

permanent revolution



Convention of the Left – Manchester September 2008

www.permanentrevolution.net

UNITING THE LEFT

Building a revolutionary alternative

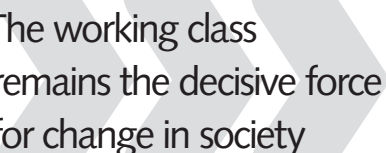
THE LAST 10 years offered plenty of opportunities for the socialist left to make a significant step forward. The brutality of globalisation, the betrayals by New Labour, the war on Iraq and Afghanistan and now the economic turmoil of the credit crunch have led to anger and organised protest. The anti-capitalist protests brought many thousands on to the streets, the anti-war movement mobilised millions.

Yet under these favourable conditions the left in Britain has shrunk. It is divided and weak. It is marginal in society at large. And it shows few signs of recovering from the blows it suffered at the hands of Thatcher back in the 1980s.

In many cases the far left has thrown away the ideological compass of revolutionary Marxism, along with the clear-cut socialist goals that it pointed to. Instead it has adapted its politics to any would-

be allies who seemed to promise electoral success.

Even basic democratic and general socialist demands, such as the right to free abortion on demand and opposition to all immigration controls, have been



The working class
remains the decisive force
for change in society

sacrificed at different times, by different groups in the search for 80/20 unity, electoral success, building a “broad” party, incorporating “new layers” and so on. Needless to say, the basic goal of revolutionary

socialism – a revolution and the creation of a state based on working class power – was tossed into the furnace early on in this process.

The Scottish Socialist Party, the Socialist Alliance and Respect – each is guilty of watering down the socialist programme and each clearly founded on the basis of “agreeing to differ” over the question of reform or revolution.

They could not even claim that their horse-trading over the socialist programme led to a mass influx into the left or a serious growth in its influence in the unions and working class communities.

But their record is one of failure. It is one of rancorous splits, disillusionment and the driving of socialists away from the movement. It is a terrible record and it includes actions that are a stain on the movement, actions that have dismayed workers looking on.

The fate of these three organisations cries out for someone to tell the truth: just as there is no parliamentary road to socialism, so there is no parliamentary road to principled socialist unity and the creation of a genuine socialist party.

Just because we come to this conclusion does not mean that our answer is to stick a flag in the sand and say: join us. John Nicholson, in the Feedback section of this magazine, is quite right to point out that this too has failed as a method of rebuilding the left.

But nor is it a case for closing your eyes to the fact that the “broad party” has proved itself just as useless to the task of rebuilding the left as is sect building. We need a new approach – not a new broad party.

The working class remains the decisive force for change in society. Its organisations, its social power and strength can swing the balance of forces away from the bosses. Yet it is ill equipped for this task because too many on the left refuse to acknowledge that as a movement it is in terrible shape.

www.permanentrevolution.net

Greeting every day of action – orchestrated by the union leaders and carefully contained by them – as the dawn of a new era of militancy will not resolve this problem. Nor will placing our faith in the election of left officials, no matter how good they sound in advance of their election.

Directing our efforts towards rebuilding the bedrock organisations, the shop stewards' committees in the workplaces, the trades councils in the wider movement and the national unions as democratic fighting organisations, can.

The left can and should unite to ensure that the days of action, the strikes in each sector, the everyday components of the class struggle in the workplaces and the elections for office in the unions, all help further this process of reviving the workers' movement at a rank and file level.

A revived workers' movement, always and everywhere, will confront political questions: how do we combat the anti-union laws, how do we deal with climate change, how do we stop the relentless drive to war? A vibrant left, one that sets itself apart from its past tendency to regard backroom bartering over programme and predatory attempts to secure monopoly organisational control over campaigns

and struggles, can answer these questions by reviving socialism.

A socialist movement worthy of the name, with social clubs, sports facilities, local papers and radio stations, websites and so on could educate and train a new generation of working class activists to provide the political answers the workers' movement needs. It would not be a party – sticking its flag in the sand – it would be a

A socialist movement worthy of the name could educate and train a new generation of working class activists

mass anti-capitalist movement, promoting fighting unity and recreating the political confidence of the working class.

But a movement is not a substitute for a party. Within both a rebuilt labour movement and a vibrant mass socialist movement we would continue to make the case

for what we believe is necessary, not just to change the movement, but to change the world – a revolutionary working class party.

The need for such a party lies in the fact that a workers' movement and a socialist movement can agree on many things to unite around in the everyday struggle. But how do we go beyond the everyday struggle? How do we achieve our final goal?

We believe there needs to be a revolutionary party, free and able to answer this question in its own way and seek to win the ranks of the movement to that answer. We don't want to win them through the crooked, discredited and manipulative ways of old. We want to win them by fighting resolutely alongside them and convincing them that our ideas are right.

The Convention of the Left has proposed a founding statement which calls for the establishment of local left forums and for a recall conference on 29 November.

We support that call.

These are tentative early steps. But if the left is able to build local forums that can draw in activists and take the ideas of socialism and working class struggle into the labour movement then that will be an important first step forward.

permanentrevolution



ISSUE 10 OUT NOW!

Cuba: the last workers' state? Will Cuba follow the Chinese road to capitalism?

UK economy: a perfect storm

China: the remaking of the working class

US Labor: searching for its own voice

Plus political briefings, interviews and book reviews

MANCHESTER MARXIST RADICAL FORUM MEETING

Sex and the Revolution

First meeting of the Marxist Radical Forum, held in conjunction with the UMSU women's group, the Riveters

5:30-7:30pm Monday 29 September

Meeting Room 4 (basement of Students' Union) Oxford Road

SPEAKERS

Catherine – International Union of Sex Workers

Vicky Thompson – Permanent Revolution

Jennie Killip – UMSU Women's Officer

Come and listen to the speakers, join in the debate and change the world!

PHOTOGRAPHY NOT PERMITTED