



## Editorial

WHO PUT the "new" in New Labour? The answer is not Peter Mandelson or Tony Blair but Margaret Thatcher, representing the forces of savage, unbridled, decaying British capitalism. It was Thatcher who drew up the agenda which the Blairites pursue in the British labour movement now.

When Thatcher took office in 1979, she announced that it was her intention to wipe socialism off the face of British politics. As Arthur Scargill likes to tell pro-Clause Four rallies, she has not yet succeeded. Tony Blair takes up Thatcher's cause within the labour movement. He hopes to finish the job Thatcher started.

Democratically controlled and administered common ownership is the necessary basis of socialism. It is central to the meaning of the word. Blair's new "Clause Four" is an anti-socialist document. Its purpose: to remove any mention of common ownership, or of social wealth from the stated aims of the Labour Party.

As foolishly arrogant as his Thatcherite mentors, Blair's new clause implicitly embraces the triumphalist bourgeois notion of the "end of history". It defines as outside the realm of possibility any form of social production that is not based on private minority ownership of the means of production! Capitalism is here to stay. There will never be anything else. This wretched system, at the root and heart of which is human exploitation, is the highest humankind can hope to attain. This is the real meaning of Blair's philosophically, politically and socially illiterate appeal to *timeless* values. For all his hollow talk of change, little Mr. Blair wants to stop the movement of history.

The existing Clause Four sketches out a future, even if it is in Fabian and rather bureaucratic terms. Blair's new clause does not. It worships the present, uncritically — not the real present, but the neo-liberal ideological fabrication of an ideal, imaginary present world of capitalist civilisation — a world, in fact, which nobody alive today actually inhabits. It bears as much relationship to capitalist reality as the imaginary socialism of Stalinist propaganda did to the condition of those who inhabited the bureaucratically collectivised hell-holes of Stalinism. Just read these words:

*"Blair's new clause embraces the triumphalist bourgeois notion of the 'end of history'."*

"We work for a dynamic economy, serving the public interest, in which the enterprise of the market and the rigour of competition... produce the wealth the nation needs."

That phrase would fit well in a textbook of bourgeois economics, but, as a description of reality, it is a joke. The revealing thing is how limited are the modifications Blair feels we need to make of his school textbook model of capitalism. The market and competition need only to be "joined" — whatever that means — to "the forces of partnership and co-operation" — what are they exactly? — in order to produce "the opportunity for all to work and prosper." This, as Tony has told us, does not mean anything in particular, at any rate, it emphatically does not mean full employment.

Blair's empty waffle represents the lowest common denominator of the post-Thatcher consensus. It could be endorsed by mainstream Christian-Democrats, never mind social-democrats, in any advanced capitalist country. As the head of the Institute of Directors put it: "There is nothing in this document that wouldn't have been supported by any Tory in the last five years."

Yet Blair's new clause *is* a radical document — radical right.

Blair believes in only a minuscule role for public ownership. This is what the new clause says: "High quality public services, where those undertakings essential to the common good are either owned by the public or accountable to

them." [Emphasis added.]

As Blair is not proposing the abolition of the monarchy and the public utilities are already in private hands, the real purpose of this phraseology may be to clear the way for the extension of private ownership and compulsory competitive tendering even further than the Tories have extended it into what remains of the public sector.

Apart from the market, Blair's other main buzzword is community — and its attendant language of "rights and responsibilities."

Many commentators have misunderstood the import of those words of Blair-speak.

For him, "community" is not even a countervailing power to be deployed against the excesses of individualism and its market. No, on the contrary, Blair's rhetoric of "rights and responsibilities" ▶