



# Europe: the workers against mainstream politics

By Hugh Jenkins

**H**OW do the wealthy top one per cent keep their control over the rest of us? How have they got away with the huge increases in inequality over the 1980s and '90s? How do they win political authority for their cuts in the social provision? And how much longer can they do it?

Despite across-the-board Establishment support for cuts in publicly-funded health care, education, pensions and benefits, workers across Europe have been fighting back. In Greece, seafarers, farmers, civil servants and students struck and demonstrated as the Socialist Party government's cuts budget came to Parliament in December. Earlier, workers across the public services had staged a 24 hour general strike on 28 November against the budget.

In Spain, two million government workers struck on 11 December against a public sector pay freeze.

In France, a week of protests on 11-16 November and a one-day public service strike on 17 October have continued the struggle against welfare-state cuts from the great strike movement of November-December 1995, which forced substantial climbdowns from the right-wing government. The truckers' dispute, using road blockades, in November, pushed the government into agreeing a social "safety-net" for the truckers against super-exploitation by thousands of small employers.

In Germany, big strikes in the metal-working industries, in October, forced the employers to back down on plans to cut sick pay in line with new legislation. The strikes followed months of protests organised by the trade unions against the

# Silencing the wage slaves

**The drive of the Blairites to push the organised labour movement out of politics is only one example of a Europe-wide bourgeois push against working-class involvement in politics. The decline of the old social-democratic parties and "Communist" parties on one side and the immense growth in the bureaucratisation of official bourgeois politics on the other have combined to situate millions of workers increasingly outside and sometimes against official politics. The following articles explain various parts of this picture.**

Christian-Democratic government's £30 billion cuts. On 15 November a conference of Germany's TUC struck an uncharacteristically militant note, promising "a showdown" with the government unless it respects social benefits and the right to strike.

Belgian and Italian workers also organised big demonstrations in 1994 and 1995 to defend social benefits. Britain is the only big country of Western Europe not to have its labour movement mobilise recently for such protests.

In Sweden, according to the *Economist* magazine, "Glum trade unionists have taken to Stockholm's streets this winter... [Their] cry is, in effect, that the [ruling] Social Democrats have calculators where they once had hearts. [Their] attacks are boosting not the centre-right opposition but left-wing parties..." Whether the government is officially social-democratic, as in Sweden or Greece, or, now, Italy, or officially right-wing, as in France or Germany or Spain, makes not very much difference to the cuts programmes.

The French movement of November-December 1995 has been the biggest so far, with almost all the public sector strike-bound, over two million demonstrators on the streets at high points, and the biggest protest marches ever (bigger than May-June 1968) in some cities. It showed an enormous gap between working-class feeling and official politics.

France's parliament has an 80 per cent right-wing majority. In May 1995 the right-wing candidate, Jacques Chirac, won the presidency. His main rival of the official left, Lionel Jospin, supported the

right-wing government's cuts in principle, objecting only to their pace and style. Even the one sizeable party to support the strike movement, the Communist Party, was very cautious about doing so, insisting that the movement was only "social" and not "political".

Yet the placards, banners, leaflets and chants on the demonstrations showed that millions of workers rejected the cuts, and in the name of a clear and positive alternative: shorter work hours to create more jobs, rebuild-

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**"Britain is the only big country of western Europe not to have its labour movement mobilise recently for welfare protests."**

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ing of public services, taxation of financial revenues. Probably most of those workers would have voted for Jospin; many would have voted for Chirac or not voted at all; only the few who had voted for the Trotskyist candidate, Arlette Laguiller, had any political representation for their views.

Marxists usually explain ruling-class power as a mix of coercion and organised consent. Troops, police, courts and prisons are its bottom-line defence; but, especially in parliamentary democracies where workers have votes, the bosses rely more routinely and immediately on

organising consent, through using their ideological hegemony to limit workers' aspirations and then throwing enough spoils to keep them off the boil.

The capitalist classes today are developing a third variant of control, one which is still more subtle than straightforward brute force, but which keeps workers in a state of embittered, sporadically rebellious, but voiceless, resentment, rather than positive consent. It is like "jamming" a radio message with overwhelming noise, rather than trying to shut down the transmitter by force or responding to the message deceptively. The ever-wider reach of the mass millionaire-owned media, their reduction of politics to a meaningless mess of sound-bites and speculations, and the increasing domination of politics by groups of career politicians, relating to the population more through the media than through mass-based political-party activity, all contribute.

In *Capital*, Marx argued that piece-rates were the best means for bosses to exploit and control labour in each factory. In an analogous way, the fluid, insecure, and very unequal economic structure of capitalism today offers great scope for workers to be controlled by their own scramble to find a "niche" in the market, somewhere between the TV-and-shopping-filled life of the better-off worker and the bleak misery of the jobless. The depoliticisation of life, and the removal of life from politics, has reached its highest point in the United States, where \$2 billion were spent in last November's elections but only 49 per cent bothered to vote in the presidential contest. It is advancing in Europe, especially among young people.

In Britain, one in five of those under 24 eligible to vote does not bother to get on the electoral register. Where ten years ago young people would have had a definite opinion about "socialism" — friendly, hostile, or sceptical — today, to many, the word is as incomprehensible as "jansenism" or "bimetallism".

Often young people all of whose basic attitudes are left-wing consider themselves "not interested in politics". Yet working-class youth, and working-class people in general, are mostly left-wing — whether they see themselves that way or not — by the standards of official politics.

76 per cent of the whole population believe that there is a "class struggle" in Britain. In 1964 only 48% thought there was class struggle. 75 per cent believe Britain is divided into "haves" and "have nots". 87 per cent (as against 72% in 1983) think the gap between high and

## Blair and Murdoch

# Best of cobbles?

ACCORDING to the *Financial Times*, "Both Mr Rupert Murdoch's national daily newspapers" — the *Times* and the *Sun* — "could support Labour in... the next general election."

"Mr Murdoch has become increasingly close to Mr Blair and meets the Labour leader every time he visits London. Mr Murdoch's son Lachlan, who runs News Corporation's newspaper interest in Australia, has also spent a weekend

with the Blairs."

The *FT* reports that the notorious union-basher Murdoch — who pioneered the destruction of trade unionism in national newspapers in 1986 by sacking the entire workforce at the *Sun* and reopening it with a new, scab, workforce behind barbed wire at Wapping — has no worries about Blair being too favourable to workers or unions, but is slightly bothered that Blair may not be "Euro-sceptical" enough.

low incomes is too big.

The number using private health insurance has dropped, while over 60 per cent want more state spending on health, education and welfare even if that means tax rises for everyone. Another poll, which also failed to offer the choice of tax rises for the rich alone, showed 70% saying "it is better to pay higher taxes and have better public services". Only 23% believe the Health Service is safe with the Tories.

Even home-owners want more state spending on housing; even parents who use private schools want more state spending on education.

42 per cent say "trade unions should have more say in the running of the economy"; 43% that "more socialist planning would be the best way to solve Britain's economic problems". Counting out don't-knows, the advocates of trade union control and socialist planning are more numerous than those who argue for union-bashing and the free market.

Opinion polls are unreliable, of course, but it seems unlikely that they are systematically biased towards exaggerating left-wing influence. They all suggest that the sort of ideas which suddenly emerged onto the streets in France in November-December 1995 have a wide, and growing, "underground" influence in Britain too — although they are not reflected at all in official politics. The Labour Party leadership is way to the right of majority opinion on almost every big political question!

Workers in the advanced capitalist countries today are disenfranchised, not by being barred by force from the vote, nor yet by being "bought off" through deceptive concessions, but by the conversion of politics into an alienated, ritualised, bureaucratised media circus with high admission fees. The Blair faction in the British Labour Party both reflects this trend and actively contributes to it.

The collective expression, political and industrial, of the working-class interest is not just suppressed by force (by anti-union laws, for example), nor deflected into safe petty reform, but declared impossible, archaic, dinosaur-like, and out of touch with individualised "post-modern" reality. This is a major feat of ideological class war by the ruling class. Yet their ideological victory is not irreversible. The working-class interest exists. Workers have common interests, for wages, jobs, public services. Across Europe they are beginning to reassert them. Socialists should organise, agitate and educate to speed the reaffirmation of working-class politics.



## Blair plans coup against party democracy

**A**CCORDING to a report in the absurdly misnamed *Independent* on New Year's Day, Tony Blair is behind a set of proposals now being floated by that strange neo-Thatcherite micro-sect, the Labour Coordinating Committee (L.C.C.). They want to abolish local Labour Party democracy, and effectively destroy the Labour/trade union link.

Their starting point is the reasonable expectation that the policies of a New Labour government will be unpopular with the people who voted them into office. Blair and his friends propose to make it impossible for the party to become a focus of opposition to a Blair government, by in effect abolishing the Party! Proposals include:

- Abolition of Constituency Labour Party General Committees and their replacement by small executive groupings. This would effectively destroy all local trade union representation in the Labour Party.

- The transformation of Labour Party conference into a rally. Only the Party leadership would be allowed to submit motions.

- Recasting the National Executive Committee into a body that deals with organisational matters only. The NEC would be elected in a new way to ensure that existing dissident MPs like Denis Skinner or future rebels cannot sit on it and oppose the leadership.

- A national list of Prospective Parliamentary Candidates so as to ensure that Labour becomes a one-faction party.

- All policy making will be done by the Parliamentary leadership, who will then hold "back me or sack me" plebiscites for "democratic credibility".

The "spin doctors" claim that Blair is committed to this agenda. It certainly fits perfectly with Blair's past record. During the last battle over the trade union link in 1992-3 Blair privately argued for all policy making to be done by plebiscites. It fits also with the obsessive fear of a resurgence of "Bennism" in the Labour Party and trade unions that all Labour's new right share.

Further confirmation that these proposals are really on the agenda comes from the fact

that Tom Sawyer, the Labour Party General Secretary, has been busy canvassing trade union leaders' opinion on the proposals.

It is important to be as precise as possible about the Blairite intentions and timetable.

*The proposals may well be sprung on the NEC after the election in either May or June.*

Already the Blairites have begun to wind down the NEC, Labour's supreme body between conferences. The proposal for a new party structure was due to be raised at last month's NEC, but the NEC meeting was cancelled at the last minute. The NEC "Party into Power" working groups — the vehicle for raising Blair's agenda — are supposed to report *before* the election. It is rumoured that the NEC will not meet again until after the election...

The pretext for cancelling NEC business is that front-benchers are needed in a Parliament where the Tories have lost the overall majority. It is hoped that if the party wins its first election for 23 years without the NEC meeting this will be cited as proof that the NEC is part of an outmoded structure which needs overhauling etc.

After the election the leadership will be able to proceed to a *snap postal ballot prior to party conference* and before the opposition at constituency level has a chance to organise itself.

The longer the delay, the more likely it will be that the proposals will surface after important trade union conferences, and therefore give the trade union leaders who back Blair more room for manoeuvre.

A victory for Blair in a postal ballot prior to annual conference would also give Blairite trade union leaders a plausible reason for going against the policy of union conferences. They will be able to re-raise the issue, using the Labour Party plebiscite victory for the Blairites as a weapon in the unions, with the cry: "The union must not go against what the Labour Party membership wants."

Those who want to defend the existing Labour Party and the Labour-trade union link should draw the imperative conclusions and begin to mobilise now.

# The alternative Europe

By Ken Coates MEP

**A**LMOST twenty years ago, in the late 1970s, there began one of those periodic waves of youthful radicalism which have washed across Europe at intervals since the end of the Second World War. First, there was the great disillusionment of 1956, which followed the ill-fated Suez War and the Hungarian uprising. Then, a little over a decade further on, there was the Europe-wide mobilisation of young people against the war in Vietnam, finally exploding in the uprising in Paris in 1968. And then again, in the late '70s and early '80s, there was the upsurge of nuclear pacifism.

In retrospect, we can see that the end of the Cold War brought that age of idealism to a close. Far from dissolving all the nuclear alliances, the Cold War victors now move their frontiers steadily eastward, while the power of their adversaries disintegrates, and their dreadful arsenals begin to leak and rust. Old fears put to rest, new resentments take root and flourish. The peace dividend has been declared, and millions of people are drawing it in the unemployment offices.

Where is the alternative Europe today? Never was it more needed. Between eighteen and twenty million Europeans are officially without work. Unofficially there are far more people locked outside the labour market. Some fifty million people in Europe subsist in poverty. The approach to monetary union, presented as a bold and visionary movement towards integration of the European continent, is today said to require economic restraint on a fierce scale, and this actually aggravates the already intolerable unemployment problem as it grinds ahead.

So there arises a Europe-wide social movement, in defence of jobs and welfare expenditure, against cuts in long-standing public commitments, and for the maintenance of the economic rights of pensioners, students and clients of the health and social programmes.

Once again, people are marching and lobbying in Naples and Bonn, in Brussels and Athens. But

the restrictions on public spending which provoke their opposition have all been agreed separately, by separate national governments, even though many if not most of these abrasive new constraints originate in the criteria of the Maastricht treaty for monetary union: and therefore it is true that there is a "European" cause for much if not most of the present discontent.

But if that discontent has European causes, it also needs European cures. Separate action, by separate nation states, can only make a very limited impact on mass unemployment. Of course, not only national governments, but regional and local authorities, can all act to reduce unemployment, and they should do so. But the scope for such action is limited by the extent of globalisation in the economy.

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**"To cure unemployment, we need more Europe, not less. The alternative Europe will put jobs first."**

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Can monetary union really proceed uninterrupted, if all Europe is up in arms against the consequent increased levels of unemployment and poverty? Indeed, should it proceed, regardless of human suffering? These are the questions which are increasingly loudly pressed by journalists and politicians all around us. But they do not go to the root of the problem, which is that unemployment and poverty will continue to rise if we do not discover adequate responses at the European, as well as the national and local, level. To cure unemployment, we need more Europe, not less: but the required European strategy will have to come closer to the ideals of those who yesterday were calling for an alternative Europe. The alternative Europe will put jobs first in any economic calculations which it makes.

More than one plan for an alternative Europe has already been drawn. A framework already exists which could have achieved the Delors White Paper of creating fifteen million new jobs. One of its

instruments was to be the issuing of Union Bonds through the European Investment Fund, the equivalent of the US Treasury Bonds which financed the US New Deal. The Fund was designed precisely to offset the deflationary effects of the debt and deficit conditions for a single currency. It exists.

So-called Euro-Keynesianism is only one thread in the skein of alternative policy. Some time ago the debate on reducing working time was stressed only by a handful of persons, but the issue is now on the mainstream agenda, both in agreements between management and labour in leading German companies and in mainstream debate. Studies indicate that even small reductions of working time could create several million jobs.

Monetarist assumptions about the effect of deficit reductions are false. They will not stand up to the criticisms of informed economists: but neither can they resist the criticism of the victims, who suffer the pain of unemployment, insecurity and poverty. If all this pain could find an effective political programme, the alternative Europe would begin to make itself plainly visible.

The first step has already been taken, with the development of an ambitious project of European demonstrations against unemployment and social exclusion, leading up to the Intergovernmental Conference which will meet in Amsterdam in June 1997. A growing number of the organisations representing unemployed people have agreed to take to the streets, and begin the walk which lead them to a major European rally on 14 and 15 June.

By bringing the problems of unemployment and excluded people to the Intergovernmental Conference, we can help focus our actions at local, national and European levels. The European Trade Union Confederation is also planning actions to present trade union views.

This may indeed be the beginning of the alternative Europe, which is almost certainly the only real Europe there is.

# What real reformists think of Blair

By Anne Mack

**L**ABOUR Party wards and General Committees are not normally the place to go to experience the cut and thrust of hard-hitting ideological debate. That could all be about to change if the level of open criticism of the Blair 'project' to be found in mainstream Labourite publications finds any reflection inside the structures of the party itself.

For instance, how about this analysis of the role played by John Prescott by some of his former supporters? An article entitled *John Prescott: The Labour Party — my part in its downfall* in the latest issue of *Labour and Trade Union Review*, a small-circulation publication associated with the Ernest Bevin Memorial Society, declares:

"Prescott has long sought a role in organisational matters in the party. At one time this magazine supported him in this. During Neil Kinnock's leadership Labour Party organisation reached an all time low. Party life in the branches and the constituencies was stifled. Organisational and financial affairs were centralised. Membership collapsed. The result was a weakening of the organic link between the party and the people it purported to represent. In other words it was ceasing to be a political party in any meaningful sense of the word.

"Kinnock has since admitted that this was all a result of his deliberate policy. He said that mass membership parties were the sort of things Communists organised. But at least Kinnock acknowledged that a large membership equated with an active party life — it's just that he didn't want an active party life. In such circumstances rebuilding the party, as John Prescott proposed, would indeed have led to a revitalised Labour Party.

"Tony Blair's circle took a different attitude to that of Kinnock. They believed it was possible and desirable (from their point of view) to have a very large membership while at the same time having the party even more disconnected from the society around it. They conceived a scheme for a mass membership party while extinguishing all political life from it.

"This mass membership would be fed a line from the top and be entertained at rallies. It would help finance the party, enabling links with the trade unions to be progressively weakened and provide a democratic fig leaf for policies decided by a small clique.

"It was John Prescott's job to organise this New Party and bend it to the will of his leader. And he has been an unqualified success at it."

This theme of the emergence of a new party from inside the structures of the Labour

Party has been central to political correspondent Hugh McPherson's weekly column in *Tribune*.

McPherson has argued that New Labour is in fact a reborn Thatcherite party parasitic on the labour movement which, like a worm that eats its way out of its host, will abandon the labour movement once it has finished drawing nourishment and support from it.

In the recent Christmas issue of *Tribune*, McPherson argued that the only difference between Blair and MacDonald is that Blair is attempting to create a national government from inside the Labour Party rather than by splitting it.

McPherson has been particularly scathing of the soft left MPs who refuse to oppose Blair, and has made a point of highlighting how old-fashioned Labour right-wingers are much clearer about what the Blair project means than many on the soft left.

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The comments of Bernard Crick — the anti-Marxist academic and former Gaitskellite — got plenty of coverage in McPherson's column precisely because he spelt out what was central to 'the project': "A shift from a membership-based party, based on ideology, towards the modern American personal party of the candidate... When the muzzled giant wakes up after the election it may find its powers gone."

This theme of political usurpation has been given a basis in class analysis — not just by Marxists, but by experienced, battle-hardened right-wingers.

For instance, Tim Pendry, a former organiser of the anti-Bennite *Labour Solidarity*, has argued in the bulletin of the Keep the Link campaign that the "ultra-modernisers" represent a new bureaucratic, managerial class.

"The cult of youth and newness, the leadership principle, social corporatism, and technocracy in the service of the nation are the essential principles of Labour ultra-modernism. They are also the essential principles of middle class liberalism at times of insecurity.

"Labour does not need some new elite to

manage it from above — especially not the authoritarian predators of the new meritocracy."

It is interesting that the more intelligent publications from the Labourite mainstream identify the same obstacle to defeating the Modernisers as the Marxists do. Take, for instance, this comment from *Labour and Trade Union Review*:

"The leader of the Transport and General Workers' Union has always played a key role in the Labour Party. Bill Morris is no exception. His key role at this year's Conference seems to have been to appear on TV and radio to justify every desertion by New Labour of the party's values. He even sneered at Barbara Castle's pension proposals as a 'quick fix'.

"But he topped all that with a letter to all levy-paying members of the T&G urging them to take part in New Labour's phoney ballot on The Road to the Manifesto.

"Morris described an exercise that would make Lenin [Stalin, not poor old Lenin — Ed] blench as 'the greatest democratic exercise of membership involvement in the history of the Labour Party.'

"What is Bill Morris afraid of? A clout over the head with a handbag?"

Everyone with a thinking brain knows that the key to breaking Blair is mobilising the trade unions against 'the project'.

Mark Seddon, the editor of *Tribune*, has taken up the same issue, but from a different angle writing for the Keep the Link newsletter. He has indicated just what is at stake in the battle over the trade union link and party democracy.

"The trade unions, with their eight million members and their families, provide Labour with an organic link with the working class, a class that the party exists to defend and advance. Labour without the trade unions and without a Left would not be Labour at all, it would simply be another Conservative party.

"In such a scenario the labour movement will not go away, but would find alternative means of being represented in Parliament."

Seddon then goes on to soften his comments by saying that he does not think that things will come to a split, but the fact that this issue has been raised at all by an important representative of the honest reform-socialist Labour mainstream should show us what is at stake in the current battles.

The issue that is coming to the forefront is "What is the Labour Party for?" It's time for Marxists to start talking about big politics inside the Labour Party — issues of democracy and class.

By Colin Foster

**A**T 6am on 26 December, 154 MPs from Korea's ruling party were bussed to Parliament. Nervously, the deputy Speaker took the podium: the Speaker was not there because opposition MPs were camping out round his house to prevent just such a coup. In a rapid mumble, he called votes on eleven new labour laws. By seven minutes past six the MPs were back on their buses, and by 6.30am the illegal Korean Confederation of Trade Unions had called a general strike.

At Kia Motors, just outside Seoul, 17,000 workers assembled as they arrived for work. By 10 o'clock they had held a meeting, decided to strike, and moved off to the general strike headquarters at Myongdong Cathedral, in Seoul.

Since then the strike has spread from one sector to another. As we go to press on 3 January, the union confederation reports:

"Most of the unions at large companies, such as the major car makers and shipyards, whose holiday lasts till 5 January, will resume the strike on 6 January. The general strike will expand to cover all sectors and industries on 7 January, as unions in most of the public utilities, such as the television and radio networks and hospitals, are set to join in..."

The general strike is demanding that the new labour laws be annulled, and that the government begin discussions with the unions on a new and democratic labour law. Such is the strength of the movement that even the tame, state-sponsored Federation of Korean Trade Unions is denouncing the new laws and supporting strike action.

According to the militant union confederation, "Korean unionists have come to learn [about] an international dimension to their struggle. This was highlighted by knowledge that similar battles are being fought out even in those countries which were once believed to have achieved all there was to achieve for workers' rights and welfare, in countries like Australia, Germany, France and the United States. This has given Korean unionists a sense of being pioneers in this world-wide struggle".

As part of the big campaign of demonstrations alongside the strike, on 27 December some 200 truck-drivers blocked motorway traffic with a low-speed truck parade, in direct imitation of



Striking worker gets to grips with a riot policeman

# General strike "tiger" econ

the French truckers. On New Year's day, the union set up dart boards with pictures of a typical capitalist, a politician, and president Kim Young Sam, for workers to throw darts at.

The government is supposedly reformist and democratic — Kim Young Sam was a leader of the democratic opposition to the old military regime — but retains the huge repressive apparatus of the old regime. Union leaders are frequently jailed, and demonstrations attacked by riot police. So far in the current dispute, however, the government has been on the defensive, with few

arrests and attacks. As we go to press, it has threatened mass arrests.

The new labour laws correspond almost exactly to what the Federation of Korean Industries had demanded from the government. It adjusts but effectively maintains the ban on the Korean Confederation of Trade Unions, and the ban on any union organisation for government employees and teachers; it legalises mass sackings, scab labour and unpaid overtime.

The Korean bosses have demanded such measures in a drive to recapture their flagging momentum from the time

**"Korean trade unionists are pioneers in a world"**

# Should we call for a workers' government?

**I**F THE Blairites succeed in what they are trying to do to the Labour Party, they will drive the organised working class out of politics. For now the Labour Party still has its trade-union links, but a Labour election victory may launch the Blairites into cutting those links.

What does this prospect mean for socialists who have long regarded a vote for Labour as a vote for the labour movement in politics? The editorial in the October *Workers' Liberty* (no.35) argued:

"The root cause of the progressive degeneration of the Labour Party, that is, the labour movement in politics, is *political* ... What is the purpose of labour movement participation in politics? To serve working-class goals. If it does not do that, then the politics become a means by which the labour movement ties itself to the political machinery of its exploiters and enemies. That is what it is with the Blairites.

"The old aim of the labour movement in politics must be proclaimed anew: to achieve a workers' government, a government prepared to serve the working class. Right now such a government would, minimally, work to ensure trade union rights, an adequate minimum wage, free education, a rebuilt Health Service and a restored welfare system. From that to the seizure of state power and the suppression of the bourgeoisie, a range of possible 'workers' governments' are possible — from 1945 Labour to the Russian Soviet government of October 1917.

"Socialists agitate and organise for the trade unions to rouse themselves, to make political demands, to table, for example, an emergency plan for rebuilding the welfare state and a workers' charter of trade union rights. We argue for

them to judge all politicians by those demands, to insist that their political representatives pursue those demands, to remove and replace any representatives who obstruct those demands... Apart from daft illusions... there is no other alternative to Blairism, that is, to the extinction of labour politics which Blair and his gang now openly prepare..."

Calling for the continuation of the fight in the Labour Party against the Blairites, the editorial advocated a Labour vote in the next election, but argued that it is also necessary to insist as forcefully as possible on class as the measuring rod against which to gauge all things in politics, *including the Labour Party*. Even if the Blairite project is carried no further than it has already gone, Labour — "New Labour" — no longer signifies working class even to the minimal extent it used to.

Advocacy of a workers' government and a campaign in the trade unions for the immediate, minimal measures such a government would carry out, combined with propaganda for the socialist transformation of society, best answer the needs of this situation, not least because they will help the bedrock labour movement resist Blair.

These ideas have proved to be controversial among supporters of *Workers' Liberty*, and therefore in this issue we open a discussion on the question. It will continue in the next issue. We invite contributions from readers and supporters.

The three contributors in this issue are George Macaulay, Tom Willis and Richard Kinnell. Macaulay was centrally involved in the Bennite campaign of the 1980s and Willis of the recent campaign in defence of Clause Four. Kinnell has written about Labour politics for over 20 years.

Sean Matgamna, Editor *Workers' Liberty*

## The Blairites have not won the decisive battle

**T**HE Blairites have *not* won the decisive battle over the link between the trade unions and the Labour Party. Certainly, with the past defeats of the left they are in a strong position, which they are continuing to consolidate; their intentions are clear; but we shouldn't be mesmerised by their strength. They have not felt strong enough to launch a full assault and are unlikely to do so until after the election. An election victory will put them in a position to introduce state funding for political parties, but will also remove the deadening pressure of subordinating everything to kicking out the Tories. Even at this stage, the indications are that a broad and powerful campaign can be organised to stop Blair and keep the link. To fight after a whole series of defeats is certainly difficult, but not impossible: we can still win.

The Labour Party *is* the political party of the British labour movement, a bourgeois workers' party with the Blairites the political leadership. It will only be transformed into something like the American Democratic Party *if* the Blairites carry the day. I think both these points are central in deciding how we relate to the present political situation.

This is accepted at the end of the editorial in *WL35*, 'Stop Blair, stay with the unions, fight for a workers' government!'

*"The socialists must organise. For ourselves we believe that unless socialists organise and direct their work, in the first place but not exclusively, at the existing labour movement, then they are building sects, and not an organisation that is fused with the labour movement, working to transform the broad movement and bring the working class towards socialism. We will stay in the Labour Party.*

*The Labour Party remains the bourgeois workers' party it always was, but now with a radical shift towards the bourgeois pole of the dialectical, contradictory, formation. Concretely, now, a Blair-Labour government will be anti-working-class according to even the most minimal criteria.*

*The reason for nevertheless wanting a Labour government is calculation that the roadblock can be broken and the working class begin to raise itself. The Labour leaders, whose party is still based on the working class, may not have things entirely their own way in power. The act of taking office will break, or begin to break, their hold on the labour movement. Much will depend on the socialists organising the labour movement to fight for its own needs against a Labour government pursuing Tory policies. For example, tremendous scope exists for self-renovating trade-union and working-class*

# Blair freezes out activists

From Abrams  
Political Correspondent

Labour's proposed new trade unionists and other activists out of policy-making by dismissing the unionist party which will remove the main...  
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The scheme is likely to be published in May or June, and...  
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...the party's leading blocks of the party's...

be given to individual members...  
...the party's leading blocks of the party's...  
...the party's leading blocks of the party's...  
...the party's leading blocks of the party's...

the focus will be on the...  
...the party's leading blocks of the party's...  
...the party's leading blocks of the party's...  
...the party's leading blocks of the party's...



But propaganda is not the same as agitation. For example, we regularly make propaganda for the need for generalised working class action (a general strike) — it's part of our agenda — but whether we raise a call for such action depends on the state and development of the class struggle. The question of slogans is concrete — how do we take forward the existing struggle in the most militant, class-conscious way possible; what are the next links in the chain?

One of the aspects of the 1922 Comintern discussions on the workers' government slogan that is relevant today is their approach. They distinguished making propaganda for the slogan ("...to be applied almost everywhere") and raising it as a call, a "topical political watchword", and were then concrete about the latter. For example, although the slogan had wide applicability in the early 1920's, Zinoviev believed the call for a workers' government in France had been premature. "...the slogan was understood as a pure parliamentary combination. ...It was a possibility, it contained revolutionary prospects, but in France, under the circumstances, it was premature. If we had based our united action on the eight-hour day, we might have had better results."

The issue in the discussion here is about the applicability of the slogan now, not about its precise content. The content is important in the following sense only. "A government prepared to serve the working class", even on the minimum programme outlined in WZ35 ("...minimally, work to ensure trade union rights, an adequate minimum wage, free education, a rebuilt Health Service and a restored welfare system..."), would be radically different from past Labour governments (with

action in defence of the welfare state, and especially the National Health Service...

...Today we can only beat the Tory enemy without if, in the Labour Party and trade unions alike, we simultaneously fight the Tory enemy within".

But the editorial goes further. Now, in response to the Blairites, it says we should call for a fight for a workers' government and by implication change the approach to the Labour leadership in the election and afterwards that we have developed over the last 30 years — vote Labour and organise/fight the leadership. I think this would be wrong, and that it is premature to raise the call for a workers' government now.

Firstly, a comment about slogans, propaganda and agitation. We make propaganda — we argue the case for socialism; we point to the stark choices that face the working class movement and the need to put class to the fore; we try and break down our ideas into more readily understood forms. Here the idea of 'a government that fights for our class like the Tories fight for theirs' (Workers' Government) is and always has been useful.

the possible exception of 1945 Labour) which have administered capitalism according to capitalism's own laws. To implement even this programme in the present situation a government would have to fight against resistance by the bourgeoisie/state machine and would therefore have to base itself in part directly on working-class organisations. So the slogan for us cannot be a clever way of calling for 'old' Labour or an easily understood way of describing the labour movement in politics (which today is the Labour Party!).

16 years ago we were able to point out the possibility of such a government arising out of the existing political situation and development of the struggle to renew the labour movement after the 1974-79 Labour governments.

"...this Left must set itself the goal of winning the labour movement to fight immediately to drive the Tories out and install a Workers' Government. This will differ from the Labour Governments so far in being based directly on the organisations of the labour movement, being under the labour movement's direct control (at least to a serious extent),



and fighting to serve the working class interest against the bourgeoisie.

*The fight to democratise the labour movement — the Labour Party, and the trade unions too — is the fight to make such a Workers' Government a possibility. If we drive through the Brighton and Blackpool decisions on reselection, if we subordinate the Parliamentary Labour Party to the labour movement, and if we get a serious proportion of the votes for electing the Labour leader (i.e. if Labour has a Parliamentary majority, the Prime Minister), and if we succeed in politically re-arming the labour movement with radical working-class socialist policies, then such a government is attainable."*

(Introduction to *Labour democracy and the fight for a Workers' Government*, December 1980. Emphasis in original)

Today the situation is very different. In 1980 the left was on the offensive, and under the slogan 'Never Again' was fighting to democratise the Labour Party; the labour movement was industrially much stronger. Today the left is much weaker; its immediate aim is to organise a defensive struggle to stop Blair and retain the existing links between Labour and the unions. Unlike in 1980, there is no direct or clear line between where we are now and a government of a radically different sort. Then the fight for labour democracy was the beginning of a fight to transform the labour movement, a necessary condition for a 'workers' government'; now the fight will be organised around defending the existing structures.

I think an understanding of our own history, of the approaches and methods we have used in the past, is a necessary part of today's discussion.

In 1979, after five years of a Labour government increasingly implementing and prefiguring Thatcher's policies, our slogan was not 'Vote Labour and fight for a workers' government', although such a workers' government would have been a clear class alternative to the Tories — unlike Callaghan's Labour Party! It was 'Vote Labour and organise for specific working class politics; Vote Labour and prepare to fight the leadership'.

Why this, apparently more minimal, slogan? Because it summed up, in election times, our basic approach to the Labour Party and labour movement. We did not abstain; we sided with the political party of our basic class organisations against the Tory enemy; we explained that a Labour victory would be a gain for the working class because of the link, because it would create better conditions for the working class to fight for its interests. But we retained our independence, insisting that only working-class action against that government would ensure improvements. We didn't pretend that a Labour government with the existing leadership, structures, etc, would be anything but a bosses' government — we didn't fantasise about it becoming a workers' government, or 'Labour to power with socialist policies'.

We called for a Labour vote *only* because of the link — it had nothing to do with Labour's stability or otherwise as a political formation, with whether it was better politically or not than the Tories, or with whether Labour leadership were 'pale pink Tories' (Kinnock) or 'quasi-Tories' (Blair).

To steer to the right and call for critical support for existing Labour leaderships was *never* an 'adequate' political response

— if we had been strong enough we would have stood our own candidates! — but it enabled us to relate to the existing labour movement, its immediate concerns, and allowed us to point the need to organise a fight against the Labour leadership that was the necessary next stage in taking the struggle forward.

It was *after* Labour's 1979 election defeat and the development of the fight for democracy in the Labour Party that the workers' government slogan became relevant. When that struggle was defeated the call was dropped, although we continued to make propaganda for the idea.

12 years further on, following a substantial shift to the right inside the Labour Party (the 'pale pink Tories' around Kinnock were firmly in charge), our approach in the last General Election (1992) is worth repeating at length. The editorial 'Turn the tide' appeared in *Socialist Organiser* 518 (26.3.92):

*"Socialist Organiser is bitterly critical of the leaders of the Labour Party. Wherever we have influence ... we fight to defeat Kinnockite policies and those who promote them. In response the Kinnockites have banned Socialist Organiser in the Labour Party and tried to expel Socialist Organiser supporters.*

*What the working class needs is a workers' government — a socialist government that is accountable to the labour movement, which puts the interests of the working class above everything else and which cuts down capitalism. That is what Socialist Organiser wants. We want socialism.*

*Nevertheless we are doing everything we can to help Labour win the election. Why?*

*Because the working class would benefit greatly and directly from the replacement of the Tories by even the present Labour Party. The working class will be better able to defend itself against a Labour government linked to the trade unions.*

*More than that: the defeat of Major and the Tories will help revive the self-confidence of millions of workers who are now too disheartened to fight directly for their own interests.*

*Millions now overawed by the brutal determination of the Tories to beat them down will begin to stir again. Millions who know that mass unemployment and a relentlessly hostile government are a difficult combination for a few hundred, or a few thousand, workers to beat in direct struggle, will begin to feel that struggle is not hopeless.*

*If we beat the Tories in the election, strikes and industrial militancy will revive. Open class struggle will revive.*

*At a later stage, the newly militant workers will find the Kinnock government trying to subdue them. But that is the next stage after this.*

*Now a vote is the most potent weapon millions of workers are likely to get or want to use. Right now, a Labour election victory will change the political climate to the advantage of the working class ... the labour movement has to start from where it is now.*

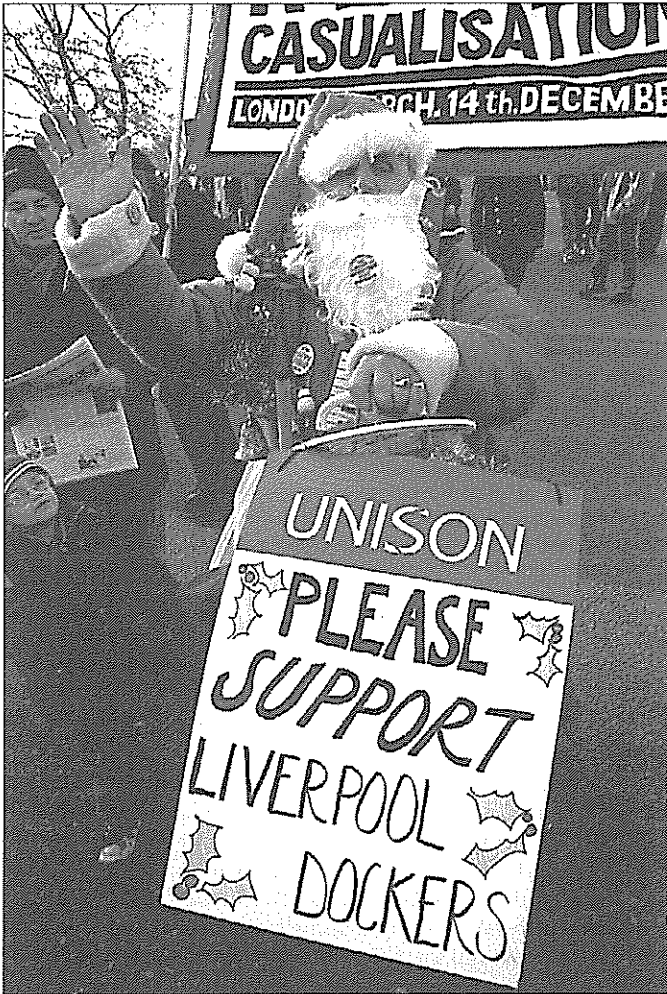
*Kinnock's purged and ideologically policed Labour Party is a long long way from socialism. But it is still the party of the trade unions. The serious left therefore has no alternative but to 'steer to the right' in the election campaign — to throw everything we have into securing a Labour victory.*

*We know Labour's and Neil Kinnock's limitations. We know, too, that the working class movement will have to fight*

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**We called for a Labour vote only because of the link — it had nothing to do with Labour's stability or otherwise as a political formation, with whether it was better politically or not than the Tories, or with whether Labour leadership were 'pale pink Tories' (Kinnock) or 'quasi-Tories' (Blair).**

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adopted in 1992 is no longer applicable now? Given that a Blair election victory will put the Blairites in a position where they can introduce state funding/sever the link with the unions (one of the basic points made in the *WL35* editorial), does that mean we have to change the basic position that a Labour victory would be a *gain* for the working class? Clearly our propaganda and agitation have to take these points into account — we start from where we are — but I do not think our position is basically changed. Our call for a Labour vote is determined not by the particular politics of the Labour leadership at any stage, by whether Clause IV is there or not, by whether they are puffed up shits or not, but by the link, by the fact it is the political party of the British labour movement. A Labour victory will be a *step forward* for the working class in the terms expressed in 1992 and in the *WL35* editorial; that is why that editorial is right to call for a Labour vote, and say “we will stay in the Labour Party”. It is a call for critical support for Blair and to ‘steer to the right’.

To clarify the question it is useful to pose it in reverse. Should we not favour the Blairites *losing* the election? This would, after all, discredit their ‘project’ and prevent them gaining a position from which they can tighten the rope “murderously”. But an election defeat would not just affect the Blairites, it would also be seen as a defeat by the working class — and the effect of another Tory victory would be further demoralisation and apathy, benefiting only the right wing. The possibility of defeating the Blairites depends on moving forward, on working class confidence and activity developing, and the minimum condition for that in the next period is a Labour victory.

What do we say in the election, particularly to the best working class militants and ordinary workers who will rightly hate both the Tories and the Blairites, who may well say they won’t vote Labour because they’re ‘just a bunch of Tories’? We say don’t give into those bastards, fight! The situation can be changed, and the first step is to get rid of the actual Tories; that we are going to have to fight the Labour government on the basic issues affecting the working class, but that government is a better government for the working class than the Tories because it is still the Party of the trade unions and therefore more open to pressure from our class.

Following the election and assuming a Labour victory, the key to changing the situation will be the development of working class activity. We cannot predict the tempo, but the first phase will be workers “cutting up rough”, directing their anger against a ‘Labour’ government running capitalism with pleasure. It will involve activity and action on specific issues (trade union rights; health service, etc.); it will aim to force concessions out of a hostile government. Its aim will *not* be to turn that government into something that won’t happen — i.e. become a “a government prepared to serve the working class”. From its actual starting point we argue for the most militant approach — pointing out, for example, that a demand to rebuild the Health Service would, in order to win, require the kind of mobilisation that existed in France in November/December 1995; we would argue that the link — assuming it was still there — should be used as one of the avenues to put maximum pressure on the government, and that it would be wrong to walk away from it.

The slogan ‘Vote Labour and fight’ is as ‘adequate’ in this situation as it has been in the past. It doesn’t stop us saying anything that needs to be said about the Blairites and their ‘project’. It is the *best* tool for relating directly to the next phase in the struggle — in the run-up to the election and the period afterwards — focusing on the need for the “labour movement to organise for its own needs against a Labour government pursuing Tory policies”. It understands that our ability to go beyond

for its own interests under a Labour government. But Neil Kinnock’s Labour Party is the best governmental option the working class has right now.

That is why the serious left is backing the Labour Party in the General Election. If Labour wins the election, it will be of great benefit to the working class. If not then it will not be the fault of the serious left.

This is the only honest approach for socialists who want to avoid kidding themselves about what Labour stands for and to avoid the irresponsible political sectarian fantasies which grip some socialists now.

Any act of the left, or any refusal of the left to act which helps the Tories or weakens Labour in this election will be a crime against the working class.

We say: vote Labour in every constituency. Organise like-minded socialists to go out and win votes for Labour. The organisations of the labour movement — the Labour Party included — must demand of a Labour government that it should, on taking office, immediately implement the following working class demands:

- Free trade unions;
- Restore Health Service cuts;
- Poll Tax amnesty;
- A minimum wage.”

Two points arise for the purpose of the discussion now.

We made *propaganda* for a workers’ government but our slogans were broken down into specific working-class demands around which workers could be mobilised. I think that this was the right way to approach it.

Secondly, has the further shift to the right by first Smith and then, more substantially, by Blair, meant that the basic approach

that phase will depend on the extent, character etc. of the struggle we can organise after the election.

The slogan 'vote Labour and fight for a workers' government' might sound more militant and 'advanced', but it has much less grip on the situation. 'Vote Labour and fight for a different government' is not a very useful slogan to mobilise activity against a new 'Labour' government. We can say dogmatically that such activity will be initially mobilised on specific issues like the minimum wage, health service, and our approach needs to relate to that fact. If such activity develops there will be sharp clashes with the government, that will spill over into the Labour Party; working class organisations and the left will revive. It is in such a situation that the call for a workers' government could again become a realistic perspective in the struggle. But that's later. Here and now, before the election, it is premature.

Similarly with the question of the Blairites' programme to cut the link — we have to analyse what stage of the struggle we are at. Here and now the fight is not about transforming the existing structures of the labour movement but defending what we have got. 'Stop Blair, Keep the Link'. After the election it will be posed as a battle to maintain the link with the existing Labour Party/government. This will have to be the focus of the struggle if we want to organise the all-out fight that is necessary, involving both left and right-wingers, militants and trade union leaders like Edmonds, and sections of the PLP.

Obviously, a defensive struggle can also be very militant, and e.g. we should argue that trade unions should wage a campaign for their members to join the Party as individual members to stop the Blairites using the CLPs against the unions. A fight to 'Keep the Link' — however defensive — also needs to say how the link can be used. Here and now we tie the link to the fight for trade union rights, a rebuilt Health Service, a decent minimum wage, and understand that in the first stages of a Labour government that it could be used as a means to pressurise that government.

We can put the argument in the following terms. The Blairites don't want a decent minimum wage and don't want

the pressure — that's why they want to cut the link. They want the labour movement pushed back 100 years, to when it went cap in hand to the Liberals. We must stop them and use the link for our specific demands. It is around such arguments that the campaign will be fought — not around the idea that a split and alternative government (workers' government) is the aim of the struggle. Again, the more militant sounding slogan ('Keep the Link and fight for a workers' government') has less grip on the actual development of the struggle, and therefore less effect.

The starting point for the discussion is a concrete assessment of the situation we face, the balance of forces, likely development of the struggle, etc. This affects and shapes the slogans we use.

It would be nice to believe in a different assessment. For example, that the fight over the link could be approached in the same manner as the fight to transform the movement in the early 1980's, or that the left was strong enough to organise a sizeable section of the labour movement around a programme of sloughing off the Blairite traitors and convening a conference within months of an incoming 'Labour' government that would sever links with the renegades and group its political representatives around a programme of "a government prepared to serve the working class". Here and now such scenarios are wishful thinking.

There is another possible assessment. That the Blairites have already won; that they have cut loose from the labour movement; that the structures of the labour movement, and particularly the Labour Party, are so neutered as to be worthless. In this situation 'old' ways of relating to Labour are simply irrelevant, and by extension the case for voting Labour gone. In this situation the immediate perspective for socialists should be to maximise the *de facto* split in the labour movement, to regroup and refound the Labour Representation Committee on the basis of a working class programme and the 'fight for a workers' government'. Such a perspective would make the SLP right now.

I think they are wrong.

*George Macaulay*

## "Vote Labour and Fight" is now not enough

**F**OR many decades, the word from Marxists in Britain about what government we want immediately has been "For a Labour Government but..." or "Vote Labour and..." There have been many, and sometimes important, arguments about the qualifications ("... but..." or "... and..."), yet "Labour" has been a relatively stable framework: the parliamentary representation of the organised working class. Within that framework we have fought against the Labour leaders' subservience to capitalism, for working-class demands, and for a democratic and socialist transformation of the labour movement.

The framework is no longer stable. The current Labour leadership has made it clear that, if elected, it will use the authority and resources of government to destroy Labour politics — to abolish working-class political representation. It will introduce state funding for political parties, and break Labour's dependence on the trade unions.

Today, therefore, to state our basic case for a government of working-class political representation, we need a broader, more basic formula: a "workers' government".

The Blair faction repeat again and again that they offer no "favours" to the organised working class. At the same time they are lavish with promises to be "the party of business". Gordon

Brown, for example, reassures the Confederation of British Industry that he will veto any attempt by the European Union to impose on Britain a levelling-up of social security provision; he makes no promise to the TUC that he will resist a levelling-down.

All Labour leaderships have stood for accommodation to capitalism. Previous leaderships, however, have always offered within that framework some promise of "a shift in the balance of wealth and power in favour of working people and their families". Blair's hard-faced, one-sided pro-business stance and his unmistakable hints about breaking Labour's union link are new.

Mesmerised by the desire to oust the Tories "at all costs", the labour movement has so far been deferential to Blair. Blair's extravagant efforts to reduce working-class expectations of improvements from a Labour government, his urgent moves against Labour democracy, and his plans to break the union link, signal that he knows that the deference will not last long once Labour is in office. (Nor can it last much longer if Blair manages to lose the 1997 general election). To opt out of Labour politics now, as Militant Labour and Arthur Scargill's Socialist Labour Party have done, and retreat to the sidelines, is to admit defeat in advance and weaken the working-class forces for the show-

down. *Workers' Liberty*, in contrast, has rightly stressed the need to build campaigns like "Keep the Link".

We vote Labour despite Blair because Labour is still based on the trade unions, and putting Blair's Labour into office will create the best conditions for rousing the labour movement to reclaim Labour from the Blair faction (which includes rallying those Labour MPs who will remain loyal to the trade unions). The paradox is that putting Blair's Labour into office will also open the way for Blair to destroy Labour politics. It will add vigour to the struggle on both sides, Blair's and ours. Blair has an agenda beyond "vote Labour and carry out this or that measure"; so do we. We should state it now, not reserve it to be revealed after we are defeated! It makes no sense to say the "workers' government" slogan is too advanced now, but will be appropriate when we have been further set back, i.e. if and when Blair has broken Labour's trade union link.

Another way of putting it would be: "For a government that will implement the emergency plan for rebuilding the welfare state" — with the addition that we indicate how that government could be created, that is, by the workers' movement. Or another: "Keep the Link — and use it in workers' interests" — with the addition that we indicate something of what we believe workers' interests require (emergency plan for the welfare state). Advocacy of a workers' government can link together piecemeal demands on the welfare state, on the link, and for the self-renewal of the labour movement, into a purposeful whole.

If the unions rouse themselves, it is unlikely that Blair will step back into line as, for example, Harold Wilson did when the unions rebelled over "In Place of Strife" in 1969. It is more likely that he will go the way of Ramsay MacDonald in 1931. He has already built a sizeable political machine independent of the labour movement. In *Workers' Liberty* no.22 we showed that "the parliamentary elite [of the Labour Party now] has a bureaucracy at least ten times the size of the party's political full-time staff", all paid for by state funds or big-business donations. The Blair faction's perspectives are not limited to tilting the balance within a more-or-less stable structure of Labour politics. Neither should ours be. We should not be purely defensive. We should state our alternative positively: a workers' government. This means a government of a Labour Party reclaimed by the mass labour movement and purged of the Blair faction, or, if Blair manages to take the "Labour" name for his desired new Christian-Democratic sect, of a new workers' party based on the trade unions.

The battle over Labour's union link may well be much more messy than we have portrayed it, less clear-cut than suggested by Stephen Byers' comments at the TUC in September. We will have to tack and turn tactically as the battle develops. We must do much more than state the bare general slogan "workers' government"; we should not renounce that general slogan altogether.

"Workers' government" is not a slogan which stands on its own, for use in chants on demonstrations, on placards, or in a few words introducing ourselves when canvassing on the doorsteps. It does not mean an immediate drive to bring down a Blair government, or exclude campaigning for limited demands on that government, any more than, say, our advocacy of a democratic federal Europe means going onto the streets for the immediate destruction of the European Commission and overthrow of all European Union governments. It is a "propagandist" formula, used in articles and speeches to sum up a whole line of argument about reviving the labour movement. If we are not to be beaten down into routinism and minimalism, Marxists need such formulas as well as our more "practical" slogans.

In "What Is To Be Done?", Lenin took to task some Russian

socialists who argued that their agitation should be about calls for "definite, concrete actions" promising "palpable results", backed up with propaganda in the form of general "revolutionary explanation of the present social system".

Lenin argued that propaganda, agitation, and action must tie together: "the 'call' [to specific action]... either naturally and inevitably supplements the theoretical treatise, propagandist pamphlet, and agitational speech, or represents a purely executive function... The revolutionary worker... will indignantly reject all this talk about struggle for demands 'promising palpable results', etc. because he will understand that this is only a variation of the old song about adding a kopek to the ruble. Such a worker will say to [the more timid socialists]... we are not children to be fed on the thin gruel of 'economic' politics..."

There is great pressure on us today to sink into day-to-day work on minimal immediate issues, or even into absorption in individual trade-union or student-union concerns, supplemented only by arid, abstract, and perfunctory socialist theorising. To campaign for a workers' government is to cut against that pressure.

To create a workers' government, even on the most minimal interpretation, will require a great self-mobilisation by the trade unions. This self-mobilisation is urgent, and the strikes of November-December 1995 in France show that it is possible. If we do not believe this, then we should give up agitation for rebuilding the welfare state — for, in present conditions, nothing less than a highly mobilised labour movement which creates a government responsive to the movement can enforce that rebuilding.

For most of this century, the slogan "workers' government" would have been unusable in Britain because it would have seemed just an eccentric way of saying "Labour government". Today Blair has put "clear blue water" between New Labour and "workers". On the other hand, the term "workers'" is broad enough that the slogan does not have the sectarian and fantastic quality that something like "revolutionary government" (or "Socialist Labour government") has. So long as Labour does remain, though with increasingly heavy qualifications, the party based on the organised working class, "workers' government" cannot reasonably be interpreted as "give up on the Labour Party".

We should have no superstition or pedantry about the words "workers' government". They cannot explain our whole perspective by themselves, but then neither can any two words on their own. They serve as a summary, in the most ordinary and straightforward language available, of the central argument that used to be expressed by slogans like "For a Labour government but...", and which now can longer be expressed by such slogans alone.

The slogan "workers' government" was advanced by the then-revolutionary Communist International in 1922, and used previously by us around 1980, in a rather different way from that we are advocating now. The circumstances were different: I think our *method* is the same as then, and, indeed, the 1922 discussions are very instructive now. But the significance of slogans is what they mean to the average worker or student within earshot of us, not the specialised references they have for us. We should certainly not use the slogan "workers' government" to evoke revolutionary perspectives in the way that a fetishist might beat a drum to bring rain by mimicking the sound of a thunderstorm; nor should we renounce it on the grounds that these are sacred revolutionary words, to be brought out and displayed to the faithful only on great holy days.

*Richard Kinnell*

# Positive aim for a defensive battle

**I**T is impossible to discuss slogans for the British class struggle without an analysis of the stage through which that struggle is now passing, the possibilities inherent in the current situation and balance of forces in the labour movement.

Put schematically, Blair's control of the Labour Party is incompatible with its continued existence as a democratic, trade union-based party of the labour movement.

Therefore, the following outcomes of the Blair "project" are on the agenda. In the first case Blair wins, the trade union link is gutted, neutered or destroyed, party democracy is abolished and the *de facto* transformation of New Labour into a party modelled on the U.S. Democrats is completed.

In the other, more optimistic case, opposition to Blair really develops, the trade unions, a broad section of activists and a significant number of MPs refuse to see Labour's connection with the working class movement broken, and a new political force based on the trade unions or a section of the trade unions emerges.

If Blair is defeated on the link and party democracy at this year's conference it will not mean the end of the matter. It is likely he will come back again and again with similar proposals. The two stark alternatives will assert themselves.

It is of course theoretically possible that Blair would be prepared to remain leader of a party which rejected his proposals on the trade union link and for the abolition of local parties and which as a result of pressure from below, in government implemented measures that were strongly pro-trade union, but in practice such a possibility is highly unlikely given Blair's previous record and his alternative base of support outside the labour movement.

The call for a workers' government, based on the trade unions, accountable to the labour movement and committed to an emergency plan for jobs, schools and hospitals, fits with the dynamics of the current situation. It provides a dramatic way of counterposing the programme of the working-class socialists to that of the Blairites and allows us to spell out in easily understandable terms our revolutionary Marxist analysis of just what is at stake in the struggle against Blair and "the project". The very words "workers' government" encapsulates the class issue of working-class representation versus a collapse back into liberalism raised by the current battles in the Labour Party.

We say to workers and youth: "Yes, vote Labour to kick out the Tories, and to break the logjam in the working class movement and politics generally; but a Blair government will be a bosses' government, supported by the billionaires' media, committed to capitalism and dedicated to keeping the unions in chains and driving them out of politics. We need something different, a workers' government, based on the trade unions, accountable to the labour movement and committed to an emergency plan for jobs, schools, and hospitals.

"We will fight for this workers' government by all means available, through the Labour Party where possible but outside and against it where necessary — but at all times relying on the direct action of workers and youth and the strength of our mass organisations."

That, I think, is a reasonable summary of our current political perspective. In explaining what we mean by "a workers' government" we can explain this basic position. The same is not true of "Vote Labour and fight."

To simply say "Vote Labour and fight for X, Y or Z socialist policy in the Labour Party", or "Vote Labour and prepare to fight" is to ignore the fact that the rules of the game are being changed, and that Blair wants to abolish the Labour Party and replace it with a new "party of the radical one-nation centre" [Blair's own words]. The old struggle between left and right in the labour movement is changing and new battle lines are being drawn.

The issue is this: are the trade unions — which are to all intents and purposes the organised class-conscious proletariat (to the extent that it so far exists as a class-conscious entity) — going to stand up to Blair and break from him to assert their own independent demands, or are we about to witness the end of Labour — which was trade unionism in politics?

To argue along the lines that "the Labour Party remains the trade union based party" is of no help whatsoever in analysing the dynamics of the period we have now entered, or in orientating to the task at hand.\* Consider an analogy. A man is about to be executed, his neck is in the guillotine! The seconds are ticking away. To simply ask "Is he alive or dead?" when he may die before we can even answer is pointless. The questions are can he be saved? and why should he be saved?

It is a similar situation with the Labour Party. The question is, can the Labour Party be saved as a trade union based party? and why? Our answer is that Labour can be saved as any kind of

## Poem

Between rebellion as a private study and the public  
Defiance, is simple action only on which will flickers  
Catlike, for spring. Whether at nerve-roots is secret  
Iron, there's no diviner can tell, only the moment can show.  
Simple and unclear moment, on a morning utterly different  
And under circumstances different from what you'd expected.

Your flag is public over granite. Gulls fly above it.  
Whatever the issue of the battle is, your memory  
Is public, for them to pull awry with crooked hands,  
Moist eyes. And village reputations will be built on  
Inaccurate accounts of your campaign. You're name for orators,  
Figure stone-struck beneath damp Dublin sky.

In a delaying action, perhaps, on hillside in remote parish,  
Outposts correctly placed, retreat secured to wood, bridge mined  
Against pursuit, sniper may sight you carelessly contoured.  
Or death may follow years in strait confinement, where diet  
Is uniform as ceremony, lacking only fruit.  
Or on the barrack square before the sun casts shadow.

Name, subject of all-considered words, praise and blame  
Irrelevant, the public talk which sounds the same on hollow  
Tongue as true, you'll be with Parnell and with Pearse.  
Name aldermen will raise a cheer with, teachers make reference  
Oblique in class, and boys and women spin gum of sentiment  
On qualities attributed in error.

Man, dweller in mountain huts, possessor of coloured mice,  
Skillful in minor manual turns, patron of obscure subjects, of  
Gaelic swordsmanship and mediaeval armoury.  
The technique of the public man, the masked servilities are  
Not for you. Master of military trade, you give  
Like Raleigh, Lawrence, Childers, your services but not yourself.

*Charles Donnelly*

*Charles Donnelly was in his early twenties when he lost his life in the Spanish Civil War. He was a member of the CP when he died; the Stalinist historian Desmond Greaves says in his history of the Connolly Association that Donnelly was essentially a Trotskyist.*

workers' party only by the trade unions asserting their independence and declaring war on Blair. But what would a war with Blair be for? Answer: A workers' government. The slogan sums up the political purpose of resisting Blair. It tells us what is at stake. If the trade unions are silenced and driven out of politics then any immediate pathway, based on existing working class institutions and realities, for fighting for a workers' government is closed. The working class will have to begin again at the very beginning with a struggle to build a new workers' party. The struggle would be set back massively, possibly for decades.

We say that it is better to break the trade unions from Blair than wait for them to be sidelined and silenced. Put bluntly, a split in the Labour Party — one that takes a significant number of MPs who will remain loyal to the trade unions — is better than the trade unions passively accepting a Blair victory on the trade union link or party democracy, even if the Tories would end up the main beneficiaries, as they did after the MacDonald split in 1931.

Responsibility for any split that should occur would lie entirely with Blair and his Christian Democrat entrust sect. His project is to destroy the Labour Party. The need of the working-class movement for political representation and to resist its abolition stands on a higher moral and political plane than anti-Tory electoral unity with Blair and the other ideological Thatcherites of New Labour.

The Labour Party eventually recovered from the MacDonald split and pushed through the progressive reforms of the '45 government. In the next period a trade-union-based party in competition with Blair's New Labour as well as with the Tories could gain ground very quickly if it focused on key class issues. If we are to have a chance of reconstituting the political labour movement in the process of the struggle against Blair then the idea of fighting for a workers' government could play a pivotal, defining role in making sense of what could start off as a piecemeal, isolated and defensive battle. It is a unifying, integrating, generalising slogan that makes the link between separate struggles and between those struggles and the socialist revolution we need.

Obviously, no slogan on its own can lead a struggle — but its intelligent development can give meaning and direction to otherwise fractured responses. To say that the slogan is "too advanced" is a serious mistake. We need to think big, to give people a broader picture of what is at stake in current struggles and to provide a line of march for militant workers and youth. The Blairites have a clear conception of what they want. If the Marxists are to have any hope of rallying broad working-class resistance to them, then we too need a bold, clear conception of the aim of our resistance.

To limit ourselves to narrowly conceived and isolated defensive slogans like "Keep the Link" and fight for this or that particular policy i.e. minimum wage, trade union rights etc. is not adequate. We need such slogans — and the battle on the



link must be organised on the slogans of keeping the link and defending labour representation; to do otherwise would be sectarian — but we also need an overall slogan that generalises the different isolated slogans and spells out what the trade union link is for — a workers' government.

By adopting such an approach we can hope to raise ourselves above the general climate of demoralisation around us and perform the job Marx indicated for serious working class socialists: "To represent the future in the present."

Marxists base our understanding of how a revolutionary party is to be built on the material evolution and development of the mass labour movement, through the class struggle. For us "perspectives" are neither a matter of mechanical and vulgar evolutionism (passive predictions), or of pure voluntarism (calls to action

sucked out of our thumbs). We intervene in the class struggle in order to shape the future.

Gramsci put this issue well:

"It is certain that to foresee means only to see well the present and the past as movement, i.e. to identify with exactness the fundamental and permanent elements of the process. But it is absurd to think of a purely objective foresight. The person who has foresight in reality has a "programme" that he wants to see triumph, and foresight is precisely an element of this triumph. Only to the extent that the objective aspect of foresight is connected with a programme does this aspect acquire objectivity. 1) Because only passion sharpens the intellect and co-operates in making the intuition clearer; 2) because reality is the result of the application of wills to the society of things... to put aside every voluntary effort and calculate only the intervention of other wills as an objective element in the general game is to mutilate reality itself. Only those who strongly want to do it identify the necessary elements for the realisation of their will."

The workers' government slogan puts the "realisation of the will" of the revolutionaries into the reality of Blair's attempt to remake the British political party system.

Staying with the old framework of "Vote Labour and fight for this or that demand" leaves us in a situation of only being able to react to events dictated by others. It rules out a bold perspective for the struggle to remake the labour movement.

*Tom Willis*

\* Footnote: This doesn't mean that the constitutional link is unimportant. In discussing the formation of the SLP it was necessary to stress that the abolition of Clause Four didn't alter the Labour Party's basic character or the trade union link. Scargill's split was ridiculously premature. Think of the way the NUM could lead a campaign to defend the link and maintain labour representation, and how Scargill has wasted that immense moral authority by creating his own little Stalinist sect. But the continued existence of the trade union link is only one aspect of what is going on in New Labour. It is important to stress it in arguments with sectarians who wish to run away from the battle with Blair, but we need an overall integrated analysis with some sense of movement, not just a fixed, static, one-sided picture.