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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-

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. ■

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