



What's new about ?New Labour??

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At the start of 1996 all British political commentators are agreed on one thing. Only a miracle can save John Major and the Conservatives at the next election. The Labour Party, which has lost a record four general elections, is now almost certain to win. The media pundits insist that it is thanks to Tony Blair that the party, ?unelectable? for the last seventeen years, is on the verge of government.

Blair?s changes to ?New Labour? is given the credit for winning over large numbers of Tory voters in their rural and suburban heartlands.

Blair?s popularity with these voters is considered to rest on his hammering of the Labour left, his repeated snubs to the trade union ?barons? and his recent success in provoking Arthur Scargill, bogeyman of the Tory tabloids, into leaving and forming his own party.

Amongst the trade union bureaucracy, even those bright enough to realise Blair?s real intentions, hold a complacent belief that because they control the purse strings they are ultimately still in control. All they have to do is stay out of the limelight, carry on swallowing the snubs, until Blair is installed in Downing Street. Then they will be first over the doorstep with suggestions for public spending, expansion of the social services, re-nationalisation and the minimum wage.

Amongst the old Labour right wing there is similar sentiment that Blair?s New Labour is an electoral flash in the pan. This is summed up by MP Austin Mitchell:

?When New Labour runs into Old Crisis they?ll come crawling back to us. Time to start working out terms.?1

Blair?s break from ?Labourism?

When Blair became leader in 1994 Labour had already been moving to the right for ten years. It did so at a steady pace under the leadership of the ?old right? and defectors from the Tribune left, backed to the hilt by the ?new realist? union leaders. Neil Kinnock was the leader of this offensive, carrying through a series of witch-hunts which purged the constituencies of the ?hard left?. Thousands more Labour activists simply left in disillusion.

But Tony Blair has taken the process a whole stage beyond destroying the post-1979 gains of the Left. He has set about refashioning the totality of Labour Party politics. He has taken the butchers? knife to the sacred cows, not only of the traditional left but also of the traditional right. ?New Labour? is not just a phrase coined by the party?s ?spin doctors? to lure the unwary Tory voters of Middle England.

It represents, on the part of Blair and his inner circle, a fundamental political and organisational change. It is designed to win the trust of the British ruling class and persuade it that New Labour will protect its interests as securely as the Tories and the Liberals do.

Margaret Thatcher had the measure of the man as well as the obstacles he still faces in his own party:

?He is probably the most formidable leader we have had since Hugh Gaitskell. I see a lot of socialism behind their front bench, but not in Mr Blair. I think he genuinely has moved.?2

Most bourgeois political commentators agree:

?The New Labour leader is unsentimental and single-minded about his refashioning of Labour as a social democratic party. You do not need leaked memos or drafts of books written by Blair acolytes. Read his lips: no more socialism.?3

Blair describes himself as a ?Christian Socialist??the most slippery and evasive tradition within British reformism. It enables him to distance himself not only from what goes for Marxism in the Labour Party but also from the old Labour right?s identification of socialism with social equality.

This concept of equality, associated with Tony Crosland in the 1950s, was to be achieved by the redistributive effects of progressive taxation policies and by measures such as the abolition of selection and streaming in schools, and a welfare state with universal entitlement and a free-at-the-point-of-delivery health system. It set as its goal the maintenance of full employment.

Of course, this programme was itself stolen from ?social liberals? like Beveridge, Keynes and before them, Lloyd George.

The old Labour right led by Hugh Gaitskell, then leader of the party, failed in their bid to get rid of Clause 4 at the 1959 Party conference. But they did shift mainstream Labourism to the right. Thereafter, Clause 4 and nationalisation were to be the badge of the Left in the party. Blair has succeeded where Crosland and Hugh Gaitskell failed, but he has gone further by downgrading most of the old right?s vision of socialism. The Economist observed his abandonment of social equality?at least as a goal requiring redistribution?and urged him to be consistent and drop talk of socialism altogether.

?Arguably, therefore, Mr Blair is right to abandon this fundamental principle of socialism. But he cannot both drop it and continue to claim an unbridgeable gulf remains between his amorphous ?Christian socialism? and that of most Tories . . . socialism, shorn of any aspiration to achieve equality, is dead.?4

As against old style, welfarist Labourism, Blair favours a ?caring? meritocracy, not so different from the waffle of John Major?s ?classless Britain?. But Blair knows he cannot commit Labour as a party to ?Christian Socialism?. Indeed his new ?clause four? still proclaims Labour a party of ?democratic socialism?. Instead he is trying to give it an entirely new meaning. He has embraced many of the ideas of Guardian economics editor, Will Hutton, in his book *The State We're In* (1995).

Hutton?s ?big idea? is stakeholding. He wants major changes to democratise control over pension funds, freeing them to promote long term investment in industry. He blames ?short-termism? and investment abroad on the dominance of the City. He wants constitutional changes too; devolution to regional parliaments, a degree of proportional representation in elections. This he believes will give everyone a ?stake in society? and overcome the tendency to the creation of a permanently criminalised underclass.

The middle classes, the main victims of crime against property will, he believes, agree to pay for this if certain concessions?privileges? are given to them by Labour. These include differential treatment in the health service (?a tiered system of contributions above the core contribution?) and selection in state schools (?grammar schools and grammar school streams in comprehensives need to be restored?).

This is a new language for New Labour and marks an important shift in the reformist politics of the British Labour Party. It marks a radical break from ?Labourism? both in its left (Tribunite-Bennite) form and in its right (Crosland) form. As such it bears out a prediction that we made in 1991 about Labour?s election winning chances:

?But it is clear today that were Labour to win back enough of the ?middle ground? to secure a majority in Parliament it would be achieved at the price of diluting everything distinctively ?Labourite? in its policies to the point where the party?s programme is almost indistinguishable from that of the post-Thatcher Tory Party.?5

Today we need only correct this in the sense that it is almost indistinguishable from the pro-European, ?one nation?

faction of the Tories. It involves trenchant defence of entrepreneurial initiative and the core market values of the 1980s and early 1990s, but it criticises Thatcherite neo-liberalism for its socially disintegrative effects. The free market needs to be tweaked in order to give all classes some access to property and its rights, in one form or another. Only thus will they feel they have a stake in (capitalist) society. Hopefully, the ills of unemployment both for the unemployed and for the middle classes (crime) will be gradually alleviated.

The Blair leadership represents more than one of Labour's periodic zig-zags to the right. It marks the coming to power within the party of a clique and a set of ideas which have been moulded outside of mainstream Labour politics.

It represents the first stage of an attempt to transform Labour from a bourgeois workers' party (bourgeois in politics but rooted in the organisations of the workers' movement) into an outright bourgeois party. The next steps of this strategy are plain to those with eyes to see.

Recent books and reports by key Blair advisors have openly advocated a post-election pact with the Liberals, a total break with the unions and a further 'policy revolution' to obliterate all traces of social-democratic reformism from Labour's politics.

But Blair's achievements to date do not yet represent a qualitative transformation of Labour as a party. Anybody who understood the essential contradiction of the Labour Party—its thoroughly bourgeois politics and its predominantly working class social base—can see that the contradiction is not resolved by a few sound bites or even by an election manifesto.

It will have to be done in the political struggles under the next Labour government. And these struggles will not be decided in smoke-filled rooms but in the class conflicts provoked by the betrayals of a Blair government. Until then, however, behind the scenes conspiracies and manoeuvres will continue to play an important role.

Blair's rise to power

After being roughed up by the police on the fringes of an anti-Nazi demonstration in Oxford in the 1970s, Tony Blair, a former public school boy, kept well clear of radical politics. After Oxford University he became a career lawyer. Only later did he decide on a 'career' in politics.

His 'Christian values' turned him away from the Thatcherism of his father. His father-in-law, the actor Tony Booth, helped him make contacts in the Labour Party. His natural political choice should have been the Social Democratic Party of David Owen, but he was convinced that despite the hold of the left on Labour in the early 1980s, the party could be steered to the right once again and that he could play a part in doing it.

Blair was welcomed by the right wing of the party as an ally in the fight against the left. After losing one by-election in a safe Tory seat he was handed Sedgefield in the Labour-dominated North East, defeating left winger Les Huckfield for the nomination. He entered Parliament in 1983.

He was rapidly taken into the new leader Neil Kinnock's entourage, promoted to top positions and given free rein to push through his project to change Labour's policies. As Labour's Employment spokesman he played a key role in facing down the unions over the demand to repeal Thatcher's anti-trade union laws. Kinnock backed him totally against the unions.

Blair profited from a peculiar balance of forces inside the Labour hierarchy. Kinnock was a former left winger who betrayed the Bennites and went over to the right.

The Right realised that he was uniquely qualified to destroy the left he knew so well. But the old right—Roy Hattersley, John Smith and Denis Healey—only tolerated Kinnock. They never trusted him to lead the party back into power. They and powerful sections of the trade union bureaucracy—always believed that one of their own, John Smith, was the man to lead Labour back into office.

Kinnock therefore surrounded himself with a new breed of Labour politicians, drawn from sources as diverse as fellow travellers of the Eurocommunist wing of Stalinism and closet liberals like Blair. In order to both smash the left and try and win an election, Kinnock needed a new strategy and new allies to carry it through.

His strategy was to undermine the party's link with the unions and refashion the party as a European-style social democratic organisation with a mass, but passive membership. His allies were drawn from the younger MPs of the 1983 intake. Some came from the right like Blair and Gordon Brown, others were ex-leftists like Robin Cook and Jack Straw, and some were former Euro-Stalinist apparatchiks from the student movement like Charles Clarke. Others were shadowy functionaries who knew how to handle the media, Peter Mandelson being the most well-known and influential of these 'spin doctors'.

Unlike the left, these people were not tied for reasons of class loyalty to the link with the unions. Unlike the old right they were not tied for reasons of expediency to the same link with the union bureaucracy. They were media conscious, game for a radical overhaul of both the party's organisation and policies. They were the self-proclaimed 'modernisers', known by their enemies as the 'beautiful people'.

When Kinnock failed to deliver victory in 1992 the old right, led by Smith, saw their chance and seized it. Kinnock resigned and Smith romped home in the ensuing leadership election. The modernisers drew radical conclusions from Kinnock's defeat.

Not their policies but the trade union links and ideological baggage of Old Labour were responsible for the defeat. The answer was not less reform but a positive revolution in Labour's character. Not a gradual 'social-democratisation' but an outright transformation into a mainstream bourgeois liberal party, was what Blair, Brown and Mandelson dreamed of.

John Smith however had decided to consolidate Kinnock's gains and not to push on with the 'modernising' project. The strategy of 'one more push' came to the fore—one more push and Labour could, just, win an election again. Most importantly, the Kinnockites' relentless onslaught on the link with the unions would end with the introduction of 'one member, one vote' for the selection of parliamentary candidates. In return, Smith promised the union bureaucrats full employment, the minimum wage and a halt to further 'reform' aimed at weakening the union link. Smith announced:

'Labour must and will not sever its links with the trade union movement.'⁶

Blair clashed with Smith over the reform of the block vote in the trade union review group set up in 1993. Blair wanted to get rid of the trade union vote altogether in the selection of candidates. Smith and his supporters—like Larry Whitty, the general secretary—favoured a system of associate membership for political levy payers in the unions that would preserve a union vote. This position won.

But the main dispute was over strategy. For Smith, little needed to be done until an election. For Blair, Brown and Mandelson, much more needed to be done to modernise the Labour Party. This dispute led to a campaign directed against Smith throughout 1992 and 1993, criticising his inertia and his belief that the Tories' own mess was a guarantee that the strategy of 'one more push' would triumph.

In revenge, Mandelson, by now an MP, was pushed out of the party machine by Smith, along with other Kinnock acolytes. Blair himself was demoted. But then fortune smiled on Blair. In 1994 John Smith died suddenly of a heart attack.

The old right had nobody who could match the 'fresh challenge' of Blair. Blair's 'traditionalist' rival, Prescott, despite some trade union support, could not overcome the media induced scare that he would not be able to win Middle England whereas Blair could. The left were unable even to secure the required number of MPs' nominations to be able to stand a candidate. Blair romped home with a massive majority in every sector of the electoral college.

Blair's unfinished revolution

As leader Blair has already moved the Labour Party far from old-style Labourism. Its commitment to a tax-funded, cradle-to-grave welfare state is openly questioned by those like Frank Field, known to have the ear of the leader. It has renounced any state intervention into the economy beyond a supportive role in employment training. The promise of restoring to public ownership the privatised utilities has been finessed almost out of existence.

Its commitment to comprehensive education is also under threat of being ditched. The notion that Labour has a special relationship with the trade unions has been downplayed. Clause 4?Labour?s formal commitment to a nationalised economy?was swept from the Party?s constitution at a special conference in April 1995.

Blair has been brazen in his assault on old-style Labourism. In a direct snub to the party?s education policy he sent his son to a grant-maintained school which had opted out of local authority control; the next party conference reversed its policy of abolishing grant-maintained status. Then he backed shadow cabinet member, Harriet Harman, who sent her son to a selective school, thereby further undermining the party?s commitment to a comprehensive, non-selective education system.

Under Blair, youth unemployment will be dealt with by a version of workfare. Those who refuse to join Labour?s work-for-benefit scheme will lose 40% of their benefits. Welfare provision in general will be reduced and replaced with compulsory insurance schemes.

The minimum wage?one of the remaining Labourite commitments?will not be introduced until after the bosses have been consulted and its figure will not be announced until Labour is in government. This means that the promise itself is now loaded with uncertainties.

A minimum wage, if granted at all, will be based on what Blair calls ?the real economy??not the real needs of workers.

For this reason Blair?s main promise, with regard to taxation, has been that the rich, the capitalists, will not be hurt by Labour. ?Tax rates need to be internationally, as well as nationally, competitive?, Blair told Japanese bosses.⁷

Most importantly, Blair has set out to weaken and downplay Labour?s links with the working class. His language stresses ?all classes?, ?one nation? and so on. The leader of a party founded and financed by the unions informed them, the day after he became leader:

?They are not going to be shut out in the cold or told they are not part of our society. They are an important part of the democratic process. But we are not running the next Labour government for anything other than the people of this country.?8

The unions, in other words, should expect no more of a special relationship with New Labour than the CBI. Thatcher?s anti-union laws would stay and the unions would be treated with ?fairness not favours?.

To prove he meant business he pushed through the reduction of the unions? vote at party conferences from 70% to 50%, a move he explained as a means of reassuring ?the public? that Labour?s relationship with the unions ?does not translate into improper influence?.⁹

Blair wants, strategically, a complete removal of the union vote within the Labour party, ending of trade union sponsorship of MPs, relegation of union-party committees to a purely consultative role. In public, however, he still has to be studiously equivocal about the union link:

?We have a unique historical relationship. I value that relationship . . . But patently in today?s world it must be more broadly based than that, especially as so many people are not in trade unions.?10

The ?broader relationship? implies a very different relationship?it implies the building of a party that is not trade union based, whose ?unique relationship? to the unions is relegated to history and which can therefore ensure that its ?fairness not favour? policy is carried through without internal party upheavals as a result of trade union influence within the

party.

Blair's ditching of Clause 4 was linked to this view of the diluted relationship between the party and the unions.

The attack on Clause 4 had a symbolic character. Labour was never in reality a socialist party.

Nationalisation of bankrupt industries and public services does not equal socialism. In any case it specifically excluded the workers themselves from controlling or managing this nationalised economy.

Nor did anyone seriously believe, from the 1960s onwards, that Labour would really set out to nationalise 'the means of production, distribution and exchange' even step by step.

Nevertheless Clause 4 'inscribed on every membership card' meant that sincere left wingers could argue inside the party either that this or that industry should be nationalised, or for wholesale nationalisation.

They might be disavowed or derided by the party and union leaders but they could not be expelled for this alone. In return the Tories and the media could and did play up the socialist and anti-capitalist character of the party.

Labour's empty commitment to collectivism, its unfulfilled promise to secure the fruits of labour for the workers, did mean that generation after generation of idealistic and radical young people could be recruited to the party to do the donkey work of winning elections. Labour looked more radical than 'continental social democracy' which had by and large explicitly renounced Marxism and socialisation in the 1950s. In reality, Labour government policies were no different.

But in getting rid of Clause 4 has he changed the fundamental character of the Labour Party itself? Has he turned it from a bourgeois workers' party into a purely bourgeois party? The short answer is no.

A bourgeois workers' party

Blair is the most right wing leader of the party since MacDonald. He has turned New Labour into a party that every real socialist feels justifiable hostility towards. But we need to distinguish what he has achieved from his, as yet, unfulfilled project.

He has made a political break from old Labourism and will introduce policies that contain fewer reforms benefiting the working class than any previous Labour government. He has weakened the link with the trade unions, signifying his long term goal of either turning the Labour Party into a European-style social democratic party (at best) or an openly bourgeois US-style Democratic Party (at worst).

Neither of these future options can be ruled out. But he has not yet achieved a qualitative breakthrough. The unions still have a 50% vote at conference. That is a very powerful influence. At General Elections they still supply virtually all of Labour's war chest.

What is more, there is the mass working class electoral support for Labour, mobilised by the unions even amongst non-unionised workers.

This support means that workers do identify the party as theirs no matter how much Blair prattles about 'one nation'.

Both of these factors can translate into working class pressure on Labour. Even under Blair that will produce pressure on the party. Such pressure, at the moment, is minimal.

The reason for this is the effect of many years of defeats for the working class. At the moment workers believe Blair is their only means of getting rid of the Tories. When he achieves this the possibility exists of the expectations turning into organised pressure.

Even within the party itself this possibility is recognised. A Labour MP told the Guardian:

'You will be surprised how quickly the old Labour Party will resurrect itself after the election. You will be surprised how the pent up demands of people will rush forth during a Labour government, how quickly the TUC will recover its buoyancy.'¹¹

And the Economist warned;

'Suppose a Labour victory is followed by disillusion. Suppose the party's new members drop out. Suppose the remaining members swing left. Then the pressures on MPs might again come from the left, encouraging disloyalty. So, Mr Blair would be sensible to keep lines open to potential allies in other parties?'i.e. the Liberal Democrats. One day he might need their votes.'¹²

Neither of these scenarios'reurrection of 'old Labour' or a strategic coalition with the Liberals'is entirely fanciful. Both recognise that the class struggle outside of parliament when Labour is in government could have an impact on the party, one which places Blair's New Labour in conflict with a mobilised working class.

Why would a majority Labour government under Blair need a pact with the Liberals, with the inevitable concessions to state funding and proportional representation that this would involve? The answer is spelled out in Peter Mandelson's new book where he argues it is 'to assure a longer term, stable, left of centre government'.

In other words, to marginalise the parliamentary left, to construct an alternative social base to the trade unions and organised working class voters, and to prepare for the total transformation of Labour into a liberal party.

This is, without doubt, the private project of the Blair clique. But Blair's public commitment to no further changes in the block vote until the year 2000 is a signal of how far Blair is from achieving this goal. Union pressure on a Labour government'exerted through industrial action, negotiation and through the party structures themselves'remains an important fear for Blair and a wary bourgeoisie.

The essential point is that a decisive battle lies ahead and has not yet been won by Blair. New Labour is 'new' in many respects, but it exists courtesy of a compromise with the 'old'.

All of that means that the tactic of critical electoral support for Labour retains its validity. To say otherwise is to ignore the reality that millions of workers look to Blair, and to embrace instead the fantasy that millions of workers have already seen through him and that he has already enacted a qualitative transformation of the party.

The left: too little, too late

This fantasy is, in all essentials, pessimistic and defeatist. It tends to be shared by those who have had illusions in the socialist character of Labour. The bigger the illusions come, the harder they fall. Arthur Scargill and Militant Labour both fit this category.

Scargill, who has recently launched the Socialist Labour Party, is convinced that Blair's victory over Clause 4 has destroyed the socialist basis of the party. His document, Future Strategy for the Left, is clear on this:

'Labour is now almost indistinguishable from the Democratic Party in the United States, Germany's Social Democratic Party or, nearer home, the Liberal Democrats.'¹³

He adds:

'In ditching Clause 4 from the Constitution, Labour has erased its commitment to the aim of common ownership without which social justice, economic democracy and socialism are impossible.'¹⁴

He concludes that it is time to split. Leaving aside the arguments for or against the Socialist Labour Party¹⁵, Scargill is

wrong to equate the ditching of Clause 4 with a qualitative change in the Labour Party.

For Marxists, the definition of Labour as a bourgeois workers' party has always meant that, in its politics, it is thoroughly bourgeois.

How is the ditching of Clause 4 (given that it has been merrily ignored by the six post war Labour governments) qualitatively worse than Labour in office under Wilson in the 1960s, for example?

Wilson imposed wage freezes on the working class and ruthlessly attacking the seafarers who struck against this. How is ditching Clause 4 worse than Callaghan sending in troops to break a firefighters' strike or introducing monetarist policies during the crisis of 1976?

These questions reveal the error in Scargill's thinking. In the past he believed that a paper commitment altered the character of the party, made it somehow socialist despite itself.

More recently, in the process of cobbling together the bureaucratic basis for the SLP, Scargill has declared that he 'now accepts' that Labour was never socialist. It is Scargill who has undergone a change from a left reformist with illusions in Labour to a left reformist without them. That in itself does not change the nature of the Labour Party.

Militant Labour echo Scargill's mistakes. They long maintained a perspective of strategic entry into the Labour Party aimed at effecting a wholesale transformation of the Party into an instrument for overthrowing capitalism. Even after they split from Labour (first in Scotland and later in England and Wales) they argued this was a 'detour' from their perspective and they would, at some future date, get back on to the main road of entryism.

They argued that it was not possible to build a revolutionary party outside the Labour Party since the masses would inevitably enter that party and push it to the left.

This perspective, in a modified form, underlies their argument for an SLP.

To justify the change of tack with regard to the Labour Party, Militant Labour has incorrectly estimated the nature of the changes brought about by Blair. In a series of articles in Militant International Review and its successor, Socialism Today, Militant Labour's leader, Peter Taaffe, has argued that Labour has, more or less, ceased to be a bourgeois workers' party. Therefore, it will no longer be the vehicle that workers will turn to in the event of a mass upsurge. After Scargill's call for a Socialist Labour Party, Militant Labour became even more clear.

In the December 1995 issue of Socialism Today, Militant Labour argue that the final dropping of Clause 4 (after Scargill's defeat at the annual conference) and the refusal to select Liz Davies for Leeds North East were decisive:

'These developments clearly mark a decisive, qualitative change in the character of the Labour Party.'¹⁶

They draw back from saying clearly and unambiguously that Labour has ceased to be a bourgeois workers' party, but they insist that this is only a matter of time when, not if. And in their paper, Militant, they argue:

'The dropping of the party's socialist Clause Four, along with the open embracing of the capitalist market, has demonstrated to millions that a new Labour government would follow policies no different to the Tories.'¹⁷

Speaking at a London discussion forum in January 1996 after being excluded from Scargill's SLP, Militant Central Committee member Hanna Sell affirmed their view that Labour had ceased to be a workers' party in any sense.

Blair's counter-reforms do not constitute a qualitative transformation of the Labour Party. Indeed, they have relied for their success inside the party on its working class roots, via the trade unions.

The union link is one of the most decisive defining features of Labour's character as a bourgeois workers' party. That link has been weakened by Blair and with many of the unions' leaders consent. But it has not been broken. Until it is,

talk of a qualitative change in the character of Labour is self serving, not scientific.

Moreover, if the link has not been broken then part of the fight to stop Blair is a fight to preserve the link.

Militant Labour are agnostic on this question, predicting that it will be broken 'in time'. For an organisation that condemned Workers Power as 'sectarians on the fringes of the labour movement' for our refusal to endorse strategic entryism into the Labour Party, this is a bit rich.

The labour movement is faced with a battle in the future?probably after an election victory by Blair?over the union link. Every member of the affiliated unions will be asking what they should do?support Blair breaking the link, or fight him.

We say clearly: preserve the union link! This will be a working class fight against an attempt to create an 'openly liberal' party. By arguing that Labour has effectively become such a party already, Militant Labour are paving the way to abstaining in that fight.

But what they have not abandoned is their old schema: the working class needs to go through a reformist, then a centrist stage before a revolutionary party can be built.

Thus, despite being spurned by Scargill, Militant Labour insist that a non-revolutionary socialist party is both their goal and the likely upshot of the class struggle in the future.

In Militant, Peter Taaffe wrote:

'A significant part of the mass of the working class have already abandoned any notion that the Labour Party is still 'their' party.

'This is particularly true of the youth, a big section of the workers in the inner city areas, blacks, Asians etc?Whether or not a Socialist Labour Party is launched, or whether it is cut across by an early general election, such a party will inevitably arise given the objective needs of the working class in Britain.'¹⁸

So, we are back to the old Ted Grant method: the objective situation performs the tasks of socialists for them. An SLP will arise and 'support for the ideas of Marxism will grow'.¹⁹

No matter that an SLP has been launched and Militant Labour are excluded. No matter that millions of workers?the overwhelming majority?will vote for Labour.

No matter that what real Marxists need to do is fight openly for a revolutionary party and programme.

History, says Grant-Taaffe, will absolve us.

It certainly seems to have absolved Taaffe of responsibility?the elementary responsibility to fight to change history and to account for past mistakes.

If Militant Labour follow the Taaffe line they will decline further. A Labour government will disorient them. And the SLP of Scargill will continue to shun them.

For now they have decided to console themselves by launching a 'shadow' SLP.

In Scotland, Militant Labour is actively pursuing the creation of the Scottish Socialist Alliance, with left Labourites, trade union bureaucrats, hard-line Stalinists and left Scottish Nationalists.

This will provide them with a further rationale for refusing to argue openly for a revolutionary party and programme.

Previously this could be rationalised as long as independent activity was seen as a 'detour'. Best to retain the

compromised left reformist programme of 'old Militant' as a passport to re-entry into Labour.

Now it is being rationalised as the necessary compromise with the dead and dying forces of the old left of the Labour movement.

At the same time Militant's leadership consoles itself that this is part of an international experience.

It is increasingly prepared to write off all the remaining Social Democratic workers' parties and Labour parties as 'bourgeois' from Austria to Australia.

This is a guarantee that Militant will continue to decline in membership and influence, experiencing disorientation and possibly a renewed round of fragmentation.

In addition, Militant will come under pressure from the very workers it thinks it is relating to by the SLP 'tactic'.

When the opportunity comes for the first Labour government for 16 years workers will vote Labour by the millions, whatever protest votes they might have registered in council elections or parliamentary by-elections.

But if Labour really is already a plain and simple bourgeois party then no socialist should advocate a vote for it.

In their delight at the emergence of the SLP Militant's leaders seem to have forgotten about this problem. Millions of workers will remind them soon enough.

The way to avoid such demoralisation, fragmentation and decline is to face reality. Labour remains a bourgeois workers' party and is the principal obstacle to the growth of a mass revolutionary alternative.

The decisive struggles over its class character lie ahead, under a Labour government.

Only by organising the working class to fight Blair—which includes uniting with workers to put Labour to the test of office and demanding that Labour act in workers' interests—will we be able to blow up that obstacle.

Part of that fight is a fight to stop Blair breaking the link with the unions. By doing this we can rally the vanguard forces to build a revolutionary party, not a new left reformist party.

This is the strategy of Workers Power, the British section of the LRCI. It is the only strategy for revolutionaries in Britain today. Fooling ourselves about the masses having broken with Labour and deluding them about what sort of party they really need—that is the stuff of sectarians and opportunists.

FOOTNOTES

1. Tribune 29 September 1995.
2. Sunday Times, 28 May 1995.
3. Iain Macwhirter, Observer, 1 October 1995.
4. Economist, 23 December 1995.
5. 'The Retreat from Labourism?', in Permanent Revolution No.9, p42
6. Tony Blair, The Moderniser Jan Soper, London 1995 p243
7. quoted in Tribune, 12 January 1996.
8. quoted in Soper, op cit, p212
9. Guardian 27 July 1995.
10. ibid
11. ibid, 18 July 1995.
12. Economist, 9 December 1995.
13. Future Strategy for the Left, p3
14. ibid. p6

15. see Workers Power 195, 196 and 197 for our analysis of the emerging SLP.
16. Socialism Today, December 1995.
17. Militant, 8 December, 1995.
18. ibid, 12 January 1996.
19. ibid.

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