Workers' Weekly

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Will Tony Blair's Policies Provide a Way Forward for the Working Class?

ONE of the characteristics of the present is that people are looking for alternatives to the failed "solutions" of the past. Tony Blair has come to prominence as leader of the Labour Party on the basis that he claims to provide new ideas and vision and new solutions which are in keeping with the mood of the 1990s. As long as the Labour Party is in opposition, these ideas and policies cannot be tested in practice. But the question remains, is there something new about the policies of Tony Blair which can provide a way forward for the working class?

Traditionally, the Labour Party has won support from workers because it claimed to be a socialist party which would take control of the economy in the interests of the working class. In recent years, it has been split between the advocates of nationalisation and those who advocate what they call the "mixed economy". Tony Blair claims that the disagreement is out of date and that the modern approach is to have a "dynamic market economy" with cooperation between business, government and unions, the role of government being to make business "better able to run itself". What he fails to make clear is how the aims of business – the biggest possible profit gained by looking after the interests of the company at the expense of everything else – and those of the working class – for an economy which is geared towards meeting the needs of all citizens – can be reconciled. If such an economy means government working with business to ensure its profits, then it has to be said that this is no different from the failed policies of Margaret Thatcher and John Major. Today there is a need for a new approach to the economy. But the touchstone is: what is the aim of the economy? Is its aim to ensure the maximum fulfilment of the material and cultural needs of all members of society, or is it to ensure the profits of business and the moneylenders? Which economy does Tony Blair stand for? Will he break from the narrow aim of trying to run capitalism better than the Tories can, which has been characteristic of his predecessors?

In his acceptance speech on Thursday, Tony Blair defined his vision of

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Communique of Central Committee

July 22, 1994

The Central Committee of RCPB(ML) recently met to deliberate on the practical programme of the Party in the coming period in the light of the discussions of the Party's National Consultative Conference of June 25-26, 1994, and of its summing up of the Conference. The CC had already endorsed the resolution passed at the conclusion of the Consultative Conference: **This Conference recommends to the Central Committee of RCPB(ML) that it begin work immediately on formulating a Draft Programme for the working class, and to present a summation of this work at the next National Consultative Conference to be held in November.** It had set the dates November 26-27 for this Consultative Conference.

The CC affirmed that the work in preparation for this Consultative

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THE PARTY AND ITS WORK

Real life: the point of departure for the basic units

CERTAIN basic theoretical and ideological considerations were spelt out at the Party's recent Consultative Conference, considerations that if ignored in implementing the programme would undermine the success of our work.

First — that there can be no progress for either the working class or the broad masses of people under capitalism. Opening the path to progress is synonymous with opening the path to socialism, and this is the strategic aim of all our work. Second — the ideology underpinning this work is Marxism-Leninism. The essential concept here is that Marxism-Leninism is meant not as a dogma, not as a category of ideas divorced from life, but on the contrary is meant as a guide to action based on the study of life. In fact, real life itself has already proved that without working on the basis of modern definitions – that is, of looking for the solution to problems within the conditions as they prevail at this time – the Party will be unable to function, the rhetorical call to "smash capitalism" will stay just that, the Party and its organisations will not flourish and will not develop the vital programme of action for the class. The working class will remain at the tail of the bourgeoisie.

So what is this "real life" that must guide our theory and practice? For us, real life means the material world within which we live and work, and which, through this work, we aim to transform. It is the real life as outlined in the Party's analysis, *There Is a Way Out of the Crisis*; it is the real life of the Party's two-point programme; it is the real life which will give rise to the Party's programme of action for the class. In other words, the real life with which the comrades must deal is the material conditions, both subjective and objective, in which they and the collectives of which they are a part must operate in order to successfully implement the Party's programme.

At this juncture, real life poses some specific tasks and problems for the organs of the Party to tackle. The pressure exerted on the working class is that it should abandon its position at the centre of society, that it should have no independent programme of its own. At the same time, the bourgeoisie is trying to impose a retrogressive and medieval superstructure on the entire society. These were the problems addressed by the Party at its Consultative Conference and which are posed for solution by the Party at every level. The Central Committee has begun the work to formulate a programme for the class, and a summation of this work will be presented in November. The basic units are continuing with the two-point programme set out after the Party's 15th anniversary rally on March 19 and elaborated in *Workers' Weekly* of April 23. Added to the two-point programme is the need to develop discussion in the working class about how the vanguard is to be strengthened and consolidated. This work needs further momentum. The Marxist-Leninist quarterly review *Discussion* must be further popularised, as must the document *There Is a Way Out of the Crisis*. And, as before, it is vital to develop discussion around these in organised forms such as lectures and seminars at which people can put forward their own views as well as make their own suggestions for practical work. *Workers' Weekly* and the soon to be published document on the themes of the recent Consultative Conference will also contribute to this programme.

In all this work, the basic units are the crucial factor. Historically, wherever the Party has made advances it has been largely due to the hard work of the units and the links and ties they have developed in the workplace and community. It is through the units that the Party activists involve themselves in daily political life, take out the Party's views, learn the views of the people, and work out the ways and means of building the Party at the grass roots.

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WORKING CLASS MOVEMENT

The threatened closure of Swan Hunter

One of the themes that the Northern Regional Committee of the Party highlighted when writing of the Durham miners Gala was that the working class has the ability and maturity to carry out its own emancipation. Today it should cease to lament the passing of an era, support those sections of the people in struggle, get organised as an independent force and appear centre stage with the programme to take society out of the crisis.

Last week, only a few days after the Gala finished, yet again the workers in the North East are under attack with the threatened and imminent closure of the Swan Hunter shipyard on Tyneside. The closure of Swan Hunter would complete a closure programme which before and especially since privatisation has wiped out the entire shipbuilding industry in the North East, with 50,000 jobs gone since 1977, as well as almost completely closing down other shipbuilding areas of the country. Added to this, since 1986, under a government and EC ruling, Swan Hunter was only allowed to produce warships, making the yard completely dependent on orders from the Ministry of Defence. This dependence, ironically, is now the reason that the yard is bankrupt.

Since Swan Hunters went into receivership 14 months ago, the workers have made huge sacrifices in terms of redundancies and in terms of keeping the yard going in a bid to keep the shipyard from being turned into scrap so that a new buyer would again allow them to produce ships. When a new buyer was found by the receiver, the company CMN gave the precondition that it would only buy Swan Hunter if the yard won the order from the government for the refit of the *Sir Bedivere*. In this way several shipyards also under threat were competing for the same order and each workforce was encouraged to support their "bid".

Just as with the miners, the shipyard workers in the North East are being told that there is no alternative to the closure of their industry. Is this the case? By what criteria are such things judged? Whose interests are being taken into consideration? Can it be the case that the interests of the shipyard workers in the North East can only be safeguarded if those in other yards are forfeited? Furthermore, should the shipyard workers as a whole only be concerned about their jobs, as they certainly are, but give no thought to the use to which the products of their labour, the warships, may be put? Such questions, as with similar questions which face the miners and other workers, underline the necessity for the workers to involve themselves directly in questions of political power, the power to make decisions which govern their lives and the direction of society. Otherwise the working class will never get to deliberate on the type of economy which is needed and how, for example, the skills of shipyard workers can be used for the interests of society.

There is no question but that workers have to involve themselves in the struggle in defence of their livelihoods and the future of their industries. But this struggle, and the working class movement as a whole, will founder, as it has done for so long, unless the struggle, the movement, has a perspective, a consciousness of a long-term aim, as well as immediate goals.

In this respect, independent political action of the workers is necessary, they cannot pin their faith in the Labour Party and hand over the initiative to them. When Tony Blair and other Labour party leaders call on the workers to support the position that government should "work with" industry so that "industry is better able to run itself", they are calling on the shipyard workers, for example, to support more of the same which has led to the complete destruction of their industry. The working class can never accept that they can make gains by abandoning their aspirations for a new society, that they should forever remain wage slaves, appealing to the government or their employers, when the present capitalist system has only the making of maximum profit as its motive force. The working class must forward a modern definition of what is profitable for society, which puts people's well-being at the centre, and not the maximising of profits.

Northern Region Correspondent

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Condemn the government's attacks on the homeless

The homeless are once more being made the target of attack by the Conservative government. Sir George Young, the housing minister, announced last week that he intended to introduce laws soon to stop homeless families having an automatic right to permanent council housing.

According to the logic of the government, that the state or local authority should bear any responsibility at all to the homeless, to the chronic unemployed, or any other section of the people unfortunate enough to be in need of benefit payments or other forms of care by society, is a concession dispensed only with humanitarian largesse.

In reality, what we are seeing is an increasing retreat by John Major and the government from the position that society has responsibility for all its members, towards a medieval position that each person is responsible for their own well-being, for their own food, clothing and shelter as individuals. How can this be possible? The very existence of modern industrial society with production organised socially precludes such a thing.

Does not John Major know this when he rails against "beggars" and the homeless? Does not George Young know this when he lets loose with bourgeois prejudice about "pregnant teenagers jumping the housing queue"? This is backwardness to the extent of criminality, a declaration that the government, as the representative of the bourgeoisie, does not care about human beings, that it has a complete lack of humanity.

To these people, it seems there is nothing more distasteful than a human being in need, and nothing more honourable than a speculator got rich through riding on the back of the crisis and ultimately the backs of the working people.

Who has caused the problem of homelessness? Here there is a sharp divide. The government maintains that at root the problem is one of the fecklessness of individuals. A "safety net" must be provided for those unfit or unwilling to provide for themselves, while it is those people in turn who are supposed to cause the problems and are putting a strain on society. This is strongly reminiscent of the period of the brutal birth of capitalism, when vagrants uprooted from the land and with no means of support, the victims of capitalism, were arrested and were subjected to all kinds of inhuman treatment. The victims of the social system are being made its scapegoats.

It is the parasitic and moribund capitalist system itself which produces the homeless, people who are forced to live on state benefits, on the minimum of living standards, people for whom there are no jobs and no prospects. A humane system would ensure a programme for full employment, for living life to the full. It would ensure a programme so that no one finds themselves with the worry of having no permanent roof over their heads, a programme where those who, for reasons beyond their control, cannot participate fully in production in society, are guaranteed a standard of living not less than that of other human beings in that society. It would recognise that society has a duty of caring for every single one of its members in accordance with their needs and not according to any other factor.

It is an indictment of the capitalist system that it gives rise to the problems of homelessness and other social problems, and then does not provide for their victims. And it is an indictment of John Major's government that it then attacks and dishes out the most vicious slanders against capitalism's victims. It shows that the bourgeoisie is not fit to be governing society and that the working class must act on this fact.

- **For a humane and progressive social policy!**
- **End the scandal of homelessness!**
- **Condemn the government for condemning the people!**
- **For a change in the direction of the economy!**

Communique of Central Committee

Continued from page 1

Conference remains the cutting edge of its programme in this period. It initiated a concrete plan for its work on formulating a Draft Programme for the working class.

The Central Committee analysed that there is much work still to be done in developing the two-point programme that it had set in April, a programme of the dissemination, discussion and elaboration of the CC's draft document, *There Is a Way Out of the Crisis*. The two-point programme had generated momentum, the results of which were reflected in the success of the Conference. At the same time, the focus of the Conference had been the question, where does the Party go from here? In this connection, the CC agreed that it is necessary that the discussion circles are widened, the calibre of discussion strengthened, and that the links with the activists in the working class and people's movement are further developed.

The Central Committee re-emphasised that the most important advance in the period since the Coventry International Seminar at the beginning of the year had been connected with the Party's defence of democratic centralism and its insistence that the Party maintain its vanguard positions. The role of the CC as the sole leader of the Party between Congresses was emphasised, and the CC decided on measures to further strengthen the work of the Central Committee and its leadership of the Party's work.

The Central Committee endorsed that there are elements which must be added to the two-point programme in the coming period. The Party must further develop its participation in political affairs, and it must pay attention to the recruiting of advanced elements to the Party, which is the cutting edge of the work of disseminating the Party's line. In this respect, the Central Committee put on the agenda the task of developing discussions in the working class and amongst the democratic and progressive sections of society on the question of consolidating the vanguard of the working class. The CC affirmed that the focus of developing this whole programme is the grappling with problems in the real world on the basis of modern definitions, with the perspective that the working class must put forward an independent programme to lead society out of the crisis.

The Central Committee took the decision that strengthening and developing *Workers' Weekly*, the newspaper of the Revolutionary Communist Party of Britain (Marxist-Leninist), and its role, is central to the whole work of this period, and made detailed plans to accomplish this task. The question of further building the technical base, in this connection, was discussed by the Central Committee.

The CC also discussed other questions, including that of fulfilling its proletarian internationalist responsibilities.

THERE IS A WAY OUT OF THE CRISIS

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How "Human Rights" Protects Neo-Colonialism

The Times of Saturday, July 16, carried a front-page headline proclaiming, "Trinidad defies London judges and hangs murderer". There were two other articles inside the newspaper on the issue of the hanging of a 31-year-old man in the Trinidadian capital, Port of Spain.

One of the articles, entitled "Delivering justice by long distance", stated that: "The judicial committee of the Privy Council, once the most powerful court of appeal in the world, and at the height of the British Empire the last resort of 450 million people, still serves 16 Commonwealth countries..." Further, the main article said, amongst other things, "The unprecedented flouting of an assurance given to the judicial committee of the Privy Council in London provoked anger among the British judicial and legal establishment..."

An appearance is given that the issue is that Britain, being the former "mother country", must continue to be the protector of human rights in such countries as Trinidad and Tobago. However, the real issue at stake concerns the future of Britain's neo-colonial relations which today are coming under increasing pressure from those countries that want to break away from British influence and take their own independent path of development.

Protecting "human rights" is one of the political cloaks which is used by Britain, France, US and others to protect neo-colonial relations. Neo-colonialism is an archaic, rotten and parasitic system where political and economic pressure and blackmail are used to force countries to toe the line of the "mother country".

Laws, as part of the legal superstructure of a given country, are the internal affairs of that country, and it is for those people alone to decide right and wrong in their own countries. Such laws should not be subject to the "final decision" of any so-called mother country.

The portrayal of Britain as the protector of human rights in the Caribbean rings very hollow, if not fraudulent, when one considers that, for example, in October 1983, when the US imperialists organised their military invasion of the small Caribbean island of Grenada – where the Queen is the head of state – bombing schools and killing scores of people, Britain, far from being a "protector", connived with the criminal American action.

When is Britain going to end its neo-colonial relations with others? This is one of the most important political issues that the working class needs to consider and which it must take action on.

Will Tony Blair's Policies Provide a Way Forward for the Working Class?

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socialism as, "A country that knows it is not just a group of individuals and families struggling on their own, but a society united and confident. The power of all used for the good of each." What was notable was that his vision of socialism does not include the working class as its builder. The whole experience of the 20th century shows that socialism cannot be built unless the working class takes the lead in bringing it about. Does Tony Blair want the working class to lead? It is quite clear that he does not. In fact he makes no mention of the working class having any role to play in the progress of society.

What this means is that the policies of Tony Blair are not new and modern, but a revamped version of those from the past. Unless a political party has the aim of empowering the working class and all members of society, encouraging the working class to play its role at the centre of all progressive developments, it is doomed to failure. Tony Blair may well succeed in bringing the Labour Party back to power. But these policies will not bring about the new society which the working class demands.

A notable fact in the Labour leadership election was that less than 20% of political levy payers voted for any candidate. Traditionally the Labour Party may well have been seen by workers as their party. But today they are increasing rejecting it and looking for a new way forward. This way forward will not be based on the old road of keeping out of politics and leaving it to the professional politicians to solve the problems, but on workers taking up politics themselves, developing the independent programme of the working class and calling for support from others for this.

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