

Workers' Weekly

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TUC Refuses to Take Up Central Task

OVER the past year, the TUC General Council has been trying to create an impression of debating its future direction. This year's Congress has shown that in reality it has a definite direction, even though this course is taking it headlong up a blind alley.

The main debate of the opening day of the 126th TUC saw the trade union leaders pledging their support for the direction of what they call the "new TUC", a direction which takes the TUC even further from being an organisation of the class and defines its role as that of a pressure group or interest group lobbying government, business and political parties on behalf of its sectional interest.

In defining its role in this way, the TUC makes it clear that it is against fighting for the aims of the working class, in whose interest it is to take society forward, to build a modern society which puts the needs of the people at the centre. The idea of lobbying for sectional interests has nothing in common with the aims of the working class. The TUC has taken this stand at precisely the time when the need for a programme of the working class is the crucial task to be taken up, to give rise to a programme around which the class can unite and rally all sections of society who are interested in progress.

In its mission statement, the General Council talks of lobbying for trade union aims and values. But the question

of what these aims and values are is avoided. Why does the General Council fail to define these? Could it be because these aims and values have no connection with those of the working class? For example, in the debate on the future of the TUC, the working class was mentioned only once, and then by an ordinary delegate from a smaller trade union. As the week drew on, it became clear that not only did the TUC's new path have no connection with the working class, but that a broad attack on the class was taking place.

By mid-week, the focus of interest had turned to the Labour Party. Tony Blair visited Blackpool. The question of whether he would or would not pledge support for striking signal workers was made an issue of debate in the media. Tony Blair refused to back the signal workers, suggesting that politicians should keep out, but said that a Labour government would treat trade unions and workers with "fairness, not favours". John Monks concurred that this was precisely what the TUC wanted. Under pressure from events, the alliance between the financial oligarchy and the labour aristocracy is breaking down. This is re-

flected in the Labour Party and trade unions, each for their own interests, distancing themselves from one another. The Labour Party wants to distance itself in order to go for power. The TUC, on the other hand, is concerned that it will lose out on the spoils of privilege and power if it is tied solely to the Labour Party.

But even though this situation creates the opportunity for the working class movement to take a decisive step forward, to take up its own politics and prepare its own programme of action, the TUC chiefs make it clear that workers must keep out of

politics. John Edmonds, for example, stressed that the programme of the new TUC meant an increased concentration on the workplace at the expense of wider issues. The TUC wants to concentrate on the one hand on lobbying as an "interest group" and on the other on supplying "specialist advice" to members.

If the meaning of "new" and "old" were examined in the context of trade unions and the working class movement, an objective analysis would have to conclude that "old" would mean the working class and trade unions keeping out of politics and

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Russia and China, the working class and the changing world

Jiang Zemin, President of the People's Republic of China, recently paid an official visit to the Russian Federation. While in the Russian Federation, besides meeting its President, Boris Yeltsin, Jiang Zemin revealed the complexion of China's foreign policy for this period. According to reports, this foreign policy is based on political considerations which will have far-reaching consequences under the present circumstances. This foreign policy rejects that relations between independent and sovereign states of the

world should be based on ideology. It sharply rebukes the cold war policy which remains the basis of the foreign policy of the US, Britain, Germany, France, Japan and some other countries.

It is not necessary to establish at this time whether this foreign policy as enunciated by Jiang Zemin during his visit to the Russian Federation is a new or old foreign policy for China. What is important is that Boris Yeltsin declared his full agreement with it. At the heart of this foreign

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THE PARTY AND ITS WORK**Today's problem needs today's solution**

THE main message to the working class from the TUC was that it should give up the idea that it can do anything to escape from the crisis or to resist the widescale attacks on its conditions of life. The same message is of course carried by the monopoly media, by Labour, Tory and Liberal and the establishment in general.

The fact is, however, that there is a way out of the crisis, as outlined in the Party's draft document from the March 19 Rally. It is the working class which has to lead this way out of the crisis in the course of moving towards the creation of a new society. How will the working class do this in the face of all the pressure that it should keep out of politics, that it has nothing to say or contribute? How will workers who are totally dissatisfied with the parties which say "sit back and vote for us, we will solve your problems", but lack confidence in their own abilities to change the situation, come forward as the leading force?

The Party having established its draft general line and set into motion the work of preparing the draft pro-

gramme for the class, the question of how this line and programme will be disseminated amongst and discussed by workers must be a major consideration of the basic units. A more general consideration is also the question of how the Party will be built in the workplaces. One of the characteristics of revisionism has always been to turn away from the notion that the party must be built in the workplace. Thus, the Communist Party of Great Britain, once it had established its "British road to socialism" also set about dismantling workplace organisations and establishing the CPGB as a party with a solely parliamentary perspective.

One of the theoretical considerations outlined by the Central Committee at the

Consultative Conference on June 25-26 was that the working class must build its own party. The modern working class of the late 20th century is not the same working class of Lenin's day when Lenin pointed out that consciousness must be brought to the workers from outside. Today in Britain we have an educated, disciplined and experienced working class which has every possibility of organising for and building a new society, except of course that whilst the objective conditions for revolution exist, the subjective factor is lacking. The task for this period remains that of creating the subjective conditions for revolution. This remains the case even more so in this temporary period in which revolution is in retreat.

It would be easy to echo the solutions of the past, but today's problem has to find today's solution. The Party, even though it is small and with limited resources, has

to find the solution to this problem, without which the work to formulate the draft programme for the class will remain unfulfilled. It is a task which must be on the agenda of all the basic units. For the working class to build its own party, there is a need for the workers to be drawn into the task of solving the problems of the class themselves. It is because the TUC and others do not want the workers to take up these problems that they want to turn the trade unions into organisations for lobbying and providing professional services. This is one form of pressure on workers. Another form is that they should concern themselves only with workerist positions, that they should concern themselves only with questions concerning wages and conditions and ignore the aims of the class, the need to create a new society. The notion that the aims of the class must be subordinate to the day to day questions, rather than the day to day questions being viewed in the context of the aims of the class, remains to this day a factor preventing the workers' movement advancing.

Workers need to gain confidence that they can analyse the situation themselves, write about their situation and take this analysis out to others. This points to the necessity of a new type of organisation of the workers to deal with today's situation. Objectively, the conditions point to the need for this and it is the task of the whole Party to respond to the need.

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FOR BRITISH WITHDRAWAL FROM IRELAND!**British government must end its pretexts for continued annexation**

WITH the struggle of the Irish people for self-determination moving into a new phase, so too must the struggle within Britain to demand an end to the annexation of part of Ireland and for British withdrawal.

The crucial question raised by the IRA's cessation of military operations is what the response of the British government is to be. John Major's government is trying to suggest that the issue now is whether the republican forces' ceasefire is permanent or not. But its own interests internationally, participating in the struggle between the big powers taking place within the conditions of the present world disequilibrium, point to its need for peace in Ireland.

Essentially, there are two paths open to the British government. One is that it will gradually over a period of time reduce troop levels, aiming ultimately to turn troops to barracks and bring about a new form of devolved government such as existed prior to 1969. Such a policy will not succeed, because the situation has changed both in Ireland and Britain, as elsewhere, and the past cannot be resurrected. The other path would be to respond to the new situation by declaring that it will allow the Irish people themselves to solve their problems and reunify their country by beginning the long-overdue process of removing British troops and winding up the British administrative machinery in northern Ireland. The latter course will be the

only way to bring about a genuine peace in Ireland.

There are other factors as well. The US government

is planning to step in with promises of big capital investments. The contradictions which emerged at the time of Gerry Adams' visit to the US last winter seem set to deepen once again. How will the British gov-

ernment view an increased US presence in northern Ireland? The government of the Irish Republic has its interests in the north as well.

What is crucial is that the British working class has

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leaving this field to political parties, and the Labour Party in particular. It is this old policy which has driven the TUC to its present position of impotence and the working class movement into a cul de sac. On the other hand, "new" means what is best from the experience of the 20th century, it means what is needed at the present in order for the movement to find a way forward, "new" means for the working class not to have itself distanced from politics by political parties, but to take up politics itself. Essentially, over the week of the Blackpool Congress, it is on this point that the attack on the working class took place. The TUC's "new" policy is that the working class should keep out of politics even more. And even though there is a formal distancing between the trade union and Labour Party leaderships, the illusion was created as much as ever that the Labour Party could come to power and make capitalism work, that it would solve the problems of workers through its policy of "fairness". Even where this was not openly stated, with the TUC arguing that the movement should

confine itself to lobbying and professional advice, the point was made just as strongly.

By the end of the week, Congress had gone on to spell out its agenda of what it would be lobbying government, business and political parties for. Even though it was not putting forward a programme for the working class, a programme nevertheless revealed itself. Recognising the depth of the crisis but having no alternative, refusing to pinpoint the fact that capitalism is in the phase of jobless growth and that this stems from its inability to harness science and technology in the interests of society, it railed against the excesses of capitalism, blaming these on the Tories. The TUC complained at the level of unemployment, cutbacks in expenditure, and new trade union legislation. But it made no mention of the stage of capitalism and how this stage brought forth these measures. It called for investment in manufacturing, an internationally competitive economy and measures to help industry. Commentators suggested that the TUC was attempting to make a "constructive contribution to increasing competitiveness".

What the new TUC put forward was essentially a programme for the middle strata which are also suffering in the crisis, with the cutbacks in social programmes directly affecting their jobs and businesses. With their huge salaries, the trade union leaders form a part of the middle strata and, like it, they see nothing revolutionary in the disintegrating aspects of the capitalist system, only their own ruin. The programme put forward by the TUC is therefore a programme to try to restore capitalism to health, to have capitalism without those aspects which are its inevitable consequence. The programme which the TUC is going to lobby for is aimed at creating illusions amongst the workers as to the future health of the society which causes their ruin. It is a programme in direct contradiction with the programme of the working class. This places before the class with even greater urgency the necessity to formulate its own programme and to find the mechanisms which can allow it to defeat the programme of the TUC and organise for the success of its own programme.

Russia and China, the working class and the changing world

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policy are the five principles of peaceful co-existence which China puts forward, a foreign policy which insists that every country, big or small, has the right to choose its own system without foreign interference from any quarter. For the Russian Federation to accept such a basis for international relations is actually a great fiasco for the CSCE, a grouping comprised of the countries of Europe, the US and Canada, which is strictly based on dictating to the world that only a "free market economy" and a "multi-party system" and "pluralism" should be recognised as the true features of democracy.

According to news agency reports, "The Kremlin, where a pragmatic search for a Russian approach to market economics has replaced pro-Western 'liberal romanticism', is looking with nostalgia at Beijing's firm control over its economy and with envy at its economic success." They report that "both leaders stressed that the international community should acknowledge that there is no single pattern for the development of all countries and that all countries should be equal".

What these and other reports indicate, together with the border agreements reached by Russia and China and their decision to turn their nuclear missiles away from each other, is that an extremely important development is taking place in the

world. The working class should support this development as positive and take advantage of it in order to advance its own interests.

The USSR during the period of Stalin's leadership upheld a political basis for relations between states and opposed any ideological blackmail by the US or any other country. Khrushchev abandoned this policy by insisting on basing international relations on ideological considerations, breaking with the People's Republic of Albania in 1961, invading Czechoslovakia in 1968 and Afghanistan in 1980, and dividing the world into two camps on this basis.

This shift in policy by Khrushchev was consistent with the imperialist policy pursued by the 14 countries which invaded Russia after the October Revolution strictly because of ideological considerations – their opposition to communism and Soviet power – and with the Truman doctrine adopted in the 1947-8 period which became known as the Cold War. It was an imperialist policy which is still being practised by the US and other countries. This shift in the policy on which foreign relations were based deprived the working class of its potential to transform the world in its own interest and was one of the causes of its defeat, in turn contributing to the retreat of revolution.

The fact that China and the Russian Federation, two big powers in the world

at this time, have declared their support for relations based on political and not ideological considerations will be a big blow to the imperialist policy of aggression and intervention. It provides the working class with the opportunity to present its own independent programme for the creation of a new order, that is, a socialist order. Whether or not the Russian Federation or the People's Republic of China stick to these policies forever, given that their leaders have proclaimed themselves to be pragmatic, is not the issue

here. The issue for the working class is that it should use the occasion to oppose the US imperialist policy of "reordering" the world according to its own interests.

In this regard, the working class of Britain should also demand that John Major's government abandon this ideological basis for international relations and any interventionist basis for its foreign policy. The visit of Boris Yeltsin to Britain in two weeks time would be an opportune occasion for it to do so.

British withdrawal from Ireland

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to make its presence felt in this situation. Firstly, by demanding that the British government declare its intention to withdraw and cease all attempts to dictate to the Irish how the peace process should proceed. Secondly, it has to demand that the constitutional changes brought about by an end of Westminster control over part of Ireland are carried through to the deep-going constitutional changes needed in Britain, with a view to bringing about a modern constitution for Britain. Thirdly, it has to take full advantage of all the contradictions between these rival powers to pursue a policy for genuine advance both within Ireland and Britain.

Last week, John Major spoke of the necessity to build a Europe based on the nation state. Leaving aside the fact that his vision is a

retrogressive one harking back to the past, the contradiction between demanding a Europe based on nation states, whilst denying that right to the Irish nation could not be more apparent. And will John Major recognise the right of the nations of Scotland and Wales to self-determination and all that entails? In other words, the working class must take advantage of the present situation to point out the need for renewal of the British state and that national rights can only be guaranteed through the establishment of a modern state based on the equality of the freely participating nations.

In Ireland, the republican ceasefire has taken away the strongest argument the British government has been able to give for the past 25 years to justify its continued annexation of the six counties.