Committee meeting on 14 December reaffirmed that approach and rejected the Hayden Phillips' recommendations that do not respect the structure and constitution of the Labour Party.

The draft document from Phillips proposes the following:

- A £50,000 donation cap applicable to all trade union donations.
- A 'double opt in' approach — whereby current and future union members would be required every year to opt into both the political fund and to affiliate to the Labour Party.
- Those opting into supporting the Labour Party would have their contributions 'individualised', directly passing straight to the Labour Party and not, as currently, collectivised via their union's political fund.

Impact of proposals:

- They would significantly and disproportionately slash Labour's finances as compared to the Tories, as well as effectively ending the Party-trade union relationship as we know it.
- 'Individualisation' of the affiliated relationship would fundamentally undermine the collective voice that trade unions have within the Party.
- 'Opting in' was introduced in 1927 by the Tory government to weaken Labour and undermine trade unions, the 1945 Labour government reintroduced 'opting out'

— Phillips' proposal of annual 'double opting in' is worse than the 1927 restrictions.

- Bypassing trade unions (in the relationship between the Party and affiliated trade unionists) effectively ends the link as we know it, with the creation of a new category of Party membership that does not include the unions themselves.
- A £50,000 donation cap is financially advantageous to the Tories, who would only require a handful of rich donors to match the maximum contribution permissible from trade unions representing millions of people.

Sir Hayden Phillip's review was set up to look at the issue of the funding of political parties following the 'loans for peerages' row. The trade unions have not been accused of any impropriety or irregular behaviour with regard to their donations or affiliations, their funding of the party has been shown to be fully transparent. It is particularly inappropriate that this review might seek to fundamentally interfere with the constitution of a political party.

It has been reported in the press that the Prime Minister's office has encouraged Phillips to pursue these anti-Labour proposals. Many Labour MPs, across the whole spectrum of the party, are determined to defend the union link, as made clear at the Parliamentary Labour Party meeting on 11 December.

What you can do

Pass a resolution along the following lines at your Branch and forward it through your local party General Management Committee to Labour's representatives in Parliament.

"This Constituency Labour Party is concerned about press reports indicating that the Phillips Review into political party funding will recommend the introduction of statutory donation caps on trade unions and undermine the historic relationship between the party and the trade unions. We note that the Labour Party Conference and Labour's National Executive Committee have explicitly opposed donation caps. We call on the Party Leadership and all members of the Parliamentary Labour Party to reject such proposals."

Defending civil liberties and freedom

By **Jeremy Corbyn MP**

The Queen's Speech has once again predicted a new raft of attacks on freedoms via anti-terrorist legislation. In 2000 parliament passed the Terrorism Act which superseded the older Prevention of Terrorism Act. This act was draconian in many ways and included in it the concept of banning organisations and restricting political activity in Britain, something which hadn't happened before outside war time.

After 2001 and the attack on Afghanistan, the government forced through increasingly powerful anti-terror legislation which included the concept of executive detention.

Most of the world now recognises Guantanamo Bay is an appalling concept and the treatment of prisoners there amounts to torture. Sadly, the lengthy detention of unconvicted prisoners in Belmarsh was little more than a British version of Guantanamo Bay.

After the government lost the high court case and was forced to release prisoners from Belmarsh, they controversially rushed through legislation which included control orders, and gave the government the right to deport people to countries that were not signatories to the UN or European conventions on human rights.

In Britain today there are a considerable number of foreign nationals languishing in prison who have not been convicted, nor charged with anything, but are merely awaiting a deal between Britain and countries who are not signatories to any of the human rights measures.

The control orders are another form of executive power which is unchallengeable in court, and if the individual who is subject to control orders breaks them in any way then custody automatically follows.

In the forthcoming session of parliament there are measures to remove jury trial for serious fraud cases: yet another attack on the whole principle of the jury system and one to be strongly resisted! There are also suggestions of increasing the banning of individual organisations and possibly once again debating 90 days detention without trial for terrorist suspects.

The liberties that have been taken away in the past five years were all very hard fought for over many centuries. It is not the place for members of parliament who have been elected to uphold liberties and democracy, to then set about demolishing them.

One of the side effects of the post 9/11 hysteria has been the growth of religious intolerance within our society, and subsequent attacks on identifiable ethnic minorities.

The hysteria surrounding the Muslim community in Britain has had the effect of attacks on mosques around the country, and on individuals wearing Muslim clothes, particularly Muslim women.

Following on from Jack Straw's comments about women

wearing the niqab, came an abuse of the concept of the European enlightenment by a number of right wing commentators on television and in the press, challenging the whole idea of the freedom to pursue religious thought and activity in Britain.

At recent public meetings and events organised in defence of the Muslim community against Islamophobia, many speakers have drawn a parallel with the way Jewish people were treated in Britain in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, the way in which Irish migrants were treated and vilified, and the attacks of the black community through the use of the 'sus' laws and stop and search methods.

Islamophobia is the latest in a long line of discrediting attacks on minorities, and the role of John Reid and other ministers in this is appalling. He calls upon parents to spy on their children, and universities to operate a controlling influence via spying networks in colleges.

When the British government decided to follow George Bush in Afghanistan and attack Iraq, the impact on British public life was enormous. We are now a far less coherent and less tolerant society. It's time for the left to stand up in solidarity with our multicultural and faith diverse communities.

Reproduced from Socialist Campaign Group News, December 2006 issue — www.scgn.org.uk

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