

represents an attempt by him to invest the workings of the blind laws of political economy with some moral force. It is not only a question of how things actually happen under capitalism but of how things *should* happen in a moral universe.

Try an experiment. Put Blair's phrase "the rights we enjoy reflect the duties we owe" into the context of his commitment to "get people off welfare." Place that alongside his belief that all young people should do voluntary work. We already have New Labour's case for workfare!

Blair's new clause is not simply an exercise to bring the Labour Party's aims and objects into line with its actual pro-capitalist behaviour when in government.

This attack on Clause Four is an integral part of what the "modernisers" call "the project." Their aim is nothing less than to remove organised labour as an active force in Parliamentary politics and to reinvent the Labour Party as the main party of a "modernised" capitalism.

New Labour really means ex-Labour. New Labour means a rebirth of the Liberal Party Labour displaced in the first two decades of this century.

Yet there is a puzzle here.

How come large sections of the Labour Party membership — never mind the overwhelming majority of its apparatus (including its trade union apparatus) — are reconciled to the party's self negation?

The question cannot be answered if we see Blair's hegemony simply as the product of an accidental combination of circumstances. Such things may have accelerated his rise to power but they do not explain it. To understand Blair's attempt to create New Labour we need to see what he has in common with *old* Labour.

Blair is an anti-socialist who wants to break the link with the trade unions; so, on the face of it, he has not got anything to do with Old Labour. Yet, at the same time, he remains deeply and firmly in the mainstream of traditionally parliamentary Labour politics. So, of course, were his failed predecessors, the SDP.

The reason Blair can embody such contradictory tendencies — being part of Labourism while aspiring to abolish it — is that Labourism itself always contained the seed of its own destruction.

Defined statically, the Labour Party is a bourgeois workers' party. That means that the party is based on the trade unions, the bedrock organisation of the working class, and that it counts for its electoral support on the working class. Yet, at the same time, the party is a bourgeois party. Its leaders carry out pro-capitalist policies in office and are integrated into the extended ruling class networks of the state and business establishments.

As a party, it simultaneously embodies the first steps of the working class down

the road to political independence *and* the continued dominance of bourgeois ideas over that same exploited class.

If we look at the Labour Party in the past, we can cast the illuminating light of history on the paradoxical phenomenon of Blair. Looked at from the point of view of its evolution, only two developments were theoretically possible for Labour. Either Labour would collapse back into Liberalism pure and simple or it would be reconstructed as an effective instrument of the working class.

The great anomaly of Labourism is that — for decades — it did neither. One reason for this is that the serious socialists failed to win a large enough part of the working class to revolutionary politics away from Labourism.

Another is that for a large part of the twentieth century British capitalism rested on the trade union bureaucracy which controlled the working-class movement as one of its main pillars of support.

That support is no longer necessary to a capitalism that has — under Thatcher — shackled the labour movement.

Blair's mission is therefore to carry the Thatcher social counter-revolution into the working class movement. Blair is not unique. Labour leaders have always tagged along behind bourgeois intellectual developments. Blair follows Thatcher just as Attlee followed Beveridge and Keynes. The difference is that Beveridge, the far-sighted reforming Liberal, could see the benefits of a relatively civilised welfare state and full employment as prerequisites for social stability in the post-war boom. Thatcher looked at the cash register and told her class it was too expensive.

Blair's only difference with previous Labour leaders is that he works at a time when the Thatcher project has not yet been carried through in its entirety. In particular, it will fall to him to complete Thatcher's main unfinished task: the destruction of what remains of the Welfare State.

Yet the unions still remain a force in the Labour Party, should they want to be a force. There is a long way for the Blairites still to go before they have pushed the Labour Party back into the womb of Liberalism.

With a Labour victory at the next election looking almost inevitable, and with the prospect looming of that government unleashing massive attacks on its own supporters, the central fault lines in British politics will run through the Labour Party. The way forward from the Labourism that has generated a Blair will have to be found still within the contradictory currents of Labour politics.

That is why Marxists must stay inside Labour, that is, inside the fight that will not, even if Blair wins, end with the Special Conference on 29 April. Win, lose or draw on 29 April, the decisive battle for the Labour Party will continue. ■

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By Roland Trenchet

TONY BLAIR'S victory at the Scottish Labour Party conference has been presented by the media as the end of the battle over Clause Four.

Nothing could be further from the truth.

It is still possible to beat Blair at the special Labour Party conference on 29 April.

Let's look first at the evidence from the NEC's own "consultation" process. Blair has not made the gains in the constituencies that his supporters claim. Just 1.5% of individual party members have come out in support — not of Blair's new statement — but of a "clear and concise statement of aims." They were backed by less than 20% of CLPs. This is not exactly a ringing endorsement especially if we keep in mind that, whatever else Blair's statement may be, clear and concise it is not.

These facts also underline a reality ignored by the media: most individual party members are, if anything, to the left of the activists who attend GC meetings.

Just because a CLP has voted to ballot its members, it does not necessarily follow that Blair will win the poll.

If the left ensures that members are presented with material reflecting both sides of the argument and with a ballot paper that gives them the option of voting to keep the existing Clause Four, then Blair could be in for a few surprises.

Remember, an academic study, commissioned by the party itself, found that 63% of party members disagree that "the production of goods and services is best left to the free market."

We can hope to mobilise these people to vote for Clause Four.

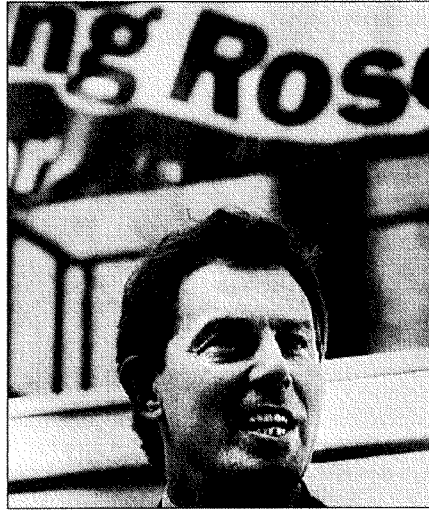
The other hidden aspect of the NEC's "Consultation Report" is this: most of those supporting a rewrite want to see a precise commitment to "redistributing wealth" and "common ownership" in the new clause. They have not got it. This sheds light on the regional conferences.

The vote in Scotland was not a vote for Blair's new clause. What the conference actually backed was a vague commitment to the idea of a new statement, and a specific commitment to the extension of "public ownership where justified on the basis of efficiency and equity."

As Blair's new clause does not even mention public or common ownership, never mind the possibility of extending it, his decisive victory in Inverness doesn't look so decisive. It was a victory for the arts of the bamboozlers. On the level of ideas it was no victory at all. The Scottish conference went on to vote for the renationalisation of the utilities.

The London and South West confer-

an beat Blair!



Edmonds is coming to Blair's rescue, with no guarantee of anything in return

ences both voted to retain Clause Four. The North West conference voted to support "all forms of common ownership."

The picture that emerges from the real consultation on Clause Four — the delegate-based regional conferences — is that there is a narrow majority in the CLPs for retention of the existing wording.

Blair will have to pull out all the stops — using his control over the party apparatus and his contacts with the media — if he is going to win on 29 April.

The unions also are still wide open. Blair only won at Inverness by counting on the votes of RMT and NUM — even though both unions back the existing wording — and, decisively, the votes of UNISON's giant Scottish region, as well as the Communication Workers' Union. The CWU is set to be the area for a major battle over Clause Four.

Despite the fact that the 1994 conferences of both the UCW and the NCU (the two components of the CWU merger) voted to support Clause Four, Alan Johnson, the joint general secretary from the postal side, jumped up to give his backing to Blair at this year's annual conference.

As Johnson is a particularly inane and unconvincing speaker this helped swing the vote our way. The old UCW and the old NCU clerical section both backed Blair while NCU (engineering) — the left's traditional base in BT — backed Clause Four.

This split inside the union caused big problems for the right wing. They have ignored existing policy; instead, the first meeting of the CWU executive voted to back Blair and hold a consultative ballot. In the meantime delegates from the CWU were instructed to vote against both NCU and UCW conference policy.

Interestingly, the CWU leadership have not said that they will be bound by the out-

come of the postal ballot. Both sides of the bureaucracy know that the left is strong in the branches and could well pull off a surprise. For instance, the 1993 Royal Mail productivity deal was rejected in a postal ballot after a rank and file campaign from the UCW branches, even though the UCW leaders had combined with management to run a joint campaign for acceptance.

The outcome of this battle will shape the relationship between right and left in the new union for some time to come.

UNISON, which is the second largest affiliate, was expected by the media to fall full square behind Blair. This has not yet happened. Despite a lot of arm-twisting from former NUPE boss and present Labour Party general secretary, Tom Sawyer, the UNISON consultation process ended with a contradictory result. Though supporting a new Clause Four in principle, UNISON has specified that "There is strong support for a continued role for public or common ownership. Some regions feel that the current Clause Four, part four, best states our commitment. Other regions want a new form of words... this includes the need for public ownership of utilities."

The wording of the new clause is still to go to a special UNISON Affiliated Political Fund Forum (delegate conference) later this month. Given that the Blair statement gives nothing to UNISON members, the result is still wide open.

In the technical and service union MSF there is still a chance of defeating the right wing. The General Secretary is Roger Lyons. His main problem is that the union is losing millions; not all right wingers see their future in the union as necessarily tied to his. After all, it isn't good for your leader to be associated with financial mismanagement on the scale of millions of

pounds.

So, it is still just possible that a pro-Clause Four majority will emerge in the MSF delegation. The union president, John MacIntyre, has already argued that the MSF delegation should vote on the basis of the '94 conference decision to support Clause Four and the '93 decision to oppose any attempt at abolition.

In USDAW, right-wing leader Garfield Davies has invited Blair to address the AAD (conference) a week before Labour's special conference. In the meantime he has instructed USDAW delegations to back the leadership, even though a version of Clause Four is contained in the union's constitution.

Nevertheless, the union's Broad Left still think that they can win conference to retention of Clause Four as it stands.

The GMB leadership have so far managed to avoid any major internal battle over Clause Four. This is no doubt a reflection of the lack of democracy in this highly centralised and top-down organisation. Nevertheless, it is remarkable that John Edmonds — who has made such a noise about full employment — is willing to go along with Blair's new statement even after the leader has made it clear that "the opportunity for all to work and prosper" did not mean full employment. Clause Four is in the constitution of Edmonds' union.

Edmonds — who is reported to believe that the days of the union-Labour Party link are numbered — should, even from his own bureaucratic point of view, try to squeeze concessions out of Blair. Instead, all he has done is come to Blair's rescue without a guarantee of anything in return.

Perhaps Edmonds is trying to "get in" with the parliamentary establishment. If so, he is a remarkably tame bureaucrat even by "new realist" standards.

But that's the problem.

The professional university-graduate trade union civil service who now run the bulk of Britain's unions are so decayed politically, spiritually and morally that they would not dare even think of putting the screws on Blair in the way that an earlier generation of bureaucrats did to Gaitskell. But then, in the '59-60 conflict over Clause Four, most top union officials had worked their way up from the shop floor. They knew how to win concessions.

And even today, it's surely no coincidence that it is in unions with a stronger commitment to lay control, like the RMT, FBU and TGWU, that opposition to Blair is at its strongest.

It is one more proof that the battle for trade union and Labour Party democracy are one and indivisible. ■