

# The battle has just begun



By Tom Rigby

RIGHT-WING spin doctors and left-wing sectarians who claim that the Labour Party is an arena dead to socialists have been proved wrong by the battle that has erupted over Clause Four (which formally commits Labour to the common ownership of the means of production).

Suddenly the national media, Labour Party wards and union branches are full of discussion about what is socialism. That was not the effect Blair intended, but that, so far, is what he has got.

In just three months a mighty opposition movement has developed inside the Labour Party and its affiliated trade unions. It has reared up, as if out of the ground, to stop Blair jettisoning Clause Four.

The fightback began immediately Blair announced his intentions from the platform of Labour Party Conference on the afternoon of Tuesday 4 October.

By the end of that session of conference activists from the Socialist Campaign Group Supporters' Network were already out getting conference delegates to sign a petition in defence of Clause Four.

We quickly linked up with the National Union of Mineworkers and the Campaign for Labour Party Democracy and called an open planning meeting for the Thursday night. The meeting was packed. It marked the start of what has become the broadest, and most united, left-wing opposition movement to develop in the party since the high tide of Bennism some 14 years ago.

The achievements so far of the movement in defence of Clause Four are remarkable:

- In the face of a wide campaign of hysterical denunciation from the Party establishment we won a vital conference vote to re-affirm Clause Four less than 48 hours after Party leader Blair had announced his intention to abolish it.

- We have won majority support in the constituencies. A survey by the TUC of 10%

of Labour constituencies found that 50% of Party members support the retention of Clause Four. Support for Clause Four is not just confined to the activist layer. The right wing are fully aware of the extent of this support. In fact it is this that explains why

*"In just three months a mighty opposition movement has developed inside the Labour Party. It has reared up to stop Blair jettisoning Clause Four"*

they have not attempted to seek the abolition of Clause Four by means of the postal ballot of all individual members. They are not at all sure they would win.

- We have taken the issue of Clause Four into the unions. We have a chance of winning more union support at Blair's hastily called special conference on 29 April than we won last October!

Proof of the way things are going in the unions was provided by the simple fact that Blair had to press the unions for a special Labour Party conference on this issue before the union conferences had had a chance to meet and pronounce on it. Blair and his coterie know that if they waited for the next annual conference in October there was every chance that key unions which backed him at Blackpool — UCW, MSF, GMB, USDAW — would have been won for retention of Clause Four.

Now everything is in the balance. The left has widespread support but the right has tight control over the party apparatus, and ready access to the media. There is no guarantee that we will win, but right now we have a fighting chance.

Why has this happened?

Because Blair and his coterie of Christian-Democratic teenage Machiavellians do not really understand the psychology of the Labour Party. Despite all the defeats and setbacks of recent years, most Labour activists do still believe in some variant of socialism,

## New Labour, Old Capitalism

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*"He has nothing to say to our traditional constituency, the poor, the unions, the spending lobby, the public servants. They have to vote for us anyway. With nowhere else to go they can be taken for granted, their only task not to embarrass us. Labour's job now is to make the world safe for the readers of the Daily Telegraph. So don't associate with our traditional voters, give our new ones the fruits of their desires and protect their privilege.*

*"Above all, don't frighten them by asking them to pay the bill. Tough on Labour. Tough on the causes of Labour."*

Blair is not only an enemy of socialism — most leaders of the Labour Party have been that — but also a scarcely disguised enemy of the labour movement.

Blair is far from invincible. He is being forced to turn to the leaders of the much-

abused trade unions for a rescue.

All Blair and his allies can muster as an argument for their case is the Great Bourgeois-Stalinist Lie that Stalinism was socialism and its failure proves the impossibility of socialism.

No, Stalinism was not socialism! Neither was the state capitalism nationalisation developed in Britain after 1945!

Nine tenths of the battle for socialism in a country like Britain is the battle to remake the mass labour movement. That battle has once more been joined.

It is now up to the serious Marxist left to go onto the offensive.

The reconstructed left must fight for the only genuinely new — in the sense that it has so far never been realised — and progressive programme open to humanity — democratic common ownership. That is, socialism. ☐

Tom Rigby is a member of the National Steering Committee of the Defend Clause Four campaign

and do still aspire to an economic and social system different from capitalism and opposed to it — a system based on democratically run common ownership. In one recent poll 65% of party members said that they thought that “The key question in British politics is the class struggle between labour and capital.”

Another reason for the force and extent of the opposition to Blair is the unprecedented unity of the left. We have built a campaign that unites a very wide range of left-wing opinion, linking it with figures on the centre and right of the party like David Winnick MP, and Gwyneth Dunwoody.

For the first time in many years the parliamentary “soft left” have been marginalised. Those like Peter Hain and Michael Meacher who floated the utopian idea of a left-wing re-write of Clause Four have been crushed between the willingness of grass roots activists to defend Clause Four and the necessity of backing Blair if you want to advance your parliamentary career. *Tribune* originally sponsored their re-write, but has now come out in favour of the retention of Clause Four.

The key to the advance of the Clause Four campaign has been that we have been prepared to combine a rigorous and principled defence of Clause Four and common ownership with wide-ranging technical flexibility about the best means to do this.

In particular, the initiative known as “Clause Four Plus,” which came from the Euro-MPs Stan Newens, Ken Coates and Alec Falconer, has completely wrong-footed the Tory-oriented “modernisers”.

The “Clause Four Plus” argument is simple. If Blair and Co. simply want to update and add to Clause Four then why not retain it and supplement it? Why abolish it?

This approach has smoked-out the “modernisers” and put them on the defensive wherever they have been faced with the argument.

Another reason for the success of the movement so far is that we have been able to draw out the practical consequences of Blair's desire to change the constitution. We have been able to link to the Clause Four issue a wide range of issues:

- rail privatisation;
- water renationalisation;
- Compulsory Competitive Tendering;
- the minimum wage
- union rights.

Many union activists can now see that they will get little from a Blair government without fighting it. That fight has already started.

A battle over Clause Four is not exactly a strategic necessity for the modernisers. Victory would not change the nature of the Labour Party. In fact, by getting involved in this debate the “modernisers” have limited their own room for manoeuvre on other fronts.

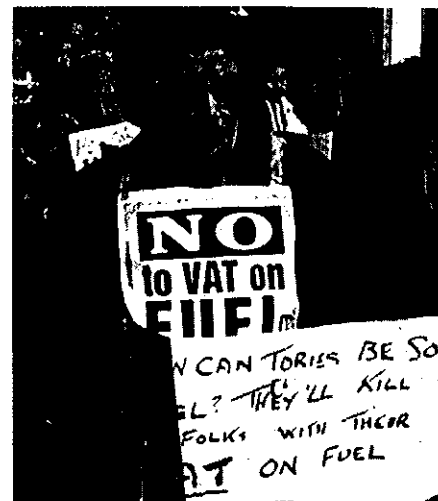
In particular they have made themselves reliant on the block votes of the right-wing union bureaucrats, thus closing down, for the time being, the possibility of cutting the union link. What they have been attacking

as an intolerable fetter on their political freedom has suddenly turned into a lifeline without which Blair will go down to defeat! Reliance on the trade union leaders is something the modernisers can ill afford because their agenda for the next Labour government (keeping CCT, privatisation) offers virtually nothing to the unions.

The left in the Labour Party is at the crossroads. We need to build on the inspiring unity that has been established over Clause Four. Our target now: victory on 29 April!

But, win or lose, what we need to see develop is an authoritative left-wing coordinating body inside the party, committed to resisting Blair's agenda every step of the way and linked up with grass roots campaigns on the welfare state, the minimum wage, trade union rights and re-nationalisation.

The 29 April conference will not be the end of the battle. ☐



Blair has still not managed to commit the New Labour Party to abolishing VAT on fuel

# “Our people have nowhere else to go”



Ken Coates MEP explains his arguments for retaining Clause Four

THE SIGNIFICANT thing about the Clause Four Campaign is how well it is doing. We've had a level of unity not seen for very many years.

The leadership expected people to cave in: they don't understand that our people have nowhere else to go.

They are at the end of a very long and painful period of evolution. We've had millions of people excluded from society.

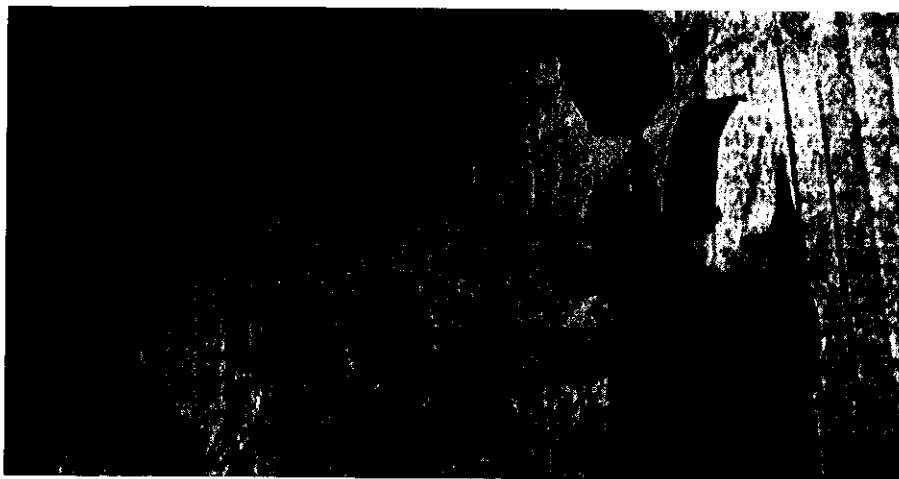
We've got huge sections of our people in dire misery. We've got problems of mass unemployment. We've got people who are scraping a living in the black economy. We've got a wide area in society where people don't have any hope.

We've got large numbers of our young men who can't get employment anywhere, and don't have any prospect of a normal social life.

*“This is an absolutely Victorian project. It would wipe out all the gains that were made from the great unionising upsurge of 1889 and the mass trade unionism that followed.”*

If you live near that, you can feel it. If you live in real Britain, then you know that something has got to be done about that, and you see all of these other things as a form of equivocation. You don't see what the so-called modernisers have to say as being real.

That is why a lot of people inside the Labour Party are worried. And they are right



### Defend Clause Four rally

to be worried. We've got to put our shoulder to the wheel and hope to persuade our colleagues in the unions and Labour Party that we can not only retain our traditions, but win back real rights and full employment.

It's necessary to look very carefully at the Blair project. In my view what is wrong with it is that he is seeking to create what Ben Pimlott calls "a popular front of the mind." The mind is the worst possible place to have a popular front in! You can see that with the attempt to align with SDPers in a common project.

If you are my age then you were born into a class that didn't know who its great-grandparents were. Unlike those who rule over us, who can trace their families back to 1066, we lost our families in the industrial revolution.

But what we did have is a sense of identity which was marked out in industry and in cultural institutions, including churches. And we had a history which is very strongly represented in the banners of the Labour

Party and unions. The one thing working-class people have got that gives them a point of reference is the knowledge of their history.

If you try to melt that down, you are leaving people rootless and without a reference point.

This 'New Labour' project is almost Maoist. It is an attempt to smash everything up. It's an attempt to displace our people.

They attack our history and our socialist traditions. They attempt to change the constitution. They make very serious efforts to separate the political Labour Party in Parliament and the country from the trade unions. It is very disorienting indeed.

For instance, at a conference of the unions organised by *New Times* and the *New Statesman*, the leader of the Labour Party called for there to be an equidistance between the unions and all political parties.

### Blood is thicker than water!

LABOUR EURO-MP Ken Coates has been at the centre of a huge controversy because of his outspoken defence of Clause Four. The right wing have threatened him with "discipline" for remarks he was reported as making about Tony Blair. A majority of his Labour MEP colleagues have come out in support of the retention of Clause Four.

Attempts by Blair's office, *Guardian* journalists and the ex-Stalinists of the now defunct Communist Party, to launch a media witch hunt against Coates have badly backfired. He has received hundreds of messages of support backing his stand.

He says "I can tell you that out in the European Parliament it is really quite moving the way people have rallied — people you would never expect to identify themselves. Blood is thicker than water! It's just normal solidarity but it's very nice. We were led to believe all that had died out."



By Arthur Scargill

THE NEW Labour leader in his first conference speech says he wants to change the Party constitution. Then within minutes of a decision being taken by the Party conference against his proposal to scrap Clause Four he says that conference could adopt whatever resolution it wishes — the

That is a project that cannot benefit our people. It will weaken all the ties of solidarity and mutual concern that our people desperately need.

This is an absolutely Victorian project. It would wipe out all the gains that were made from the great trade unionising upsurge of 1889 and the development of mass trade unionism that followed.

The adoption of Clause Four marked the end of a thirty year process of development which saw the Labour Party separate itself out from the Liberals as an independent political force. Clause Four finally cut the ties between organised labour and the Liberal Party.

Once Clause Four is removed, then that situation is changed. What is happening is an attempt not only to change the nature of the Labour Party but also an attempt to undermine Labour's historic basis of support.

Rather than dissolving our traditions and our identity we should be attempting to appeal on the basis of our own politics to professional people and small and even medium business people.

We should be saying that democratic common ownership is a basis on which real economic strength can be built. For a long time it will coexist with private enterprises of various kinds, whose operators will be more secure than they are today under the domination of the multi-nationals.

When we run our own pension funds, working people will be more secure than they have been under people like Maxwell.

We shall never recover full employment without a vast increase in local and regional public enterprise and service. That is why democratic common ownership is one of the big ideas for the 21st century. ☐

## Defend socialism!

leadership will do something different. The leader will do what he likes!

History is littered with leaders and leaderships who ignored at their peril ordinary men and women seeking common justice and a better way of life.

In real terms now we have five million without a job. At the very least, ten million workers live on or below the poverty line. Hundreds of thousands are homeless, feeling helpless in a society that breeds hatred. Isn't it a terrible tragedy, indeed a sin, that we have a Party leader who wants to change the Party's entire outlook and the way it evolves its policies?

Tony Blair and Gordon Brown, the Clinton clones, want an American style Democratic Party. If anyone is naive enough to think that they would be satisfied with the removal of Clause Four, they are living in cloud cuckoo land. The next step would be: "We want a new name" — one that is more acceptable. One that doesn't jar. One that will be acceptable to the City of Lon-

don.

What an obscenity to witness on television — Labour's leaders greeting the captains of industry! Wining and dining them at £300 a head at the Labour Party conference! They should have been meeting the unemployed, those who are disenfranchised.

We've heard the right wing say that two middle-class Fabians devised Clause Four. I much prefer two old middle-class Fabians in 1918 to a group of out-of-touch spin-doctors now who are trying to ditch the very concept of the Party as a working-class party and make it indistinguishable from the Tories or the Liberal Democrats.

The Party has always won General Elections at a time of crisis or industrial struggle. I remember the same kind of foreboding that we now hear from people like Tony Blair about the "problems" of nationalisation, or industrial action, or trade union legislation being conveyed to me by Denis Healey in 1974. 1974 was the year that we had a miners' strike. Ted Heath decided that we would have a General Election to find out "who rules Britain."

At a time of industrial action, people were prepared to vote for a Labour Party that looked as though it was prepared to have revolutionary change. So it has been all over Europe, where people have suffered at the hands of regimes that have not ruled in the interests of ordinary men and women.

I do not simply want to see the Labour Party win a General Election. I don't want to see merely nationalised industries. I want to see the Labour Party win political change. I want to see them introduce the common ownership of the means of production, distribution and exchange.

To see the Labour leadership embrace the market is not only to see them repudiate the basic socialist faith. It is to see them sow the seeds of defeat at the next election.

I didn't join this Party to ensure that it ran capitalism better than the Tories! I joined to change this rotten and corrupt system of capitalist society into a socialist society where men and women could control their



Blair's New Labour Party fails to face up to the rottenness of the capitalist system. Photo: John Harris

own lives and their own destinies. That is why I believe that common ownership should be at the very forefront.

I say to people in the PLP like Peter Hain and Clare Short, who say that they are in favour of socialism, that the only way you can do something positive to defend socialism is to defend Clause Four. No fancy words. No dressing up of the arguments. Straight down the line defence of Clause Four — defend socialism!

I speak with the full support of the National Union of Mineworkers. We are committed to Clause Four of the Labour Party's constitution because it's also *our*

constitution. The first leader of the Party was a miners' leader called James Keir Hardie. Another great outstanding miner leader of the Party, Aneurin Bevan, was wholeheartedly committed to Clause Four, part four.

I say to all those inside and outside Parliament, inside the Party and the trade union movement: "Remember the struggle waged ever since the Party was born." It has been on this basis that we are different from parties which support capitalism.

Clause Four marks this Party out from the Tories and the Liberal Democrats. It establishes a clear identity and one which has given us victory in eight General Elections.

We will fail in our duty if all we do is speak or preach. Until we translate words into action we shall not be remembering the basis on which this Party was founded: to bring about a fundamental and irreversible change in society.

We should fight to retain Clause Four in its entirety and demand that there are no changes. Not a dot, not a comma, not a word. We should say to Tony Blair and to the leadership that we not only want to retain Clause Four — we want you at the next election to show to our class the same loyalty and dedication that the Tories show to their class.

You should implement the kind of policies that will create an equal society — a society where helplessness, unemployment and indignity will be consigned to the dustbin of history.

All my life I've fought for a socialist society. I believe passionately that we can have in our lifetime socialism as it was envisaged by the Labour pioneers. We owe it to them to defend Clause Four. More importantly we owe it to ourselves.

We will not succeed unless we are united and determined. That means translating speeches into resolutions to defend our party and the faith which brought us into the party. ☐

Arthur Scargill's was speaking to the 12 November 1994 Defend Clause Four conference

## Thoroughly modern Johnnie

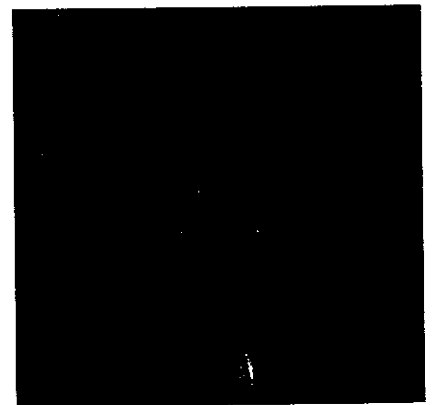
WHEN HE STOOD against Tony Blair for leader of the Labour Party, not so long ago, John Prescott, last of the Jaguar-driving working-class hero MPs, paraded himself as the keeper of Labour's best traditions. Now, as Blair's deputy, he rides in the Blair gang's neo-Tory crusade to extirpate the last traces of socialism in the Labour Party.

What is his catch cry now? The word today is "modern". Prescott appears in the 10 minute video which the Labour leadership has produced as propaganda for their "ditch Clause Four" campaign.

Prescott is, naturally, in a supporting role. He is there to back his leader: he is as profound as you would expect from the man and the role he is playing.

Time after time he responds to the scripted questions by proclaiming the need for Labour to be a "modern" party, with a "modern" constitution, reflecting the "modern" world. He who was so lately a tradition man is now the most "modern" man in the party, second only to er... "Tony".

Thoroughly modern Johnny, in fact. And where is Margaret Beckett, the other



Labour leadership contender who appealed to the left for votes? Nobody seems to know, for Margaret is uncharacteristically silent.