

# New Labour,



## Editorial

THE GREATEST MEDIA con trick in late twentieth century British politics is surely the way a tiny fraction of right-wing Social-Democrats and Christian-Democrats have been able to portray as "modernisation" their drive to turn the clock of Labour politics back a full century.

Only in this Orwellian world of ours, in which a handful of billionaire tycoons control the mass media, could their antique and reactionary political project be described as 'radical' in any sense other than 'radical right'.

Blair would:

- re-introduce means testing,
- undermine state pensions,
- force the unemployed on to cheap labour schemes,
- protect selective education,
- place university education beyond the reach of many working class students,
- continue the run down and marketisation of the NHS,
- continue to outlaw effective trade unionism, and
- abolish direct labour movement representation in Parliament.

Radical? Welcome to the world of Blair-speak!

No one in the labour movement should underestimate how far Blair wants to go. His war against Clause Four is just the start. Hugh MacPherson, *Tribune's* political commentator, an independent-minded reform socialist, has defined the issues clearly and sharply:

*"Labour now faces one of the most significant periods in its history, with a re-definition of its beliefs being rushed through, and a leader who is surrounding himself with people who have little or no commitment to trade unions, or questions of redistribution, or a really modernised form of public ownership. There is nothing new about Tony Blair's views.*

*"He threatens not only the Labour Party and the unions but the Tory Party itself. For he seeks to replace it."*

Blair's goal is not to reform the Labour Party but to abolish it as it has so far existed.

The attack on Clause Four is a symbolic first act, but the core of Blair's agenda is to break the union link by introducing state funding for political parties. Financed by the taxpayer, a gang of anti-working class political careerists would then have made themselves more or less completely independent of the working class and its movement.

Blair's end goal is to transform the Labour Party into a mainstream bourgeois party with a captive working class electoral base similar to that of the US Democrats. This fact is plain to see for anyone who bothers to look. Maverick right wing Labour MP Austin Mitchell put it like this when discussing the political philosophy of Peter Mandelson, Blair's closest advisor:

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# Beyond the Northern Ireland ceasefire

THE CEASEFIRE in Northern Ireland — the best thing in Ireland for a long time — is five months old.

The Provisional IRA war, ostensibly against the British state, was fought on an issue defined at root by the determined and bitter opposition of one million Irish people, the compact majority in North East Ulster, to resist what the Provisional IRA, and the Catholic Northern Irish minority, driven to revolt by decades of oppression, wanted: a united Ireland. Inevitably the violence of the PIRA came to be directed mainly not at "Brits" but at Irish Unionists.

It could not win and it did not deserve to win: substituting one million Protestants forced against their will into a united Ireland for half a million Catholics forced against their will to be part of the Six County State would not by any reckoning have been progress.

Progress lies in mutual accommodation by the two peoples who share the island of Ireland.

The hard underlying political reality is still that the desires and aspirations of the two peoples in Ireland, as they are now posed by the antagonists, are simply incompatible.

If a broadly acceptable compromise is not worked out the ceasefire may drag on for a while — maybe a long while — as a peace of exhaustion, which it is now in some degree, but war will then break out again. The Northern Irish working class will once more be the great loser.

For the left in Britain the end — for now — of the Provisional IRA campaign creates a new situation.

For many years, sections of the British left felt that it would be unprincipled to sharply criticise the PIRA so long as it was conducting a military struggle against — or ostensibly against — the British Government.

We, of course, came to disagree with that, though initially we shared the belief

that the first duty of socialists in Britain was to support against 'our own' government even such a flawed and limited national revolutionary movement as the PIRA; we were the only organisation of the British left to suffer an armed police raid on our headquarters in connection with Ireland (in 1973). Belatedly, a decade ago, we came to the conclusion that what the working class needed from us was not cheerleading for the Provos, but, above all else, an honest attempt to understand Ireland in all its complexities.

We have acted on that conclusion, telling the truth as we saw it.

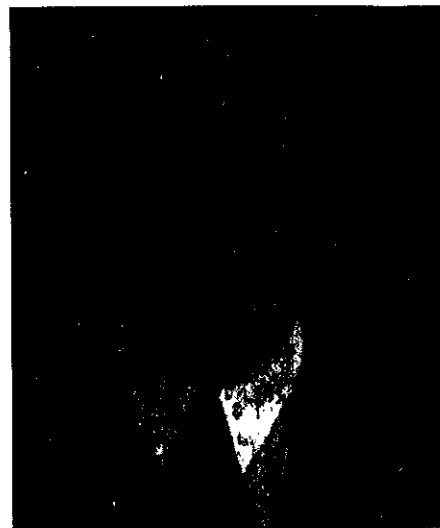
Ireland over the last 25 years constitutes one of the great failures of the British left. Because it has confined itself to shouting pseudo-Republican slogans such as "Troops Out", the left has played no independent political role. It has had no analysis of Ireland independent of the old British Liberal/Irish middle-class/Sinn Fein analysis.

Even discussion of Irish issues was ruled out: ours was not to reason about such things but to follow the lead of those "fighting British imperialism" in Ireland.

Where Ireland is concerned, for over twenty years the left has substituted self-hypnotising lies for both knowledge and policy. The result is now utter political confusion.

It is hard to believe, but most of those who call for Troops Out think that thereby they call for a United Ireland. In fact, unless preceded by a political settlement, it would certainly mean civil war and repartition, not any sort of united Ireland.

They talk about ending the "Protestant veto" when, for 22 years now, since the abolition of Stormont, Northern Ireland has been kept in balance by twin vetoes: the Catholic veto against majority rule in Northern Ireland has balanced the Protestant veto against any all-Ireland constitution. Both vetoes are backed by force and the threat of force. We could go on: the left is awash



Gerry Adams of Sinn Fein. The Northern Irish working class needs its own, democratic solution to the "constitutional question"

with such un-thought-out nonsense.

Above all else, right now, the serious left needs to step out of the shadow of middle class Irish nationalism, to cease to walk in awe of Gerry Adams' "Fianna Failers with guns".

They need to ask themselves what they think about Ireland, about Sinn Fein's politics, about the Provisional IRA. It has practical importance.

For the British left has a great responsibility in Ireland. One million people in Ireland, probably a majority of them working-class, say they are British. The British labour movement can influence such people towards reconciliation in Ireland. But the left, by playing the chameleon to Catholic nationalism, has long rendered itself unable to even talk to those Irish workers within the British state.

All that can now change.

For ourselves, we are convinced that the working class needs to advocate its own democratic solution to the "constitutional question" that divides the people, and the workers, of Ireland. We advocate a federal united Ireland as a solution to the divisive constitutional issue: this idea can be a means of allowing the working class to unite and, ultimately, to create an Irish workers' republic.

The Northern Irish trade unions should once again create a Labour Party there. Unless such a party had a federalist policy on the "constitutional question" it would be foredoomed to shatter at the first crisis, as such parties have shattered in the past. But it does not have to be foredoomed.

For years we have found it impossible to even get our ideas discussed on the left. To discuss such things was to betray the "armed struggle". Now that Gerry Adams has "betrayed" it, the serious British left needs to take a fresh look at Ireland, and at itself too.

In every respect the British left has failed the Irish working class in the last twenty-five years. It is time we too made a new start! ▣

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