

# **Collective Bargaining as Industrial Democracy: Hugh Clegg and the Political Foundations of British Industrial Relations Pluralism**

*by Peter Ackers*

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# **Collective Bargaining as Industrial Democracy: Hugh Clegg and the political foundations of British Industrial Relations Pluralism**

## **INTRODUCTION**

Sometime during the summer of 1949 Hugh Clegg first met Allan Flanders, who had arrived at Oxford to take up the post of Senior Lecturer in Industrial Relations (IR) from the start of the Michaelmas term. For the next twenty years, their partnership shaped the development of a peculiarly English IR paradigm. Flanders and Clegg were the nucleus of the early post-war ‘Oxford School’ of IR, the authors of the 1954 foundation text that defined the modern field and the intellectual architects of the 1968 Donovan Commission that shaped future policy debate. Arguably, British IR has only just begun to shake-off this theoretical legacy, as voluntary joint regulation or collective bargaining has palpably ceased to be the focus of the employment relationship and the policy emphasis has shifted to legal regulations and Human Resource Management (see Edwards 2003). As IR struggles to redefine itself for a very different society, it is worth revisiting the intellectual founders of the old dispensation, to understand better what factors shaped their conception of the new discipline.

Flanders tends to be feted as the ‘theorist’ within this joint project, much as Beatrice appeared to drive the intellectual project of the Webbs (see Harrison 2000). John Kelly (2004) has described Flanders as a ‘much more powerful intellectual figure’. Clegg is positioned, in contrast, as the empirical cart-horse, who manned the public enquires and built the academic institutions through which Flanders’ ideas could flow. This is how Clegg, in his modesty, often presented the partnership. ‘He was more of a theorist, and he was a slow worker, and a bit of a perfectionist, whereas I’m a fast

workers and more slapdash'.<sup>i</sup> Indeed, Clegg's own academic output was prodigious, compared to Flanders' relatively slight oeuvre, and it began before Flanders entered the scene, continued long after his death, while much of it was written and researched with only slight reference to his partner. Moreover, by 1949 Clegg was already established as a Fellow in IR at Nuffield College, with almost three decades of learning and experience behind him. Within a year he had published two monographs, which established his broad approach to industrial relations.

This essay questions three central and interlinked assumptions that surround the IR legacy of Hugh Clegg: The first is that *Clegg, throughout his academic career, was primarily an empiricist who left theoretical work to others and largely drew on concepts that he borrowed from them*. This view is almost universally held, even among his closest admirers. The second is that *Flanders was the theorist in the partnership and the main source of the concepts that Clegg developed in his empirical studies*. This reading is probably just as widespread. The third is that *Flanders and Clegg's academic creation, British IR pluralism was a direct product of Cold War Anti-Communism*. This links to the first and second propositions, by assuming that the intellectual driving force of the new paradigm was Flanders and by demonstrating that anti-Communism was his driving obsession. Kelly (1999a, 1999b) has made this case for Flanders. His image of Flanders can itself be questioned, as can the notion that Flanders's political ideology is the golden key that unlocks the entire paradigm.

Below I strive to restore Clegg as an *independent intellectual agent* in the construction of IR pluralism: a man who (1) made his own early seminal theoretical contribution; with (2) little aid from Flanders; and (3) drew on his own rich political and ideological background and academic influences.

The first two assumptions about the Flanders and Clegg partnership are interwoven. But how great was Flanders' intellectual influence and when did it begin? Or, to put the question another way, what was Clegg's independent theoretical contribution to British IR and is it possible to isolate this? My argument below is that we can do so both by topic and chronology. For instance, according to Clegg's 'Introduction' to Flanders' (1975, p.7) first book of essays:

With the publication of *The Fawley Productivity Agreements* in 1964, Allan Flanders became almost overnight the outstanding theorist of industrial relations in Britain and, many would say, in the world.

But the earliest of these academic essays was written in 1961, a year after Clegg's body of work discussed here; even if, as the older man, his political and journalist writing extended much further back. In Kelly's version, Flanders drew the plan of the building while Clegg did the empirical and academic spadework. This interpretation has the merit of at least putting someone's ideas at the genesis of modern IR, if not those of Clegg. Even an admirer, like Brown (1998, p.848), depicts a similar division of labour:

Leaving the Communist Party, Clegg committed his remarkable intelligence to the factual analysis of organized labour, leaving the more theoretical aspects to Flanders in a close division of effort which, after Flanders' death in 1973, he was to have difficulty shaking off.

Clegg *was* exceptionally modest and unassuming, by all accounts, while being very penetrating intellectually. Moreover, 'theory' was regarded by him with some suspicion, in reaction against his early Communist period. Once more, Brown (1998, p.849) sketches this mind-set:

A view once expressed by Clegg was that 'an ounce of fact is worth a pound of theory' and there can be no doubting that his published life's work amounted to a great weight of books containing little discussion of theory and a vast amount of sparsely expressed fact. It was not, as we shall see, that he was unaware of the theoretical underpinnings of his work; it was rather that he was painfully aware that the study of organized labour has long been awash with, in varying degrees, plausible

and optimistic theories, which have usually been sustained by little more than myth and ignorance’.

Brown’s account of ‘philosophical underpinnings’ already suggests a hinterland of theory, supporting the empirical work. And the popular image of Clegg as a naïve empiricist, somehow does not ring true with what we know of the man and his early life and influences. As Brown puts it, succinctly but also slightly cryptically: ‘Perhaps as a result of his rebellion against both Christianity and Marxism, Clegg exhibited both an antipathy to dogma and a strong sense of morality’ (p.849). Some key elements of Clegg’s early intellectual formation are crucial here.

First, Clegg’s father was a highly itinerant Methodist minister, who exposed him to both a powerful religious and moral influence and, very likely, an existential insecurity occasioned by constant resettling in very different communities from posh central Glasgow to industrial Lancashire.<sup>ii</sup> These influences were very likely intensified by attending Kingswood Methodist boarding school outside Bristol from the age of 13. Next, Hugh Clegg joined the Communist Party (CPGB) while still in the sixth form and remained an active committed member for over a decade, through his time at Oxford and the intervening years in the army, leaving only in 1947. This was hardly a brief adolescent fad. And it was made all the more intense by the fact that Clegg’s elder brother, Arthur was at once a major influence on his early life and a high profile and life-long Communist. And the manner of Clegg’s leaving the CPGB is also relevant given the claims of Cold War anti-Communism. By all accounts, the intellectual core of Clegg’s faith was broken by his philosophy tutor at Magdalene, Harry Wheldon, between 1945 and 1947, leading him to drift away from the Party rather than directly reject it. There was a loss of faith, but no ‘God that failed me’ backlash to religion or some fierce from of anti-Communism. As we see below, in his

IR writing, Clegg's attitudes to Communism gradually toughened, but remained liberal and thoughtful. Finally, the war allowed Clegg, the uprooted child, to re-invent himself in two down-to-earth commonsense roles: as an NCO among ordinary working class men with their suspicion of the officer class; and as a conventionally domestic, family man of the time. Perhaps the other small but remarkable episode worth recalling is the months in 1938 that Clegg volunteered to work for *Mass Observation*. It is hard not to read this as an early introduction to empirical research on working class life that was sustained by participant observation in the army.<sup>iii</sup>

This thumb-nail sketch opens-up other ways of understanding Clegg's intellectual life at Nuffield in the late 1940s, 1950s and early 1960s, than as an empiricist *tabula rasa*. The task of purging his own Communist beliefs, over time, and challenging the labour myths that Brown mentions, was itself a monumental theoretical task of destruction and reconstruction, combining both the sharp logic Wheldon had taught him at Magdalene and the absorption, criticism and refinement of the empirical and theoretical tradition of the Webbs, Cole and Chester. With hindsight, this early 'clearing of ground' was probably Clegg's major theoretical work, though much of it has been taken for granted by future generation of IR academics. The remainder of this article considers Clegg's solo writing on industrial democracy and nationalisation between 1950 and 1961, setting aside his joint IR research on other contemporary topics, which is indeed heavily empiricist. In contrast to the Webbs fertile partnership, the *System of Industrial Relations in Britain* (1954) was Flanders and Clegg's only major joint publication. Clegg's prodigious individual output in his Oxford phase included two books with TE Chester (of Manchester University) and three with Rex Adams, a Nuffield research assistant. So the more interesting question may be, not the

theory Clegg failed to write after Flanders' death, but the theory he wrote before their partnership had time to develop. Here we can see what Clegg brought to IR *before* he embarked on the great works of institutional description.

### **The early Clegg: Trade Unions, Nationalisation and Industrial Democracy**

The linked notions of Hugh Clegg as an atheoretical empiricist who took what theories and concepts he did use from his collaborator, Flanders, is largely based on his rhetorical statements and the evidence of his 1970s textbooks. Yet from the late 1940s to the early 1960s, while still at Oxford, he laid many of the theoretical foundations for the further development of the mature empirical and institutional discipline he created. This groundwork drew upon political theories – which he was teaching to undergraduates at Magdalene and Wadham – to define a pluralist outlook that centred on trade unions and collective bargaining.<sup>iv</sup> He accomplished this through a sustained critique of the Marxist wing of the British labour movement and the ideas of one early mentor at Nuffield, GDH Cole, on the central themes of nationalisation and industrial democracy. Using both theoretical arguments about the nature of Democracy and empirical evidence about the efficacy of different approaches, these books underline the central assumption of British IR that joint regulation, not public ownership or workers' control, is the key to the future. They are a polemic directed at practical socialists, rather than 'ivory tower' academics and, as a result, they are light on references and unsophisticated in style. Yet, for all this, they effectively railroad debates about new forms of industrial democracy, by establishing a mainline IR discipline focused on trade unions and collective bargaining.



### ***Labour in Nationalised Industry (1950)***

This Fabian pamphlet was Clegg's first publication and established the nucleus of his position on industrial democracy and nationalisation, which he elaborated over the next decade. As we have seen, Cole (as Chairman of the Fabian Society) both commissioned the pamphlet and wrote the preface, which heralded 'the reformulation of Labour and Socialist programmes in the light of the experience of recent years' (p.3). The pamphlet was subtitled an 'Interim Report of a Fabian Research Group' that had met in consultation with the AEU, but had not yet reached any shared view. The background reality to the discussion was the Morisonian 'Board' structure of the Nationalised Industries and Clegg confines his specific comments to the public sector, after noting, in his future characteristic style, 'the varying historical development of systems of labour organisation and collective bargaining' (p.5). He registers criticism of the Morisonian model, but excludes himself from this debate. This marks his early independence of mind and unwillingness to walk passively in the footsteps of the Webbs and Cole, though the pamphlet was a compromise.

Cole set up this thing about industrial democracy. It was a Fabian group, and asked me if I would be the rapporteur of it, and I agreed. And then at some point I produced the draft of a pamphlet. And he was very upset about it, and he drafted another one. We had strongly different views, you see. It was a matter of compromising...The source of disagreement was that I was pressing this idea that proper industrial democracy was the development of trade unionism and collective bargaining in other directions, and he was a workers' control chap'.<sup>v</sup>

Clegg begins with a description of the relationship between trade unions and joint consultation. 'Hitherto, trade unions have taken as their essential task, the *protection* of their members' economic interests and rights.'(p.8). As 'bargaining' and 'democratic' bodies they have had 'no responsibility' for the conduct of industry, other than maintaining their agreements with employers. Wartime joint production committees had changed this, by making unions also responsible for securing efficient

production and this has continued since, especially with joint consultation in the nationalised industries. 'But the implications of this involvement in responsibility have not been at all thoroughly considered by the trade union movement (p.8)'. The key question which already pre-occupies Clegg and shapes his other writing on this theme, is that 'these fresh function and obligations' should not undermine the unions' 'traditional function of protecting their members' interests', which, he insists 'must not be sacrificed' (p.9). The pluralist principle is already clear (though not yet labelled as such): 'in any form of society, and under any form of management, workers will need trade unions to look after their interests' (p.9-10). This must remain the unions' 'first objective'. Yet unions and their members have wider interests in 'the improvement of the human conditions of employment over a wider field and the fuller recognition of human rights in industry' (p.10). And joint consultation promises an 'extension of the scope of collective trade union action into these new fields', linked, ultimately, 'to a widening of the scope of collective bargaining itself', into training, work organisation, time study, discipline and promotion (p.10). At this time, Clegg is clearly optimistic about the 'opportunities' joint consultation offers trade unions, provided they are willing to accept a measure of 'responsibility'.

The pamphlet next looks forward to how to 'increase that responsibility in such a way that it does not conflict with the protective functions of the unions' (p.12). This is secured by distinguishing between the ability to *influence* management decisions through consultation and the 'power of *decision*' or 'joint control' which would be a bridge too far for union independence. Though writing in the third person, Clegg clearly judges that taking 'a direct share in management' is unwise, whereas 'effective consultation, reinforced by a continual widening of the scope of collective

agreements, is the trade unions' best form of approach to industrial democracy' (p.13). This anticipates his mature alternative theory of industrial democracy, as does the analogy with political democracy and the nascent discussion of the 'various interests' that add substance to liberal democracy. Mooting, for a moment, the alternative, Colesian model of 'joint control in nationalised industry' (p.13), Clegg suggests that 'it might undermine trade union power' by providing a rival 'focus for workers' loyalty'. This 'might be highly desirable in a full socialist society, provided that the trade unions could retain as much of their protective function as would still be needed in such a society' (p.14). In the meantime, however, 'no such alternative structure ought to be developed, and the trade unions, far from relaxing, ought to strengthen their hold over the machinery of joint consultation, especially at the establishment level' (p.14). Thus already, in 1950, we find Clegg already in rapid transition from a Colesian democratic socialism to a pluralist social democracy.

The rest of the pamphlet turns to institutional description in the various industries and to policy proposals. Clegg endorses the institutional separation of consultation and bargaining at all level in the nationalised industries. He is particularly concerned to decentralise power to lay union representatives at the establishment and department level, 'since it is here that representative government begins to become self-government' (p.22). Turning to wages, he anticipates another life-long theme, the need for a government wages policy in 'a country committed to economic planning' (p.26). He recommends consultation as early as possible in the planning stage and that trade unions should 'provide more adequate research assistance' to their officials on these committees. Consultation topics covered include: production; welfare, 'perhaps the most obvious subject of all for consultation' (p.31); training and education;

promotion; recruitment and dismissal; and discipline. Throughout he balances union independence and responsibility. Thus, though absenteeism was a major issue for the new nationalised industries: 'In matters of discipline the first duty of a union is to defend its members' and 'discipline must remain managerial' (p.35-6). Strong criticism is reserved for the 'attitudes' of managers in the nationalised industries, 'who do not understand workers, who have no times for unions, who do not know how to consult, and who may equate discontent, demand for wage increases, and strikes with sabotage' (p.37).. The solution lies in properly trained, professional 'personnel or staff officers' (p.35). and managers who 'learn to manage as democratic leaders'.

Overall, this early pamphlet anticipates the style and themes of Clegg's later work to a surprising degree. A pluralist political philosophy is already emerging from the background framework of industrial democracy and human rights. The central idea of collective bargaining as a democratic process is coupled with a poorly disguised suspicion of forms of 'workers control' that might undermine trade union efficacy. A residual and ill-defined 'socialism' remains, but the analytic weight has shifted to micro-reforms of the newly established social democratic settlement, rather than radical change.

### ***Labour Relations in London Transport (1950)***

Published in the same year, this book contains some of Clegg's earliest thoughts on IR from 1948/9. As his first book, in lieu of a thesis, it is the fruit of Clegg's postgraduate research since he arrived at Nuffield as the 1947 *George Webb Medley Scholar*. In it we see, both his early conceptualisation of IR and his brand of

institutional and historical IR research method, following closely in the footsteps of both Cole and Norman Chester. Henry Clay and GDH Cole are thanked, but the book is dedicated to ‘my past supervisor and present colleague, Mr DN Chester, for his aid, his wise advice, and his constant encouragement’ (p.v).

Cole’s place in the pre-history of IR is well-known. Clegg belonged to the famous ‘Cole group’ as an undergraduate and rejoined him at Nuffield, but still suggested ‘he wasn’t a major influence’. He points instead to the role of Chester who as Master of Nuffield was also his supervisor and who suggested the subject of London Transport for a research thesis.

And I worked with that for about a year...and I suppose I had it ready sometime in the spring of 1949, and he showed it to Cole and said “would this get the D.Phil.?” and Cole said “no; he was afraid he’d give it a B. Litt. With regret that he couldn’t do more” and so Chester said “well, lets forget about that”, and went around to see Richard Blackwell’.<sup>vi</sup>

And so began a long publishing association. In 1949, Chester was also instrumental (with Cole) in securing Clegg a fellowship at Nuffield:

I had by this time cut my links with the Communist Party. The reasons for it were both academic and political. Marxist economics and dialectical materialism had been undermined for me by the teaching of my philosophy and economics tutor; and the behaviour of the Soviet Union in the post-war world disillusioned me about Communism as an ideal form of government and social organisation. So when Chester told me he was proposing to nominate me for a fellowship at Nuffield College, and wanted to know, before he did so, whether I was a member of the Communist Party, I could answer with a clear conscience that I was not, and had ceased to pay dues to the party a couple of years ago.<sup>vii</sup>

Chester’s own intellectual field was public administration. He edited the journal of that name for which Clegg wrote and founded the Oxford Management Centre and and it seems likely that this rubbed off on Clegg’s approach to IR.<sup>viii</sup>

*Labour Relations* is described as ‘an attempt to describe and evaluate the labour relations of a publicly-owned undertaking’, at a time when ‘labour relations are more and more coming to be regarded as an important subject’. Trade unions have reached ‘a fairly general recognition of their right to consideration and consultation in all matters affecting industry’. As part of the new public mood, ‘Personnel management, industrial psychology, “human relations in industry” are raised to the dignity of independent studies’ (p.1). Full employment is a factor, but so is ‘a long-period development in attitudes to industrial relations’. The growing scale of industry calls for : ‘institutions and generalized procedures to supplement attenuated personal relationships’ and ‘specialized techniques for dealing with labour matters’ (p.2). Moreover, a major debate is taking place over whether public ownership will improve the conditions of workers and industrial relations as most socialists have predicted. Here Clegg recalls the hope of the early Christian Socialists, Syndicalists and Guild Socialists for industrial democracy and the subsequent rejection of joint control in the newly nationalised industries. As yet, it is too early to assess ‘the success or failure of industries nationalized since 1945’ (p.8), but London Transport provides an ideal historical laboratory, since it was nationalized in 1933, largely following Morison’s model.

Chapter one meticulously recounts, in great institutional detail, the history of public ownership and labour relations at London Transport , including the response of the trade unions and the Communist Rank-and-File Committee, which looms large in the book. Indeed, it illustrates Clegg’s emerging argument that if trade unions become too involved in management they will lose credibility with their members and face challenges from below. He also develops the sort of stakeholder or pluralist argument

that he had heard from Cole. 'In any undertaking the financial interest of the shareholder is to some extent opposed to that of the salary – or wage-earner, and the interest of both must be to some extent opposed to that of the consumer' (p. 98). And he is already suspicious of some of the performance claims for nationalisation, given the London Transport experience. Chapter four is a detailed historical analysis of the 1937 Coronation Strike of Central Busmen.<sup>ix</sup> Although Clegg recognises that strikes are hardly typical of IR, he is interested in assessing 'how far public ownership increases or reduces the likelihood of conflict between employer and employed' (p.103). He roots this analysis in other rank-and-file revolts, such as the 'Miners Next Step' movement in the coalfields, and in Transport explores the blend of spontaneous revolt and Communist leadership, concluding that 'both Mr. Bevin and Mr. Campbell had overestimated the importance of Communist influence among the busmen' (p.108). And he concludes, critically: 'The Coronation Strike brought the busmen nothing that could not have been obtained without a stoppage' (p.137). Although, London Transport, overall, has not seen more strikes due to public ownership, the Coronation strike 'was perhaps in part due to public ownership' (p.137) since the employers could not easily pass the cost of settling onto the customer, as a private sector operator would have done.

The remainder of the book explores management policy, beginning with joint consultation – another central theme of Clegg's early work. Here he distinguishes consultation from negotiation. 'The objects of joint consultation are to develop the interest of workers in their jobs, and to make better use of that interest by bringing the workers into closer contact with industrial policy-making' (p.143). Already, however, he is sceptical of the efficacy of consultation as against deeply-rooted collective

bargaining. 'The more enthusiastic supporters of the principles of consultation, who find therein the complete answer to the problems of industrial democracy, might think this a disappointing result, but it cannot yet be said that their faith in consultative committees has been fully justified' (p.151). Already, the sceptical, pragmatic, empirical tone is well in evidence. Clegg concludes thus on the entire experience of public ownership at London Transport. 'It is at least clear that the most optimistic and the most pessimistic forecasts made before 1933 have not been fulfilled' (p.168). Public ownership does not lead to a land of milk and honey, but nor does it lead to Sodom and Gomorrah! The performance indicators – productivity, the quality of service and labour turnover – are inconclusive. Restrictive practices have not eased. 'There is little evidence that the attitude of the employees to their work or to London Transport has changed under public ownership' (p.179).

Finally, Clegg addresses the usual socialist alibis that London Transport has not had enough time yet, and that, in any case, this is not 'true' nationalisation. First, after sixteen years, 'if there is anything in the socialist predictions of improved labour relations under nationalization, the most patient of us would have expected some results by now (p.182). Next, he asks, 'can we attribute this to shortcomings in the form of public ownership?' (p.182). Certainly, there are limits to expenditure on employee welfare if nationalised industries are to serve the public, as taxpayers and customers. And had the unions been directly involved in the management of the industry, this would merely have exasperated tensions between the official union and the rank-file.

(London Transport) has not, so far, shown that the public corporation provides an adequate and permanent solution to the problems of relations between employer and employed, between union and management...it may be that the public corporation has



no special advantage in this respect; that, although both sides have done their best (certain shortcomings excepted) to promote good relations, the result predicted of nationalization have not been obtained because they could not be; that such results should not have been expected...if it is true it follows that the road to the Utopia of the industrial democrats does not lead this way, if indeed there is such a road (p.188).

Thus, at this early point in his career, Clegg has pricked the bubble of socialist dreams and begun to map a more prosaic route to industrial democracy. At the same time, he was trampling on the hopes of his younger self.

### ***Industrial Democracy and Nationalization (1951).***

The second book marks the completion of the Fabian project aired in the pamphlet five years earlier. Apparently that interim report had 'represented the limits of the groups' agreement' (including the decision not to directly address the pros and cons of the Morisonian model) and there was 'such controversy' that Clegg carried on alone to write this essay (p.v). The only help he records was from this Fabian group. But, with no Cole looking over his shoulder, this piece is much more audacious and direct than the earlier work and written provocatively with 'socialists' as its audience. The opening chapter on 'The meaning of Industrial Democracy' takes us through the historical evolution of the theory and practice of a socialist idea, taking in Marx, Bakunin and William Morris, Syndicalism, Guild Socialism, Whitley Councils and Joint Production Committees. As for these later institutional manifestations, Clegg notes how they often met 'trade union indifference or hostility' (p.9), and with good reason. 'Workshop representation in this form bears a close resemblance to company unionism or to profit-sharing schemes, which are anti-trade union devices of industrial paternalism' (p.8). This also explained the triumph of the Morisonian model of nationalisation over earlier aspirations for worker's control.

Clegg turns next to 'Socialist views of Democracy', arguing that democratic socialists now take 'a more sophisticated view of democracy', rejecting the Syndicalist idea that 'industrial democracy must replace political democracy in a socialist society'.

Drawing on the experience of Communism *and* Fascism and stressing the utopian character of much socialist thinking, he roots this new realist view of democracy in 'the dangers of power' (p.14) and the importance of opposition in a large-scale state or society: 'the price of liberty in the state is organized opposition' (p.17). In a classic pluralist or functionalist analysis, the internal democracy of parties or trade unions is less important than the fact that they provide effective opposition groups.

There is nothing new in this analysis of parliamentary democracy...The purpose of restating it here is to show that in thinking about industrial democracy we must not take an over-simplified view of the nature of democracy, as industrial democrats have too often done in the past' (p.19)

This political analogy, and a recognition of the limits of it, lead Clegg to his famous conclusion. 'The trade union is thus industry's opposition – an opposition which can never become a government' (p.22). Yet this still leaves the 'problem of trade union responsibility' as the union tries to balance its dual role as 'champion of the workers' and 'policeman' of joint agreements with the employers (p.26-7), and out of this tension comes unofficial strikes. Since Clegg is not just declaring a trade union right, but also outlining a stable social democratic constitutional order in industry with collective bargaining at its centre, the balance must be attempted: 'it is necessary for a union both to oppose and to agree' (p.30). Direct union control of industry, or even joint control, would undermine real pluralist democracy, and these are 'ideas which live on only as the pale ghosts of the enthusiasms of the crude but heroic army of the early syndicalists' (p. 28). Against the threat of 'totalitarianism', which Clegg sees as rooted in utopian conceptions of 'active participation', he chooses 'to interpret

democracy passively’ and to stress the fundamental independence of the union from management (p.34).

Having grounded his approach in political theory, Clegg applies his ‘theory of industrial democracy’ (p.37) to some ‘general problems’ of nationalisation. He notes the need to be accountable to consumers and the national interest and explores existing institutions for this. En route, he highlights the changing expectations of nationalisation as full employment, redistributive taxation and the welfare state have achieved many goals that were formerly expected of it. ‘The hopes of socialists have long been centred on nationalization. Few to-day expect as much of nationalization as did socialists of two generations ago’ (p.44). The ‘extravagant claims of socialists’ deserve part of the blame for the sense of disappointed expectation surrounding nationalisation (p.61) and here he returns to his polemic against various utopian brands of socialist, while insisting that the mainstream view was more ‘utilitarian’. Even so ‘workers certainly do not see the interests as radically changed by nationalization’ (p.65), just as he had found at London Transport. Indeed, ‘a sense of partnership’ was just as likely to be found among progressive private employers (p.67). And once more, joint consultation is a disappointment, especially on issues of production and efficiency, notwithstanding ‘a general level of moderate achievement’. Clegg repeats the case for a national wages policy, as part of the ‘progress towards equality’. ‘Every extension of socialism makes it more essential that the government should set up some body to compare the demands made by, and increases granted to, every group of workers’ (p.117).

By now, Clegg has toughened his stance on Communism, which was regarded as misguided but fairly harmless in the London Transport study.

One of the most potent causes of inter-union conflict, and of conflict within unions...Communists put the interests of the U.S.S.R. before those of their own country and are therefore regarded almost as enemies of the state...the complaint against the Communists is that they do not play the game, and they regard any means as justified if it leads towards their social revolution (p.97).

This said, Clegg recognises, 'that some of the most competent and conscientious trade union leaders, at every level' (p.97) are Communists, but still doubts whether they are a principal cause of unofficial strikes. While 'strikes in nationalized industries are not an advertisement for socialism...not even a Communist can manufacture a strike without a grievance' (p.99).<sup>x</sup> In short, the biggest problem with Communism in IR, apart from its dubious motives, allegiances and methods, is its damaging impact on the cohesion and efficacy of trade unionism and hence on industrial democracy.

Communism weakens unions as an effective democratic opposition and makes it harder for them to take on legitimate responsibilities. Even so, Clegg explicitly rejects moves 'to suppress Communists...because it is a severe limitation of liberty, and because the difficulty of defining a Communist always involves the extension of repression beyond their numbers' (p.139).

Speaking as a socialist to fellow socialists, Clegg's main practical recommendation is a decentralisation of management to increase industrial democracy at the place of work. By this logic, 'industrial democracy consists, in part, of the opposition of the trade unions to the employer, and, in part, of the attempt of the employer to build his employees into a team working together towards a common purpose' (p.121). For now, he is prepared to entertain the 'democracy of common' purpose at the level of the 'team' or establishment, even while he rejects it at the level of industry. And he is

still optimistic that nationalised industries should be able 'to attain a standard of management above that of private industry' because of the 'greater attention given then before to human problems' (p.126). The main obstacles to this are over-centralisation and poor quality management. 'The right sort of establishment manager is only the beginning of industrial democracy', however (p.127). 'Shop stewards and equivalent representatives' are equally essential. 'Any attempt to by-pass the unions and their representatives, even by seemingly democratic methods, to build up a paternalism which excludes them is no democracy at all' (p.128-9). This allots 'a dual role to the trade union representative in the establishment, both defending the interest of workers and participating in its running. In this way, Clegg makes some concession to the contemporary human relations view at the local scale. The overall dilemma for trade unions is that while 'there can be no democracy without responsibility, the acceptance of too great a degree of responsibility will weaken and eventually destroy democracy' (p.137).

In its quiet, understated way, *Industrial Democracy and Nationalization* is a major and innovative contribution to revisionist social democratic thinking on IR, drawing on both political theory and in-depth empirical study of the institutions and mechanics of industry. Clegg's theoretical conclusion was striking and influential, for better or for worse.

Organised opposition is a prerequisite of democracy, at least on a large scale. Only so long as the trade unions act as an opposition to management will they serve the interests of industrial democracy (p.141)

A 'democracy of common purpose can only exist if it is contained within a larger democracy of opposition' (p.142). The larger industrial democracy is a system of collective bargaining centred on trade unions, while what remains of the old 'noble

ideal' of workers control should be pursued by joint consultation in the workplace and those small units where talk of common purpose is meaningful. Trade unions need to preserve their independence, yet 'dual loyalties are essential if there is to be socialism' (p.147). Finally, nationalization per se contributes nothing to industrial democracy, which can be developed just as effectively by collective bargaining and consultation in private industry. It is worth pausing to register here that we still in 1951 and, as yet, there has been no reference to Flanders or his writing from this uncommonly generous academic.

### ***A New Approach to Industrial Democracy (1960)***

This book offered the most sophisticated, fully developed and influential version of Clegg's thesis, without fundamentally altering the perspective of the two 1950 publications. Clegg thanks Alan Fox, Bill McCarthy, John Plamenatz (the political philosopher) and Allan Flanders – the *first mention* of his name in this stream of writing. 'Above all, however, I owe my thanks to C.A.R. Crosland, M.P., who has given me more help with this book than I have received before in any book that I have written'. (p.vi). For now Clegg's home-grown IR revisionism meets the central figure of Labour party social democracy. The context was the September 1958 Congress for Cultural Freedom in Vienna on the subject of 'Workers Participation in Management', which engaged drew Clegg with a wide range of 'philosophical and sociological' perspectives on the subject, including different comparative institutional experiences (p.v). Once more, he had been asked to write an essay responding to the various presentations. These included delegations from Austria, Finland, France, (West) Germany, Holland, India, Iran, Israel, Italy, Japan, Sweden, Turkey, the UK, the USA and Yugoslavia. The UK delegation included, Crosland, Clegg's co-author T.E. Chester, Harry Briggs from Unilever and Eric Trist from the Tavistock Institute –

whose paper looms large in Clegg's analysis. Daniel Bell's paper, by contrast receives no specific reference. Because we are primarily interested in the development Clegg's ideas over time, I will comment only on those passages that either mark significant departure from or additions to previous positions. For the author claims that 'there are several points on which my views have changed considerably' since the 1951 book (p.vi).

Part one provides another tour through the labour history of industrial democracy in theory and practice, from 'workers control' to consultation, this time with a wider comparative lens. The exposition is more systematic, especially on Guild Socialism's attempt to reconcile the different stakeholders in industry. Clegg opines that these 'tended to stray right outside socialist territory' and cements his revisionism by asking: 'why not also admit the rights of the private employer?' (p.13) 'A New Theory of Democracy' emerges from the dystopian experience of Stalin, Mussolini and Hitler, as 'Political thinkers began to pay more attention to the analysis of the nature of democracy as it existed in western countries' where it had survived and thrived (p.20). Among western socialists, a new realism has triumphed as 'enthusiasm will give place to more sober emotions' (p106). The strength of these 'stable democracies' (the anglo-saxon countries plus Scandinavia) lies in their 'pressure groups' of which 'trade unions have become by far the most noticeable and probably the most powerful' (p.20-1). These provide 'countervailing power' against major, potentially totalitarian concentrations of power in society (p 25). Such realities and precautions lead to 'three principles of industrial democracy', all evident in his earlier work.

It seems to me that there are three main elements in this theory. The first is that trade unions must be independent both of the state and of management. The second is that

only the unions can represent the industrial interests of workers. The third is that the ownership of industry is irrelevant to good industrial relations (p.21)

But now the political implications are more explicit. 'Conversion to this view has been one of the signs of maturity in western socialist parties' (p.27) as labour movements converge on a new social democratic consensus. The author claims,

A practical and empirical creed, the creed of democracy achieved, of trade unionism which has arrived... The new theories are both pessimistic and traditional. They are rooted in distrust –distrust of power. They argue that the political and industrial institutions of stable democracies already approach the best that can be realized. They return to traditions of liberal thought which preceded the rise of socialism (p.29).

Part two consider post-war developments in light of the three principles, to test their comparative reach. Joint consultation, the main British innovation, is adjudged largely a 'failure' in its ambitions to improve productivity, IR and working conditions, though there is still 'something' to be said in its favour (p.38) even if many of the best private firms manage without it. The reasons are that consultation committees are widely bypassed, while the formal distinction between consultation and collective bargaining does not hold up in practice and it is the latter that really matters for industrial democracy. Whereas in 1951, Clegg had placed some hope on 'local consultative committees' and in the face-to-face relationships of local managements and their employees, its failure at this level has been most marked' (p.40). Partly because 'management has not made it work', consultation is no more than an 'occasionally useful *adjunct*' to collective bargaining.<sup>xi</sup> In institutional terms, at least: 'it may follow that no great improvement can be made in the system of industrial relations already established in Britain' (p.41). France, by contrast, merely displays 'an inability to achieve anything like a satisfactory system of collective bargaining (p.43), due to a combination of fragmented, political trade unions, intransigent employers and an overweening state. Once again, Clegg is critical of 'the duplicity of the



Communists' who 'thrive on bad relationships with management' (p.45-6), but is not prepared to get hot under the collar about it or to lay the full blame at their door.

German co-determination presents a different dilemma, since it works, yet should by his earlier theory, undermine strong independent trade unions. 'On balance, Works Councils may have done more to strengthen the unions than to undermine them' (p.55). Clegg squares this circle, by arguing that in the special case of de-Nazification, co-determination has been a necessary route to restoring strong independent trade unions. In his view, 'collective bargaining is a process much more obviously akin to co-determination. Each is a process of arriving at joint decisions' (p.96). It works for German workers, but countries with mature systems of collective bargaining, like Britain and the USA, have no need of this institutional crutch. Likewise, Yugoslav Works Councils and the Israeli Histadrut have nothing to offer countries with strong independent trade unions, but may be of benefit in less developed societies. 'In those countries devices of this sort might serve as a means of moving towards the political system of the west, the system of pressure group democracy' (p.118). Hence, Clegg is not prepared to condemn 'the Yugoslav experiment...It is a venture into the unknown, a voyage of discovery' (p.107). This comparative evidence suggests that two of the three principles must be applied flexibly. Trade unions can have relationships with political parties, the state and employers without forfeiting their basic independence. Strong unions are best able to represent the interests of workers, but they may co-exist with works committees, and where unions don't exist, something is better than nothing.

Part three largely reiterates his 1951 conclusion, albeit in a more sophisticated way. What should industrial democracy aim to achieve? First, to protect the 'rights and interest' of workers against 'those with power' (p.83-4). Second, what about 'efficiency and happiness'? Despite the claims of Elton Mayo and industrial sociology, Clegg questions the easy claim that 'Industrial democracy is good business' (p.84). For him there is 'no logical connection between democracy and efficiency' and probably not much evidence either. His case for industrial democracy rests on political principles alone (see Martin 2003). He doubts that participation in management has much to do with 'the primary causes of industrial conflict' or with job satisfaction in general. As for joint consultation, there is no evidence it contributes to high productivity or low strikes rates, while trade unions protect the rights of workers. Hence, joint consultation can be written off as an effective instrument of industrial democracy', though it 'may serve the purposes of personnel management' as one communications option among others (p.91-3). As the system of collective bargaining has matured it has become largely redundant. To conclude, 'there is no effective alternative to collective bargaining as a means of protecting the interests and rights of workers' (p.113). Lest we wonder, where this system comes from, Clegg confidently asserts: 'Trade Unions necessarily follow industrialization unless totalitarian methods are used to destroy them (p.117).

### ***A theoretical contribution***

Clegg's early writing on industrial democracy and nationalisation are explicitly theoretical, notwithstanding his use of empirical evidence to test the arguments. They draw on the work of Cole, in particular, and constitute an evolving critique of it. Moreover, they cast Clegg as the third human link in the 'great tradition' of British

non-Marxist theory about the labour movement, leading from the Webbs, through Cole to him, with personal contact, rupture and continuity at each stage. Clegg's other intellectual source is the realist, pluralist political thinking of Schumpeter and Dahl (see Pateman 1970, chapter one) reflecting his PPE training and work as an Oxford Politics tutor at Magdalene and Wadham. With the exception of his erstwhile thesis on London Transport, they are only very thinly referenced, which makes the precise source of his ideas hard to fathom. This reflects both the relaxed scholarly style of the time and his intended audience, which – other than perhaps the 1960 book – was the trade union leader and labour movement activist. His intention seems to have been to make the reader aware of their own presuppositions about industrial democracy and then to systematically replace these with new and more robust foundations. This *theoretical work* cleared the ground for the empirical project that followed of mapping and fine-tuning the British system of collective-bargaining. The clearing process swept away Clegg's youthful Communist ideas and the idealistic hopes of Cole to uncover the apparently vigorous shoots of a pragmatic, native social democracy.

## CONCLUSIONS

Clegg's individual work from this Oxford era has been largely forgotten, with the exception of the easily misunderstood phrase; 'trade unions are an opposition that can never become a government'. Some have tended to dismiss his foray into political theory as an unfortunate adventure. Yet this string of works from 1950 to 1960 was crucial for establishing the foundations of British IR as an academic endeavour. They made trade unions and collective bargaining, rather than personal management and consultation or the state and labour law, the centre of the discipline, both in terms of its empirical research and its perception of institutional reform. Clegg did so, not just

because trade unions were powerful, but because he wanted to make them normative: a key element in the new social democratic settlement. Beyond that these texts anticipate many future key theme of post-war academic IR: the importance of workplace bargaining, Fox's explicit characterisation of unitarism and pluralism, the need for incomes policy and – looking even further forward – the failures of British Personnel Management.

For Pateman (1970, p.71-2), however, Clegg was the man who 'claimed that industrial democracy already exists in most industrialised Western countries' (p.71). Following Ostergaard, she argues that the analogy between democracy in politics and industry is invalid, since management is permanently in office, and unaccountable to anyone except, formally, to shareholders and the state. She also attacks Clegg's claim that it is impossible for workers to share directly in management, pointing out that (1) they already do in lower level management and (2) collective bargaining itself is a form of participation. The second criticism is confused, since this is precisely Clegg's point. The first, however, illustrates a blind-spot in Clegg's (and IR's) institutional understanding of participation or industrial democracy. He was well aware of Trist's human relations work and comments extensively on it, and on occasion uses the term 'direct participation', but simply cannot accommodate this within his institutional framework. At the end of his 1960 book, Clegg caricatures direct participation, as a particularist return to craft values of 'self-government' of very limited application. Anything less is merely a management communications device. Clegg's industrial democracy is a representative democracy, a passive democracy as far as ordinary workers are concerned: about committees, procedures and agreements.

Poole (1986, p.132-3) points out, quite rightly, that Clegg is merely developing the Webbs (1897) exposition of *Industrial Democracy* through trade unions and collective bargaining, while enriching it with the new realist theories of political democracy and adding the warning that ‘workers’ participation in management was not only irrelevant to the question of industrial democracy but could actually be harmful to worker’s interests and to the extension of ‘democratic’ social relationships in industry’ – as anything that weakened trade unions would be. To be fair, however, as Kaufman (2005) notes, Clegg inverted the priority that the Webbs’ gave to legal regulation over joint regulation, a fateful manoeuvre for the future of British IR in theory and practice. Poole suggests, moreover, that as a ‘*strategy* of increasing workers’ organisational power’, Clegg’s emphasis on trade unions and collective bargaining has much to say for it. Two decades later this seems far less convincing. With hindsight, the lack of formal participation structures, underpinned by law lead to an uneven patchwork of joint regulation that was quickly and easily swept away by economic and political change after 1979. Arguably too, the lack of direct participation or ‘teamworking’ and emphasis on arms-length adversarial bargaining relationship damaged the cohesion and productivity of British industry compared to economies like West Germany.

And yet, as Clegg’s own 1960 discussion of German co-determination made clear, while the tensions between trade unions independence and participation in management, at levels of the workplace and company, were real there was no single, clearly demarcated frontier of control. Instead, there was plenty of scope for overlap, ambiguity, blurring the borders of conflict and co-operation, without sacrificing union independence.

The fragility of trade union independence can be exaggerated...The truth is that trade unions are condemned to be the battleground of warring tendencies...in accepting responsibility in order to share power they have to realize that there is no easy formula by which power and independence may be balanced (p.99-101).

By implication the 1951 phrase, 'the trade union is an opposition which can never become a government', is misleading and simplistic. Unfortunately, it stuck, and the continuing polarisation of collective bargaining and worker participation merely legitimated institutional conservatism when reform was necessary and possible. In the end, it may have painted British trade unions into a corner from which they could not escape.

If Clegg's writing on industrial democracy had unforeseen conservative effects and lacked the forensic power of great political and sociological writing that does not make it unimportant *as IR theory*. He describes his 1960 book as 'a contribution to social theory' (1960, p.131). As IR theory, it was *dull but important*, because it shaped the future of IR thinking and policy-making in the UK up to 1979. Clegg took up the mantle of the Webbs and Cole, redefined and revised their ideas for a new social democratic age and built the conceptual box from which IR has only lately begun to escape. He did not do so alone, but nor was he a mere water carrier for Flanders. The main elements of his influential 1960 work were already apparent in studies that must have been almost complete when he first encountered Flanders. Crucially, the conception of collective bargaining and trade unionism as a social democratic moral project, extending democracy and rights, was there from the start.

Brown (1998 p.850-1), a former student and colleague of Clegg, argues that Tony Crosland had a crucial influence on Clegg's 'new theory' of industrial democracy. As we have seen, Crosland had accompanied Clegg to the Vienna and gave detailed

comments on the draft of his 1960 book. These and his broader political vision may partly account for the ‘uncharacteristic panache’ of Clegg’s final book on industrial democracy. And judged purely as an academic text, it clearly supersedes all the others. However, to understand intellectual influence, historically, it is crucial that we account for chronology. As I have shown, in substance, Clegg’s ‘new theory’ had already appeared in his 1950/51 books. The 1960 version presented the case better, developed a more nuanced view of the dynamics of trade union independence and responsibility and a more terminal diagnosis of consultation; but the core arguments were a decade old. Even the realistic political analysis had appeared in the 1951 book. No doubt, Clegg was influenced by Crosland’s 1956, *The Future of Socialism*, given the similarity between their ‘non-Marxist, egalitarian and strongly pluralist political’ philosophies. And Brown testifies to the scale of Clegg’s ‘sense of personal loss’ on Crosland’s premature death. But it seems likely that the theoretical influence flowed both ways and that on this issue Clegg’s ideas were decisive. The Gaitskell papers contain an annotated galley proof of Clegg and Chester 1953, *The Future of Nationalisation*, indicating that Clegg’s IR ideas were already in circulation among Labour revisionists.<sup>xii</sup>

Crosland’s (1962) own essay and report of the Vienna conference, ‘Industrial Democracy and Workers Control’, published in *Encounter*, February 1959, also supports this view. The politician references Clegg’s 1951 work, and much of the article reads as a précis of the academic’s arguments. Collective bargaining has already secured workers’ greater influence ‘*without* formal participation in management and largely outside the machinery of joint consultation’ (p.218). Unions must maintain their ‘*opposition* role’ (p.219). The ‘mere fact of public ownership has

had little effect on industrial relations', but: 'Nor is formal consultation a panacea' (p.225); while 'paternalism...may be used to undermine the position of the unions'. Most of these ideas come from Clegg, since it seems unlikely that Crosland knew much about the institutional details of British IR. Others, like the characterisation of German co-determination and Yugoslav workers' council as an immature surrogate for mature collective bargaining could have come from either man, but sound more like Clegg too. Where Crosland appears not quite convinced is on 'the participation of the primary work-group'. In his judgement, 'the hard-headed leading men in government, industry, and the Trade Unions should suppress their 'practical man's' suspicion of sociology (p.227); a suspicion that Clegg shared.

How we regard the respective contributions of Allan Flanders and Hugh Clegg cuts to the heart of how we understand the emergence of the distinctive British IR paradigm at Oxford in the 1950s. If we follow John Kelly's *idealist/ deductive view*, IR emerged primarily from Flanders' brand of cold war, social democratic politics, since he was the leading intellectual in the partnership and his ideas drive the discipline forward. By contrast, Richard Hyman (2004a, 2004b) appears to suggest a more *materialist/ inductive view*, whereby the British discipline of IR was largely a reflection of industry IR practice; though he has himself noted the bridging role of Cole. I am suggesting a middle way between these two possible rival interpretations, closer to Kelly in the emphasis on ideas, but following Hyman in disinterring the Webbs-Cole - Clegg chain of influence.<sup>xiii</sup> In this view, Clegg becomes an important theoretical figure, in his own right, during the formative phase of British IR. He became critical of 1950s Communism for his own sound, liberal, well-argued reasons, drawing on his own intensive experience of the movement, but never let 'anti-Communism' drive his



analysis of IR. He also bequeathed a distinctive institutional and historical research method, which I plan to discuss in subsequent paper on his historical work. One point of comparison would be British Social Anthropology where Radcliffe-Brown provided the Durkheimian theory while Malinowski furnished the ethnographic research method (Kuper 1973). According to this division of labour, Clegg's greatest contribution would be to establish the way in which IR research was conducted – until the qualitative and quantitative innovations of the late 1970s. But even in sphere of theory, Clegg's early break with Cole's brand of industrial democracy and redefinition of the Webbs view of industrial democracy, established a central theme for the new discipline. It was Clegg, the politics tutor, in recoil from Communism, who established, for better or worse, that the only viable brand of industrial democracy in the UK, was to be collective bargaining with trade unions.

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<sup>i</sup> 'Hugh Clegg; Confidential Discussion with Brian Harrison on 29 Sept 1987 at 7, Nash Square, Regency Drive, Kenilworth, Warwicks CV8 1JE [incorporating his subsequent corrections]. Henceforth *Harrison interview*, p.5

<sup>ii</sup> Herbert H. Clegg's stations were: 1902 Matlock; 1905 Brigg and 1908 Gainsborough (both Lincolnshire); 1911 Birmingham, Belmont Row; 1913 N. Cornwall Mission; 1917 Truro; 1920 London, Ealing; 1924 London, Finsbury Park; 1927 Glasgow, St John's; 1930 Cardiff, Roath Road, 1937 Tunbridge Wells, 1943 retirement. *Hills Arrangements*, The Methodist Church..

<sup>iii</sup> Main source: Clegg (undated) though I have checked against other sources.

<sup>iv</sup> He was appointed at Magdalene in 1947, straight after gaining a first in his PPE finals, and later transferred to Wadham where, among others, he taught Willy Brown (1998). See Clegg (undated).

<sup>v</sup> *Harrison interview*, p.3-4 (abbreviation removed).

<sup>vi</sup> *Harrison interview*, p.3 (abbreviation removed). There is a similar account in Clegg (undated).

<sup>vii</sup> Clegg (undated) p.35. Apparently Cole and Chester vied for sponsorship, 'but there was not question in mind as to which of them I owed my allegiance'.

<sup>viii</sup> See 'Chester, Sir (Daniel) Norman (1907-1986)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, p.339-40. He may have been even more important as a role model for the academic entrepreneur and institution/ disciple builder Clegg became at Warwick. Halsey (1978, p.1-2) portrays a man of humble provincial origins who 'emerges as a striving individual out of the solidarity of the 'working class movement' seeking a place for 'the academy in the practical world...of industry and public affairs'. It is easy to see Clegg's affinity.

<sup>ix</sup> Flanders wrote a 1930 article on this famous dispute, but there is no reference to this in Clegg's version.

<sup>x</sup> He maintained a live interest in British Communist history through his research students Walter Kendall and Rod Martin.

<sup>xi</sup> My italics: another memorable phrase and theory of participation in its own right.

<sup>xii</sup> The Gaitskell Papers, London (UCL) Manuscripts Room, London: ref Gaitskell/C71. At this stage it was Chester and Clegg.

<sup>xiii</sup> These are merely suggestive ideal types, partly based on a discussion at the 2004 IRRA. While there is a large literature on the History of British IR *practice*, there is very little on the History of British IR

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*theory*, especially in this early period. So my intention here is simply to frame a potential or nascent debate about the origins of IR as an academic discipline.