PART III

Leaving Labour
The beginning of 1929 brought more signs of the increasingly recalcitrant stance that was coming to characterize the ILP’s relationship with the Labour Party. On the agenda for the London divisional conference was a motion from the Clapham branch critical of what it saw as Labour’s tendency to compromise with opponents and temper its policies in hopes of attracting wider support. The branch recognized “the necessity of converting the masses of the people to our point of view” but felt that Labour could best achieve this goal by advocating a “bold and uncompromising policy.” In an amendment to the motion, the Marylebone branch pressed for clarification of the ILP’s position on the Labour Party’s “Disloyalty clause.” These rumblings of discontent in London were symptomatic of things to come. Indeed, many within the ILP were growing impatient with what they saw as the Labour Party’s half-hearted promotion of socialist policies and its efforts to impose this tepid approach on MPs—including, most notably, ILP MPs.

The Lead-Up to the 1929 Election

Two months later, Brockway included in his list of issues for the upcoming ILP conference the demand for “revolutionising Parliament” by means of the committee system. He also noted the need for the ILP MPs to urge the Labour Party to pursue the Socialism in Our Time program endorsed by the ILP at three consecutive annual conferences.1

Reporting on the 1929 annual conference, the New Leader praised Roden Buxton for his courage and sincerity in arguing for “what was unquestionably an unpopular view.” According to Buxton, the ILP was “sowing suspicion” of the labour movement and, as a result, “was becoming increasingly disliked.” Buxton went on to argue that “overlapping with the Labour Party” was a mistake. Instead, the ILP should abandon all connection to “legislative and administrative work” (including the nomination of candidates for Parliament) and stick to its traditional role of promoting socialism, focusing exclusively on education
and propaganda. Buxton’s views were not utterly without support. One dele-
gate thought it would be “better for Maxton to come out of Parliament and be
a John the Baptist for the I.L.P.” But all of this was overwhelmingly rejected.
“The I.L.P. has never been satisfied with advocating principles only,” Brockway
explained in his report on the conference for the New Leader. Opposition
came from across a very wide spectrum. Patrick Dollan said that 95 percent
of Scottish ILP members would reject Buxton’s view, while Trevelyan insisted
that the ILP “must be all it is or nothing.”

At the conference, the demand for the reform of parliamentary procedure as
advocated by Jowett—“who,” Brockway reminded his readers, “has made the
subject of Parliamentary Reform his life-work”—was once more agreed upon
without dissent. The new regulations for the selection of ILP parliamentary
candidates based on their acceptance of the party’s policies were approved. The
successful NAC motion, moved by Kirkwood, insisted that candidates should
have a satisfactory record of membership and service in the ILP and should
undertake to accept “in general” ILP policy and give effect to it in the House
of Commons if elected.

An amendment to the NAC motion, put forward by London Central on
behalf of four other branches as well, would have enabled the NAC to end
the ILP membership of those MPs who “consistently opposed party policy.”
Although the proposed amendment was defeated by a vote of 214 to 124, it
clearly had the support of a significant minority of delegates. The amend-
ment would also have instructed ILP MPs to vote against war credits. The
following week, the New Leader concluded that, on the war credits issue, the
ILP’s policy should be “to work within the Labour Party for the acceptance
of our views, but to acknowledge the authority of majority decisions when
they go against us.” However, acceptance of dissent on “issues of principle
upon which minorities feel so keenly” was essential.

With the general election campaign underway, the New Leader editor
reiterated that the ILP regarded socialism as an “urgent vital necessity”
and complained that the Labour Party had no “transitional programme.”
Yet the paper also put out a four-page “MacDonald Special” supporting
the Labour leader and stressing his “work for peace.” After the election, at
which Labour, while failing to gain a majority in the House of Commons,
became, for the first time, the largest party in terms of seats won—a total
of 287, as compared to 191 in the election of December 1923—the NAC and
the Leader remained supportive. But how long would this last?
Another Minority Labour Government

The first NAC meeting following the election passed a resolution congratulating MacDonald “on his great personal triumph.” It was, the resolution said, an opportunity for his government to begin the “reorganisation of our society on Socialist lines.” In that work, he would be “assured of the loyal and whole-hearted support of the Independent Labour Party.” At least for a while, the support continued. “A promising beginning has been made with the two chief objects of the Government—Employment and Peace,” declared the New Leader in June, while an editorial headline the following month recognized that the government had put forward a “Good Reformist Programme.”

But ILP support for the government was not to last. By the time of the Labour Party conference in the autumn of 1929, the New Leader was complaining of “timidty and feebleness” and predicting that “unless within a reasonable measure of time it is possible to do something substantial for the workless the Government will fall with a crash.” In the House of Commons, Maxton had responded to the King’s Speech laying out the new government’s proposed legislation by saying that he hoped “not to make difficulties for the present Government.” He would, he said, be “very patient.” But Maxton’s speech, reproduced verbatim from Hansard, was headlined in Forward as “Maxton and the Labour Government: Terms on Which He Will Give His Support,” hardly suggesting the stance of a Labour MP patiently disposed to support his own government.

Brockway had been elected as MP for the London constituency of East Leyton. In his 1942 memoir, Inside the Left, he recalled the first meeting of the Parliamentary Labour Party, at which Wheatley argued that it was wrong to accept office as another minority government, while Brockway himself urged that “the Government should introduce its socialist programme and stand or fall by it,” much as Allen had suggested years before. MacDonald, of course, rejected both of these proposals. Brockway’s account continues:

He turned towards the I.L.P. Group and warned the Party that the one thing which might destroy the Government was “sniping” from within. A roar of cheers resounded through the room. There was no misunderstanding the threat in MacDonald’s voice or in the cheers; so early in the life of the second Labour Government the battle between MacDonald-ism and the I.L.P. was joined.

From the standpoint of its Labour adversaries, who were seeing the ILP increasingly as a “party within the party,” the very fact that MacDonald was physically able to turn “towards the I.L.P. Group,” whose members were presumably sitting together as a distinct bloc, was itself significant.
The ILP Parliamentary Group and the Insurance Bill

Unemployment and provision for the unemployed had always been crucial and emotive issues for the entire labour movement. Labour came to office having pledged to repeal the “not genuinely seeking work” provision of the existing legislation, which was used to disqualify some of those seeking unemployment benefits. The minister of Labour, Margaret Bondfield, had appointed the Morris Committee to recommend changes, but the members of the committee who represented employers’ organizations were unwilling to accept what came to be known as the Hayday Formula. This took its name from Labour MP Arthur Hayday, one of the two Labour Party representatives on the committee. The Hayday Formula would have disqualified only those who had definitely refused suitable employment. Instead, the Morris Committee recommended that disqualification should also take place when employment was available and the claimant failed to prove “reasonable efforts to obtain such work.” There seemed to be little or no difference between what was now proposed and the old formula that Labour had opposed.\textsuperscript{11}

Opposition to the Insurance Bill, as it became known, was widespread in the trade unions as well as in the ILP. Even before the bill was published on 15 November 1929, a front-page editorial in the New Leader vehemently objected to it under the headline “Stop the Persecution: An Appeal to Miss Bondfield.” The Labour Party’s Clynes, the editorial said, had been entirely right the previous weekend when he had said, “Better that some shirkers should receive money than that thousands of honest men should be deprived of benefits to which they are justly entitled.”\textsuperscript{12} A special meeting of the ILP parliamentary group, attended by thirty MPs, less than a quarter of those entitled to attend, took place at the NAC’s request. The MPs were unanimous in appointing a subcommittee to draw up proposals that became known as the “I.L.P. Minimum Demands,” which were approved at a subsequent meeting of the parliamentary group.\textsuperscript{13} But by now the alarm had sounded among those ILP MPs who saw themselves, first and foremost, as government loyalists.

Aspects of the Insurance Bill constituted some improvement, from the Labour Party’s point of view, and, as Forward reported, publication of the bill had unleashed “a storm of hostile criticism from the capitalist press.”\textsuperscript{14} Two significant meetings took place on 19 November. In the morning, the Parliamentary Labour Party (PLP) heard MacDonald ask for support for the bill “not as something they desired, but as the best they could get under the circumstances.”\textsuperscript{15} The PLP overwhelmingly approved the bill and insisted that there should be no amendments unless the entire PLP agreed to them—something that Maxton made clear he refused to accept.\textsuperscript{16}
In a meeting that evening, the ILP parliamentary group carried a motion, moved by Shinwell, supporting the bill. Only fourteen opposed. William Leach, the MP for Bradford Central, had collected the signatures of sixty-six MPs who were members of the ILP in a “memorial” that declared, “Our principal work in Parliament is to help the Labour Government in the purposes it has set itself. We refuse to embarrass its ministers in their work.” At the meeting, however, Maxton and his supporters rejected the attempt to make the decision of the ILP parliamentary group binding on all its members, arguing that although the practice of the group had always been “to reach the greatest measure of common agreement,” it had “never been held that Group decisions bound every member.” Like Maxton, the New Leader was far from accepting the PLP view: “Amend! Amend! Amend!” was its front-page demand. While the paper recognized that the majority of ILP MPs would support the bill, it accused those who had signed the memorial of “losing all sense of proportion and taking party loyalty to impossible lengths.” The pro-Labour Daily Herald also noted that a minority group within the ILP, “led by James Maxton,” were determined to press for amendments.

The divisions within the ILP between those supporting Maxton’s line and those who regarded the Labour Party as having the first claim on their support now widened. Leach, in a letter to the New Leader, made this quite clear. “I regard this as my Government,” he wrote. “Perhaps you don’t regard it as yours.” It is doubtful that he was convinced by the editorial note that followed his letter, which emphasized that the paper gave “general support to the Government.” Another MP, Mary Hamilton, insisted the following week that “those of us who propose to support the Government have searched our consciences as sincerely as Maxton and his friends have done.” The Maxton group pressed ahead with the amendments, none of which garnered more than thirty-nine votes. For Brockway, writing more than a decade later, “This was the first step in the course which led to the disaffiliation of the I.L.P. from the Labour Party.”

The NAC supported the Maxton group’s actions on the Insurance Bill, with three members voting against. One was Dollan, who blasted Maxton on successive days in the New Leader and Forward. His New Leader article, “The Clydesiders: What I Think of Them,” was scathing. Maxton was not as popular on the Clyde as many people seemed to think, Dollan wrote:

Clydeside and Scotland did not follow him in his demand for the affiliation of the Communists to the Labour Party; in his Cook-Maxton campaign; nor in his League Against Imperialism adventure. Mr. Maxton is a great favourite and appreciated for his devoted service to the I.L.P. and Socialism but Clydesiders do not regard him as the best leader in tactics and policy.
There was sympathy for Maxton’s position on the Insurance Bill, but Dollan rejected the “general attitude of critical hostility adopted by some of them [ILP MPs] to the Labour government since its formation.”

As early as August, Dollan continued, Maxton had said that the government was not benefiting a “single working-class member of the community.” Criticism was legitimate but there should be “some regard for team work.”

The headline of Dollan’s article in Forward, just one day later, asked “Should I.L.P. Support Maxton? The National Council’s Blunder.” The antagonism of “certain Clydesiders” and others towards the Labour Government was being exploited by “hostile critics,” he said. In the final 1929 edition of Forward, under the headline “A Plea for Loyalty,” Dollan asked ILP members to support the Labour Party and criticized both Maxton, for violating the ILP constitution, and the NAC, for endorsing his action. He complained, “It is a case of my hero right or wrong.”

As with Cook-Maxton the year before, the division of opinion in the ILP was clear, once again, from the contrasting reactions of Forward and Labour’s Northern Voice. While Dollan was making his criticisms in the former, the latter was reporting the Lancashire Divisional Council’s unanimous congratulation of Maxton and his supporters for their “fight to obtain justice for the unemployed” and making a front-page plea urging members to “rally to the rebels.”

Dollan had now clearly emerged as the major critic within the ILP of Maxton and the Clydesiders, though by no means the only one. The New Leader’s report of the Scottish divisional conference in early 1930 noted “Wheatley’s formidable speech” in support of Maxton and the other rebels. But this was not enough to achieve majority support for their actions. Shinwell, in reply, questioned whether there was any point to debating the matter any further. Maxton had said that whatever the conference decided, he would “do it again,” so why “hold a Conference at all?” asked Shinwell. Dollan then left the chair and attacked “the formation of the Left Group in the House of Commons,” which, he argued, had no justification in ILP policy. “On the question of mandate,” wrote the reporter, “he challenged Maxton to produce a resolution from the N.A.C. justifying his conduct.” Support for the actions of the Maxton group was defeated by 103 votes to 94. An editorial comment in the New Leader concluded:

The narrow defeat of Mr. Maxton and his immediate associates at the Scottish I.L.P. Conference is not so astonishing as it may appear on the surface. Those who are closely in touch with affairs north of the Tweed have always been quietly amused at the popular myth so firmly held in the south that Scotland was a great stronghold of the rebel Left. Mr. Maxton has always held, and events may prove him to be right, that the main strength of his support lay outside his native land.
This judgment was supported at the end of January by reports of “support for the Rebels” at three of the other divisional conferences. The Welsh conference included a significant exchange involving W. G. Cove, MP, who had taken over MacDonald’s former constituency of Aberavon. When Cove said that “the Labour Party was their child, and they had the right to slap it,” one delegate shouted, “Yes, but not to kill it.” Nevertheless, a card vote endorsed the actions of “the Rebels” by 47 to 37, and their supporters sang “The Red Flag” after the vote. David Mort, the division’s NAC representative, resigned on the spot.28

There seems to have been less division and less acrimony at the Yorkshire and Midlands conferences. Support for the NAC statement endorsing the Maxton group’s actions on the Insurance Bill was unopposed at the latter, though it rejected, by 52 votes to 6, a motion moved by Joseph Southall calling for disaffiliation from the Labour Party. Yorkshire approved without dissent the NAC statement supporting the rebels. This approval was advocated by the formidable Jowett.29

Three weeks later, after the Southern regional conference had endorsed Maxton’s initiative, the New Leader noted that this brought it into line with the “rest of the country (Scotland excepted).” In the same issue, Ernest E. Hunter, the paper’s editor until John Paton took over in April, announced “The End of a Chapter”: MacDonald had resigned from the ILP. Differences had built up over a long period, Hunter wrote, after summarizing appreciatively the Labour leader’s contribution. However, “when the I.L.P. inscribed on its banners ‘Socialism in Our Time,’” he continued, “the rumbling of the storm became louder and louder.” The ILP had embarked on a course “alien” to MacDonald’s “mind and mood,” he concluded.30

In April 1930, at the ILP conference in Birmingham, Dollan—expressing the desire that “the old fellowship of the I.L.P. would return”—made a last ditch attempt to refer back to the NAC the section of its report that supported the rebels. Once again, he argued that they had had “no mandate from the party.”31 But he was, as he anticipated, defeated by 367 votes to 53, and the conference endorsed the actions of the Maxton group by, in Brockway’s words, “an overwhelming majority.” The conference also decided to “reconstruct” the ILP group in Parliament to include only those who accepted ILP policy as determined by its national conference.32

“Discipline Run Mad”: The Struggle over Standing Orders Begins

The new Labour MP for Wolverhampton, W. J. Brown, would turn out to be something of a maverick’s maverick. Since he was the long-time general secretary of the Civil Service Clerical Association, this may well have surprised those addicted to stereotypes. Before long, he would fall out permanently with
the Labour Party; be tempted for a short while by Mosley’s New Party, though not sufficiently to join it; and, after losing his seat in the disastrous (for Labour) general election of 1931, return to parliamentary politics as an independent during the Second World War, retaining his seat at Rugby from 1942 until 1950. His indignation and contempt towards the Labour establishment is clear in a *New Leader* contribution, “Discipline Run Mad,” in April 1930.

In his article, Brown noted a Downing Street lunch attended not only by Labour ministers but also by representatives of the Liberals, finance, and industry, which was probably bad enough in itself from the standpoint of most ILPers. Worse was to come. The following day, “23 Labour Members of Parliament were ‘carpeted’ for having, a day or two earlier, voted in favour of the abolition of the Air Force.” At a Parliamentary Labour Party meeting, they were told they “must either obey or get out.”

The PLP had begun to tighten up its standing orders in 1929, returning to the issue in March the following year. By the time Brown’s article appeared, the alarm had already been sounded from the ILP side by Jowett. For him, what was at stake was the radically robust interpretation of representative government for which he had vigorously advocated for more than two decades. Jowett’s article “Labour and Cabinet Rule,” which appeared in the *Bradford Pioneer* at the end of 1929, spelled out his concerns once more and related them to the course being pursued by MacDonald’s government. “If the present Labour Government succeeds in gaining this power to suppress minority action in the House of Commons,” he wrote, “then Labour will have established a system of dictatorship over colleagues in Parliament never before known.”

The cabinet already had “immense power,” wrote Jowett. The previous Monday, the minister in charge of the Unemployment Insurance Bill had moved to close the debate on the bill while John Wheatley was waiting to speak. Jowett doubted that this would have happened had Wheatley—who had served as a cabinet minister himself in the 1924 Labour government—been a Tory or a Liberal. Although, in principle, all MPs should have an equal right to speak, Jowett argued, it was objectionable when the usual practice of giving priority to former cabinet ministers was ignored simply to silence opinions that the government found “disagreeable.” Jowett denied that, in voting against the closure of the debate, he had “voted against the Government.” He had voted against the decision of the chairman, he insisted.

Jowett ended by reminding readers of the ILP’s long-held Bradford policy and reproduced (in bold type) the resolution carried at the ILP conference on the eve of the Great War:

The famous Bradford Resolution, passed at the Coming of Age conference in Bradford in 1914, is quite clear and still stands. It is the answer to
any charge that might be made against an I.L.P. member of Parliament who voted to increase unemployment benefits this week. I will end by quoting it in full:

That Cabinet rule, which involves the suppression of the rights of the private member to any adequate voice in the policy of his Party, and which implies the resignation of the Ministry and the dissolution of Parliament when proposals of the Cabinet are negatived, besides making almost impossible the free consideration of proposals which have not received the Cabinet hall-mark, is inimical to the good government of the country; that with a view to ultimately break up this system, the Parliamentary Labour Party be asked to take no account of any such considerations and to vote on all issues in accordance with the principles for which the party stands.

This motion was move by Wm. Leach and seconded by J. H. Palin.37

The fact that Leach, Jowett’s fellow Bradford MP, had moved the motion in 1914 and was now, as we have seen, a staunch supporter of the government and an active opponent of I.L.P rebels would not have been lost on many who read this—as, no doubt, Jowett intended.

The reports of I.L.P conferences and the weekly comments and debates in the New Leader suggest that while the vast majority of I.L.Pers were, as conference delegates, happy to nod through motions reaffirming support for Jowett’s policy of either replacing or augmenting the cabinet system with House of Commons committees, few were prepared to give such a procedural or constitutional issue the kind of priority it needed if it was to make any real impact. But the growing conflict over Labour Party discipline and the standing orders of the parliamentary party triggered a period when other I.L.P members emphasized the desirability, even the crucial necessity, of supporting Jowett in his efforts towards “constitutional” change. Indeed, the I.L.P submitted to the 1929 Labour Party conference a motion demanding that “departmental committees in association with the Minister and composed of members of all parties in proportion to their numbers” should be established. It had the usual negative fate.38

In January 1930, the New Leader called again for “drastic reform” of parliamentary procedure. The cabinet system, it claimed, had gone from bad to worse. J. Allen Skinner revived Jowett’s “Parliament or Palaver?” title in an article claiming that the proposals in the original pamphlet provided “the means of making Parliamentary working tolerable for the self-respecting Back Bench man.”39

Then came what R. T. McKenzie calls the “culminating absurdity” of the I.L.P revolt. On 17 July, Brockway was suspended from the Commons, on the
motion of MacDonald, for “disregarding the authority of the Chair,” as *Hansard* records, when he attempted to initiate a discussion of the critical situation in India. He claimed that over five thousand men and women were in prison there as a result of political activities. In a vain attempt to prevent his colleague’s suspension, John Beckett, who would soon follow Mosley not only into the New Party but into fascism and eventually into internment during the Second World War, tried to remove the mace. Its presence at the clerk’s table was deemed essential, by long parliamentary tradition, for Commons business to be conducted. Beckett, too, was suspended.40

The following week, the *New Leader* editor, John Paton, made a plea for a “sense of proportion” and complained of the “reduction of the private member” to a “mere vote-recording machine.” He continued with a reiteration of the call for parliamentary reform: “A method of procedure which compels a conscientious member to resort to active revolt is self-condemned. Every citizen who cares for effective democratic government must join in the effort, to which Mr. F. W. Jowett has long given the lead, to reorganise the Parliamentary machine and fit it for the business of a modern State.”41

Earlier, at Easter, the *ILP* conference had rejected the demand of Labour’s National Executive Committee that MPs pledge not to vote against the official view. Brockway commented in his report on the conference that if this demand were not modified, the relationship of the *ILP* to the Labour Party would be in serious trouble. He claimed that the Maxton group had voted independently of the official Labour line only ten times out of a possible two hundred. All the same, it was vital for the *ILP* to have “a coherent group” that was required to support *ILP* policies.42

From the *ILP*’s standpoint, Labour’s disciplinary regime was objectionable in principle. In the House of Commons, policy was ultimately decided not by the *PLP* but by senior cabinet ministers. If *PLP* decisions were binding on the government, that would be acceptable, but, Brockway insisted, “the ‘Left’” could not possibly accept a discipline that imposed “a policy often out of harmony with the decisions of the Labour Party Conference, and in determination of which the Parliamentary Party has no real voice.”43 However, he also argued that Labour’s standing orders denying MPs any right to vote against government policies were unenforceable. “Some Labour M.Ps may enjoy the prospect of disciplining the Left Wing,” he said, but others, such as Catholics in relation to the Education Bill, would also find themselves coming into conflict with the rigid discipline that was being imposed.44

For the *ILP*, a particular decision of the Labour Party NEC ratcheted up the tension. The national executive committee refused endorsement to Tom Irwin, the *ILP* candidate adopted in East Renfrewshire, who had made it clear
that he intended to accept the statement requiring its candidates to adhere to ILP policies. The NEC’s decision, wrote Brockway in the New Leader, marked “a new outbreak of disciplinary measures.” Of the episode, Paton would later write, “This was really a declaration of war by the Labour Party, and was so regarded by the I.L.P. It came at a time when negotiations for a settlement were still nominally proceeding.” Other similar conflicts would follow in constituencies where ILP candidates were initially adopted by Labour, and these would culminate in the general election of 1931 following the collapse of the Labour government, when nineteen ILP candidates were refused endorsement by the Labour Party. If the problem from the viewpoint of the ILP was the unreasonable discipline now being insisted upon by the Labour establishment, from the other side of the conflict, the new arrangements for the ILP parliamentary group and the seemingly unremitting hostility it pursued towards the government were just as objectionable.

The ILP Parliamentary Group: The Fissure Widens

Seven or eight years after the unravelling relationship between the ILP parliamentary group and the Labour government, which most Labour MPs felt duty bound to support, became visible to all, John Paton described the situation in the 1929–30 Parliament as follows:

In effect the I.L.P. became a permanent opposition within the Labour Party. Its members ignored the official “whips” and took their instructions now solely from the I.L.P. At “Question Time” they shot at the Labour Ministers just as relentlessly as they’d done at their Tory predecessors; their amendments to the Government’s proposals became a regular feature of the Order Paper; in every debate it was their speeches which were felt to be the most deadly in exposing the Government’s weakness and timidity.

The response of those Labour MPs who believed it their duty to support the Labour government and still belonged to the ILP was almost a mirror image of the attitude of the rebels to the attempts of Labour to impose discipline. At a meeting attended by thirty-nine ILP MPs on 16 July 1929, Maxton had been elected chairman of the group, and his close ally Campbell Stephen its secretary.

If the rebels were outraged by demands for what they saw as blind obedience, those MPs who were now excluded from the ILP parliamentary group because they refused to commit to following ILP policy were equally incensed. The tone of the conflict between these two groups had already been set by Maxton. In answer to a delegate’s question at the 1930 ILP conference, he said...
that the reconstruction of the group could only be carried into full effect after
the general election. But he went on to make it clear that the NAC did “intend

to exclude from the I.L.P. Group in the House, members who declare them-
selves I.L.P.ers but have never accepted the policy of the I.L.P. and in public
and in private have been hostile to I.L.P. policy.” As Ralph Miliband says of
the reorganization of the group, “The rebels thus became a more tightly-knit
body. But they also became more isolated from their parliamentary colleagues,
who deeply resented their activities.”

Meanwhile, the NAC still held out hopes of finding a compromise with
Labour over the standing orders issue. The dispute had led to certain ILP
parliamentary candidates not being selected or, when selected, not endorsed.
But the NAC insisted that, at a meeting with Labour’s National Executive Com-
mitee in July 1930, it had become clear that the objections of the Labour Party
were apparently based on a misinterpretation of a clause in the “Regulations
for I.L.P. Candidates” adopted by the Carlisle conference in 1929. It had been
“mutually agreed” that the standing orders question was “capable of amicable
settlement.” In the meantime, the NAC said, “the work of reforming the Parlia-
mentary Group was being carried through.” This process was by no means
uncontested. One of the most outspoken of the internal critics was, predictably,
Patrick Dollan.

Dollan made a contribution to the 1930 ILP summer school under the title
“A Rebel Against the Rebels,” which is how he saw himself. As the New Leader
reported, he expressed “disbelief in sectional groups working in the House of
Commons, and asked that I.L.P. Members in the House should not just be
fault-finders.” He was not alone. According to the NAC report to the 1931
ILP conference, Shinwell had raised the position of those ILP MPs who, like
himself, first as financial secretary to the War Office and then as secretary for
Mines, had accepted office under MacDonald. The NAC had conceded that
having raised no objection to members joining the government at the time, it
could not do so in retrospect. But if they wished to join the ILP’s parliament-
ary group, they should be asked for an assurance that if an occasion arose on
which the NAC believed that they should resign their offices, they would be
prepared to do so, and they should also give assurances that they were “advo-
cating the policies of the I.L.P. within the Labour Party.” Moreover, in future,
they should consult the NAC before taking office. These were not conditions
that Shinwell or any of the other holders of governmental office were likely to
find remotely acceptable.

Shinwell was tenacious in his objections to the changes in the ILP’s parlia-
mentary group. This triggered an exchange that spread over two editions of the
New Leader in November 1930. In a piece headlined “Shinwell and the I.L.P.:
Light in the Darkness” on 14 November, Shinwell was reported as arguing that members of the Parliamentary Labour Party would be “compelled to leave the I.L.P.” if the NAC enforced the policy that had been adopted. He asked: “Am I to assume that, if the I.L.P. minority can flout the Parliamentary Labour Party, then the minority in the I.L.P. can flout the N.A.C.?” Surely “the right to flout” was not a monopoly of the ILP group. Paton replied the following week, insisting that “few subjects have been more fully discussed by the I.L.P.” and that Shinwell must accept that the decisions reached would be enforced.

In the same issue, Dollan complained that “a membership of 142 I.L.P.ers . . . had been reduced to a fragment which exercised political anarchy instead of Socialist discipline” and pleaded for more tolerance of party members with differing views.

At the 1931 ILP conference, Dollan was supported by George Hardie, “brother of the pioneer.” No ILP MP disagreed with ILP policy, Hardie claimed. “The disagreement was in method.” He declared that he hated dictatorship, and he urged toleration “so that the Party might again become the mainspring of the Movement.” An altercation involving Stephen and Dollan became so heated that they were admonished from the chair. Tensions were continuing to grow in the ILP, but neither was MacDonald’s government itself free of them.

Mosley’s “National Policy” and the ILP: From Fissure to Chasm

The most dramatic dissent from within government centred on Oswald Mosley’s “memorandum,” his resignation, and the sequence of initiatives that moved him and some of his supporters to fascism. This would indelibly colour the political atmosphere of the 1930s.

MacDonald had appointed J. H. “Jimmy” Thomas as Lord Privy Seal and had charged him with unemployment policy. One of those given the task of assisting him, as the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, was Mosley. Skidelsky summarizes Thomas and the response to his appointment as follows: “Totally devoid of constructive ideas, intimate with the City and big business, the boon companion of half the House of Commons, the jingoistic upholder of imperial and national unity, his appointment gladdened conservatives and dismayed radicals.” If this was really how Thomas was seen, it is hardly surprising that Mosley found his subordinate position frustrating.

With support from George Lansbury and Tom Johnston, once the editor of Forward, who had been given similar roles in addressing unemployment, Mosley drew up and submitted his memorandum. It called for a much more co-ordinated governmental and administrative response to unemployment and for long-term economic reconstruction. It included short-term measures put forward by himself and his two colleagues and a financial and credit policy.
that owed something to advice sought from Keynes. When the document was rejected by the cabinet in May 1930, Mosley resigned from the government. For the rest of 1930, he pursued his demand for an interventionist policy within the Labour Party.

Mosley had little success with the PLP but rather more at the Labour Party annual conference in October. Brockway’s later account records that he had “never seen or heard such an ovation at a Labour Party conference” than the reaction to Mosley’s speech. The motion was narrowly defeated by 1,251,000 to 1,046,000, with most of the votes, of course, being the “block votes” of affiliated unions. The vote showed, Michael Foot writes in his biography of Bevan, that Mosley had “the overwhelming majority of the constituency parties behind him.”

It looked as though Mosley’s intention was to secure the Labour Party leadership. A new version of the memorandum was produced. Supported by seventeen Labour MPs in February 1931, it proposed a national economic planning organization tasked with producing a national plan, an investment board to rationalize and reorganize British industry, and a mixture of protection and imperial preference. It also included, notes Foot, “some startling additions affecting the reform of Parliament.” Noel Thompson sees John Strachey, still one of Mosley’s closest supporters at the time, as largely responsible for the idea that the government, reduced essentially to a small cabinet of five, would have sole right to initiate legislation by Orders in Council, with parliamentary debates on its proposals only taking place if more than two hundred MPs petitioned the Speaker. The revised memorandum, A National Policy: An Account of the Emergency Programme Advanced by Sir Oswald Mosley, whose main authors were Aneurin Bevan, W. J. Brown, Strachey, and Allen Young, was published. Meanwhile, Mosley and some, but by no means all, of his supporters—Bevan being the most notable exception—had resigned from Labour and set up the New Party.

Mosley’s plan “partly accorded with the earlier analysis of the I.L.P. devised by Hobson and Wise,” notes Foot. Mosley had some support in the ILP, with some ILPers following him into the New Party, and some—like Beckett—even into fascism. But most had major objections to Mosley’s scheme, seeing it as an emergency program to prop up capitalism rather than a blueprint for advancing socialism; it was also imperialistic, authoritarian, and, at least prospectively, anti-democratic.

In early December, the NAC rejected Mosley’s proposals because they placed otherwise desirable goals in the context of an emergency cabinet system and the British Empire rather than of the “Socialist organisation of world trade.” The following week, W. J. Brown, one of the signatories of the revised
memorandum, denied that it was anti-democratic.\textsuperscript{66} \textit{Forward's} comments on Mosley’s proposals were scathing. It had, it said, expected something better, after his resignation speech, than the “political cocktail” Mosley delivered. His advocacy of “Export Trade and the Commonwealth” was “dangerously near Beaverbrook bunk.”\textsuperscript{67}

In the new year, John Paton complained that Mosley had misrepresented the ILP’s Socialism in Our Time policy in claiming that it meant a “twenty five year delay” before any decisive action would take place. On the contrary, he insisted, it meant “immediate large-scale operations immensely greater in intention and scope than anything Sir Oswald proposes.”\textsuperscript{68} At the ILP’s London divisional conference, Allen Young, now seen as Mosley’s “first lieutenant,” had given an “excellent speech,” reported the \textit{New Leader}. He made the case for “the short-term policy of setting capitalism on its feet, at the same time securing a measure of control over wages, prices and general economic conditions.” But Dr. C. A. Smith, who would chair the ILP at the end of the 1930s, argued against the “Imperial ideas” being advocated, and a restatement of ILP policy was approved with overwhelming support.\textsuperscript{69}

After the resignations from the Labour Party, Brockway, in the \textit{New Leader} article “Running Away from Socialism,” accused the Mosleyites of abandoning the cause.\textsuperscript{70} For E. F. Wise, Mosley was “the discreet buccaneer.” Ten days before, his talk had been of “a New Labour Party”; now, it was just the “New Party.” Wise observed that the bold spirit of Mosley’s Birmingham program of five years before had gone. There was “no talk now of the banks for the people.” As Wise saw it, Mosley was “adroitly angling for the support of disillusioned elements in all the old Parties.” It was also noticeable that dictatorship had “receded to the last chapter.” While the ILP shared “his ardent desire” for the reform of parliamentary procedure, “of Mussolinis and Pilsudskis we are suspicious.”\textsuperscript{71}

Hot on the heels of the defection of the Mosleyites came the resignation, as Minister of Education, of Sir Charles Trevelyan. He was frustrated by the reappearance of the old issue of religion and the schools and despairing of being able to get the school leaving age raised, which was one of the short-term measures proposed by the Mosley memorandum to reduce unemployment. Trevelyan was also, very explicitly, totally disenchanted with MacDonald’s leadership. The reactions of the Parliamentary Labour Party and the \textit{Daily Herald} were hostile, but the \textit{New Leader} was supportive. It published the resignation speech made to his constituents, emphasizing Trevelyan’s declaration: “I want to see a Labour Government cease from the mere effort to keep office and just govern decently, and turn to an effort to break through to Socialism and establish a new Society.”\textsuperscript{72} It also carried an article by the former minister
under the title “Break Through to Socialism,” in which, the paper noted, “he advocated the Socialist plan embodied in the ‘Socialism in Our Time’ policy of the I.L.P.” The gulf between the Labour government and its supporters and the ILP continued to widen apace.

Divisions within the ILP would continue to increase, but the extent of these was partially masked by the more general dissatisfaction of ILPers with MacDonald’s government, unhappiness that covered a wide political spectrum within the smaller party. One of the rebel ILP MPs was Elijah Sandham, who complained that “a sense of Socialism seems completely lacking in some of our Cabinet Ministers.” He would later support disaffiliation from the Labour Party but then soon find himself at odds with those attempting to commit the ILP to a “revolutionary policy.” In February 1931, a front-page New Leader article by Wise denounced Snowden’s “stiff-necked financial orthodoxy.” Wise would soon be one of the most persistent and outspoken opponents of disaffiliation.

The dispute over discipline and the standing orders of the PLP rumbled on interminably. A NAC statement on relations between the ILP and Labour, in June 1931, listed the eight occasions when the ILP group had voted against the government and emphasized that “no fewer than 126 out of the 280 Labour M.Ps have, on one occasion or another, voted against the Government.” From their Labour critics’ point of view, this statement totally failed to recognize any difference between an individual rebellion and an organized opposition within the party. The NAC complained, emphatically, that new standing orders sought to “impose constraints on the Members of Parliament hitherto unknown in the Parliamentary history of this country.”

The following month, Brockway reported the ILP’s response to the latest letter on the issue from Arthur Henderson, the Labour Party secretary, under the headline “The Crisis Before the I.L.P.” Agreement might still be reached, he argued. The ILP recognized the need for the parliamentary party to have standing orders, but it could not accept rules that prohibited Labour MPs from “voting against the Official Whip when their Socialist convictions and pledges” compelled them to do so. Brockway urged the ILP to press forward with the Socialism in Our Time campaign. A week later, the New Leader made a point of listing the “Actual Offences” of seven MPs reported to the PLP and published a letter from Jowett detailing occasions when MacDonald, Snowden, and Lansbury had voted against the official line in earlier years.

The arrival of a National Government was anticipated some weeks before it became a reality. Brockway tells us in Inside the Left that in June 1931, he heard that “MacDonald was entering into secret negotiations with representatives of the Conservative and Liberal Parties to scuttle the Labour Government and form a National Government” and that he sounded a warning in the New
Leader. Brockway is referring to his front-page piece “Towards A 'National' Government,” published near the end of July 1931, in which he alleged that British capitalism had “quivered on the edge of a precipice for two days” the previous week and that “influential feelers for formation of National Government had been put out.”

Meanwhile, the ILP’s final parliamentary revolt against the MacDonald government had ended, after “one of the longest sittings of Parliament on record,” with the passing of the Anomalies Bill. Promoted by Margaret Bondfield, this bill limited the right to unemployment benefits of casual and seasonal workers and married women. The seventeen members of the ILP group sometimes had the support of other Labour MPs and of a solitary Liberal, Frank Owen, but for the most part, the ILP group was “left to maintain the fight alone.”