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New Labour held its conference recently in Brighton. Why it bothers is a question rarely asked, given the glee with which the party hierarchy ignores its decisions.

For example, the trade unions did inflict a defeat on the government's plans to expand the role of the private sector in the NHS. The health secretary replied quickly, saying the government will not moderate their policies as a result of the vote. So why bother having a conference at all? Doubtless the other defeats for the Blair hierarchy, over the right to take secondary strike action and keeping the pension age at 60 for public sector workers and linked to earnings will likewise be ignored. As for Iraq, that too was ignored. A promised debate at the conference was cancelled by the leadership.

Perhaps the fact that an autocratic leadership ignores the membership explains why New Labour has lost so many members? Given the regularity with the Labour Party leadership ignores both its membership and general public, can anyone

wonder why anarchists reject representative democracy as undemocratic? As can be seen, democracy is premised on the alienation of power rather than its exercise. Giving power to a few leaders is guaranteed to result into autocratic ignoring of the people they claim to represent as the system is based on it. That is why anarchists reject it in favour of self-management and decision making from the bottom-up. In an anarchist organisation, if the delegates do not reflect the view of the base they are recalled and replaced by someone who does. Not so in capitalist democracy, where we are stuck with a bunch of idiots who have the power to make our lives worse for 4 or 5 years when we get the chance to election another bunch of idiots to tell us what to do!

One thing of note did happen in Brighton. An 82-year-old delegate was manhandled out of the conference when he heckled the foreign secretary during a speech about the war in Iraq. Walter Wolfgang, a veteran Labour activist of 57 years and who escaped Nazi Germany in 1937, was dragged from the hall by stewards after (quite rightly) shouting "nonsense" as Jack Straw spoke of Britain's success in bringing democracy Iraq. Another delegate was also ejected after complaining about Mr Wolfgang's treatment. The Labour hierarchy, seeing a PR nightmare evolve, quickly u-turned on the issue and apologised to him.

Like the conference itself, the ejections show what low regard the Labour hierarchy has for its members and the public. Rather than reply to the heckle, New Labour barred him and so admitted that the party leadership was talking indefensible rubbish. It shows that a guilty government fears even the tamest of dissent.

Significantly, when Mr Wolfgang tried to re-enter the hall after being ejected he was refused permission under Section 44 of the Prevention of Terrorism Act. Assuming that this is the 2000 act, section 44 is the "Power to stop and search" and, according to the act, an authorisation "may be given only if the

person giving it considers it expedient for the prevention of acts of terrorism." Section 45 indicates that the police may detain a person "for such time as is reasonably required to permit the search to be carried out."

It is hard to see how this was remotely applicable here. Clearly the idea that an 82 year old accredited Labour Party delegate was going to commit acts of terrorism is a joke. It is disagreeing with the government now deemed an act of terrorism? Is this article "glorifying" said act? Plainly, the "anti-terrorism" laws were used for the political aim to stop dissent, to quash freedom of speech. Were we not assured by the politicians that these anti-terrorism laws would not be used against protestors? That they would be used wisely and purely against terrorists? We knew that was, to coin a phrase, nonsense at the time. We argued that they would be used by the state as and when required to stop protest and dissent.

Subsequent events have proven us right. The application of these laws against a lone heckler is just the latest abuse of many. It shows how the Terrorism Act can be seriously abused to attack anyone who criticises the government. Does it give an idea of how these "anti-terrorism" powers are used in practice? Of course. You want to demonstrate in the street against the government? Then be prepared to get arrested for "terrorism" — as the Desi protestors discovered.

Abuse? That would be the wrong word as the state wanted these power precisely to use them in this way. Yet more confirmation that giving the state yet more power is not a clever idea.This gives an idea of the future powers given to the police. You want to demonstrate in the street against the government? Get arrested for "terrorism".

What is surprising is not that Mr. Wolfgang was silenced as he was. Such silencing of dissent and protest is what we have come to expect from Blair's regime. What is surprising is that Mr Wolfgang was the only heckler. No one else in the party raised their voices to denounce the rubbish spewing from

party leadership. Their silence is damning. But then again, New Labour was born with the destruction of the limited inner-party democracy that existed within the party.

But it does raise one key question. Why are people in a party whose leadership ignores conference decisions and election manifesto promises when it suits them? A party whose contempt for them is as great as that of the population they claim to represent. Have they no shame?