

## The Labour Party on John Smith's Death

ON the occasion of the death of John Smith and the debate about who will be the next Labour Party leader, the considerations for the working class should mainly be focused around precisely what were the policies of the Labour Party, whether they will be different under a new leader, and whether these provide any alternative, any opposition, to those of the Conservative Party.

In viewing the policies in this way, the working class must bear in mind that the Labour Party claims in name to be a party of labour. It is therefore necessary to ask whether in any sense it puts forward a programme in the name of the working class, whether it has anything to

say about the role the working class must play in leading society out of the crisis, whether its policies are based on the strategic aims of the working class.

As a preliminary, it can be remarked that it was said that John Smith led the Labour Party to the threshold of power.

But does this mean that John Smith formulated a programme and policies which favoured the working class which would be implemented were the Labour Party to win the next general election? Clearly it does not mean that workers themselves were on the threshold of coming to power. Whatever John Smith's attributes as leader, he did not attempt through the Labour Party to organise workers to be in a position to make decisions themselves on political affairs or on matters which affect their lives. The tributes being paid in

the working class movement to John Smith emphasise that he was a good friend to people at work and that he brought unity to the Labour Party enabling it to be in a position to defeat the Conservative Party at the next general election. It is no slur on John Smith's qualities as a person to question whether his achievements represent a step forward for the working class or whether the Labour Party in power would have charted a way out of the capitalist crisis. The facts point to the working class instead being increasingly disillusioned with the Labour Party and its inability to act in their interests.

It can be said about John Smith that he wished to restore the faith of working people not only in the Labour Party but primarily in the political system itself in Britain. The Labour Party's proposals for constitutional reform and John Smith's remarks on this subject confirm this. Indeed, the tradition from which he came and which he succeeded in stamping on the Labour Party is one which saw politics as a form of advocacy and not as an expression of the clash between economic or

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### Seeking opinions on "There Is a Way Out of the Crisis"

AS our Party's work gathers momentum in the period approaching its Consultative Conference, one of the key tasks is that of taking the draft document *There Is a Way Out of the Crisis* widely amongst the activists from the working class and other sections in struggle.

At the present time, many different sections of workers are

engaged in struggles of various forms, as are sections of the intermediate strata. These struggles are directed against exploitation and the offensive of the bourgeoisie. Many are protests against the cutbacks in services provided by the state. Those in struggle are directly concerned with the issues raised in the Party's draft

document – that of finding a way out of the crisis.

The importance of approaching the sections in struggle is not that of winning them over to the Party's positions, but of persuading them to read the draft document and listening to their views on it. One of the important things about the

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## Labour Party on John Smith's Death

**Continued from page 1** class interests in society, or as a reflection of the stage of the social system. But the wish to restore faith in the political system in Britain with which people are so discontented is to work to maintain the status quo against the interests of the people. The working class demands a change in the direction of society in the direction of socialism. But the Labour Party John Smith has bequeathed, no matter who takes over as leader, is a party far removed from such a modern perspective. It rather fits into the increasingly archaic commitment to the British political conception of "good government" and parliamentary politics. This is the source of the disillusion of the working class with the Labour Party as it is kept at arm's length from political power, passed over as an independent social force

and its interests overlooked and its aspirations negated. The Labour Party is firmly rooted in the old conception that the system of representation of working people in parliament should be perfected on the old model, a model that has neither seen the working people empowered nor the crisis overcome. The Labour Party is stuck with old definitions and old prejudices, with the narrow and very limited aim of coming to power in order to fulfil its vain claims of making capitalism work better than can the Tories.

The putting in place by John Smith of "One Member, One Vote" in Labour Party elections, albeit in a compromise form, is both a reflection of the crumbling of the alliance that the labour aristocracy once held with the financial oligarchy in their stranglehold over the working class movement,

and of a tradition with a developing profile within the Labour Party which seeks neither to represent labour in parliament nor develop a programme that serves its short- and long-term interests, but nevertheless seeks to mobilise the workers to support the party.

It could be considered ironic that those dubbed the modernisers within the Labour Party effectively want to bring the party in line with a conception of a political party that was developed in the 18th and 19th centuries rather than one applicable to the needs of a modern democracy where people are empowered and make the decisions which affect their lives. It is only "modernising" in the sense that those forces swim with the tide of the retreat of revolution. But this in itself only further increases the disillusion of the working class with the

Labour Party, though at the same time having the potential of increasing the demand of workers as individual workers that the Labour Party in fact serve the interests of labour.

The whole question of the relationship between the trade unions and the Labour Party which came under scrutiny at the time of the OMOV debate may once again be put on the agenda when the time comes for the Labour Party leadership battle. There is little sign that it will be dealt with in a modern way, which is to say not on the basis of whether the party and the trade unions should or should not be the political and economic wings of the same, labour, movement, whether the economic wing should control the political wing, or vice versa, but that any party of the workers must have one programme, a programme to take the entire society out of the crisis, a programme which takes into account the individual interests of workers, their various collective interests, as represented for example in the trade unions, together with the general interests of society, and harmonise these.

To be truly an opposition to the policies of the John Major government, policies must be put forward which are not just based on a narrow oppo-

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## Labour Party

► situation, for instance, to some levels of government spending, or just to echo in the parliamentary chamber the discontent of the people with the Conservative policies, but are policies which are based on and fought for in the framework of battling against the entire backward motion of society and its institutions towards medievalism and opposing to this a forward motion towards a new society.

Instead, the logic the Labour Party has been using is also the logic the Conservative Party uses. It is that the well-being of Britain's economy is directly dependent on the well-being of the monopolies. Whereas John Major's aphorism summing up the Conservative logic is, "If business wins, Britain wins," that of the Labour Party is, "A new partnership between government and industry to make Britain's future." The Labour Party puts forward that the key task is to revitalise British industry so that it can more successfully compete, and only then can the "quality of life" be improved. The opposite of this common logic of the Conservatives and Labour is the case. The health of the economy is directly linked with the well-being of the people. If the people are well-off, the economy is well-off.

No alternative to this capitalist logic has been put forward by any of the prospective Labour Party leaders. The whole ethos of both the Labour Party and the trade union leadership at this time is to claim to have a better solution to the generation of capitalist profit than does the Conservative Party. As everyone knows, the Labour Party's pledges in terms of investing in social programmes, on the obligation of the state to provide public services and of any reform of the political process or of the state are extremely thin on the ground. Only by firmly rejecting the Conservative government's policies and the logic on which they are based is it possible to open a path to progress, and the Labour Party has no programme to do this.

Neither does the Labour Party put forward policies in the name of the working class nor give recognition that it is necessary for the working class to be at the centre of the forward march of society. Its policies do not favour the working class and hence society as a whole. The Labour Party has no new vision to present to the working class or broad sections of the people about a society which puts the well-being of the people at the centre. The workers should therefore draw the appropriate conclusions.

## Seeking opinions on *There Is a Way Out of the Crisis*

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draft document is that it is not a narrow document produced by communists for communists, but one which attempts to point the way forward for the working class in its struggle against the bourgeoisie and for the working class to lead the whole society forward. Pointing the way out of the crisis has relevance to all sections in struggle against the offensive of capital.

Of course, those in struggle are often preoccupied with the details of their own struggle and how it should be developed. They often consider this more important than the questions raised by the Party. It is necessary that tactics be worked out to seek the opinions of these elements of the working class and other strata who are resisting the attacks of the bourgeoisie, discussing the document and building links with them. Through discussion with them, as many of these activists as possible should be encouraged to add their own proposals in order to enrich the document, and all those who are serious should be encouraged to attend the National Consultative Conference.

The present situation in the workers' movement makes it a particularly fruitful time for this work

to be carried out. With the alliance between the financial oligarchy and the labour aristocracy in crisis and the workers increasingly disillusioned with the trade union leaders and rejecting the Labour Party, the question of the working class taking up its historic mission to pave the way for the building of a new society is the order of the day. There is an opening in which the Party can operate and win support for communism. This does not only involve recruitment of the most class conscious workers and other democratic and progressive forces into the ranks of the Party. It is also important to build ties and links with the activists in the resistance movement. This will necessarily lead at a later stage to building alliances of various kinds in order to strengthen the resistance of the class and that of the middle strata.

It is this work of actually seeking the opinions of the advanced elements of the working class and other sections of the people in struggle, which is the cutting edge of the second point of our Party's two-point programme in this period – elaborating the draft document and mobilising people to participate in the National Consultative Conference on June 25-26.

**Against the Cuts****What future for health care? What kind of society?**

**WAITING lists in London are now around 150,000. Up to 24 further London hospitals are at risk of closure with thousands of health workers' jobs threatened. Earlier this month the health policy think-tank King's Fund Institute advised the government to spend £200 million more on London's health services—contradicting a Department of Health statement that London gets £70 million too much!**

Most of last winter, hospitals and A&E departments were operating to capacity and beyond. For those who know the situation, gone is the sense of security that, should disaster happen, access to the best medical care will be assured. Many are dying who could be saved. If the health service is not allowed to give treatment till someone's condition has deteriorated to a crisis, how can the health of the population be safeguarded?

A national health service providing advanced medical and other health care through the state to people when they need it irrespective of their wealth or position in society should hold a central place in any modern civilized society. Yet every step of the government's health reforms is setting in motion forces that are lead-

ing to the break up of the NHS and the insinuation of private health and social care into wider areas of life:

— growing waiting lists forcing those who can afford it into private health care and those who cannot to suffer;

— an internal market where services are determined by yearly contracts set to meet short-term demands and financial targets, so that planning according to need and for long-term development becomes increasingly impossible;

— market testing opening each area of the health service up to the possibility of being provided by private companies;

— fewer staff with more work, suffering a wage freeze, with job insecurity becoming the norm, and with pressure for health

employers to break with national wages and conditions.

What is the ideology that is being imposed on the health service? It is that every aspect of life, even the misfortune of ill health or accident, is an opportunity to make money, that people should not believe they have a right to health care, a claim on society for the support they might need, but rather that people should fend for themselves.

The many passionate campaigns that are being fought by health workers and people in the community are testimony that this ideology is not being accepted by the population. Yet discussion on such important ideological and political questions is not brought to bear on the running of society and the governing of the country. These facts are showing that the capitalist system is in crisis on these questions also. In this system, the financiers have the first call on the resources in society, their debts must be serviced, no matter at what cost to the

people. Resources devoted to health, education and social services are not viewed as essential investments in society, but as costly expenditures, that political parties must be committed to reduce. It is important that people unite to oppose the cuts and demand that investments in social services be increased. The question can be asked, what kind of democracy is it when the working class and the majority of people are excluded from participating in the political debate and do not have power to prevent policies which they know will take society into disasters not just for now but for the future generations?

Modern-day society has raised the question of universal health care and social welfare. Yet the present political system appears to be aiming at retrogression in this crucial sphere, where society does not provide in such ways for its members. This is dehumanizing society, forcing people to become victims of spontane-

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Available as a pamphlet

**THERE IS A WAY OUT OF THE CRISIS**

Draft document released by the Central Committee of RCPB(ML) for discussion, March 19, 1994

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## Topics from the Study Groups

## Increasing investment in public services

**LOOKING** at the historical development of the economy over the past two hundred years or so, it can be seen that the greater investments in education, health care, housing, old-age pensions, social insurance, and other social benefits, the better the health of the economy.

One of the questions which has arisen, however, in the course of the discussion groups studying the Party's draft document is: where will this money to increase investments come from? The answer is that obviously it will come from rising production. The simple equation is that more values produced will give rise to more values to be invested in social programmes. But if in society there is a check on social production in such a manner that its fruits are expropriated privately, such an equation will not work. It does not matter what the level of social production, social programmes will remain minimal.

At the present time, not only does this equation not work, but another fac-

tor has been added. Private interests are taking over various state sectors in order to make maximum profits for themselves. They are demanding that no monies be invested in the sectors of education, health care, affordable housing and social programmes so that they can run these in a manner which benefits themselves. Furthermore, they also want the monies invested in social programmes to land in their own hands. For instance, the decreasing investments in education at a time the costs have also increased makes it more lucrative for some to provide education because they make greater profits. Health care has long been the preserve of the highest profits for the

pharmaceutical companies and equipment suppliers. Similarly with other public services.

Finally, there is the question of values in social and ethical terms. What kind of people are these who would take values out of the economy for their own pleasure while causing such a devastation to the people that as many as one fifth of the population is condemned to perpetual poverty while the

vast majority face continuous insecurities? The hallmark of a truly humane society is one in which more and more values are put back into the economy so that everyone is provided with the highest of standards. This is an obligation of a truly humane society towards all human beings. In such a society, the people must be in a position to make decisions on all those issues which affect their lives.

### What future for health care? What kind of society?

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ous forces, rather than planning the society to serve the needs of the people. It is pointing the lesson that the state is being run for the benefit of the most powerful economic interests.

The question *What kind of society should be built?* is coming to the forefront of people's minds at this time.

In our opinion, the programme that RCPB(ML) is putting forward that **There Is a Way Out of the Crisis** is very important in answering such questions and that the work to get concerned people's opinions on the Party's draft document is crucial.

*Party activists in  
London*

## DISCUSSION

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# NATIONAL CONSULTATIVE CONFERENCE

**Hampden Community Centre,  
150 Ossulston Street, London NW1**

(nearest tubes: Euston/King's Cross)

**June 25 and 26, 1994**

**Opening Session: June 25, 9:00 a.m.**

**Closing Session: June 26, 5:00 p.m.**

The Revolutionary Communist Party of Britain (Marxist-Leninist) is organising a **National Consultative Conference** on June 25-26, 1994, in order to discuss the draft document released for discussion at the rally on March 19, 1994, celebrating the 15th anniversary of its founding.

The aim of this conference is to involve all the forces which are concerned about the present state of affairs in Britain and the world in elaborating the draft document **There Is a Way Out of the Crisis** and to begin planned work to build a practical programme on this basis.

All activists in various struggles, other Communist Parties, their leadership and rank-and-file and broad masses of the people are warmly invited to attend the conference where discussion will take place on a topic-by-topic basis in which individuals will contribute their comments by turn. A number of papers prepared by the Central Committee of RCPB(ML) will be presented in order to facilitate the discussion.

Anyone who would like to intervene on the basis of a prepared paper must contact RCPB(ML) at least two weeks before the National Consultative Conference takes place.

Hardial Bains, national leader of the Communist Party of Canada (Marxist-Leninist), has been invited to open this conference and participate in the discussion. Various other Communist Parties and organisations from across the five continents have also been invited to attend, along with progressive and democratic personalities.

The National Consultative Conference is the most important forum which has been organised by RCPB(ML) in order to promote discussion on the questions of vital interest for the working class and people of Britain and internationally. Everyone is welcome. A registration fee of £25 (students and unwaged £10) is required to meet the conference expenses. Sandwiches and refreshments will be provided during the proceedings.

The conference proceedings will also be made available in print and video form.

**For further details contact RCPB(ML),  
170 Wandsworth Road, London SW8 2LA. Tel: 071-627 0599**