

Championing internationalism in the post-coronavirus world Labour CND RESPONSE

Q4: International priorities and global leadership

Global leadership takes many forms. In recent years, the UK's positive contributions have included 'soft power' mechanisms around development and diplomacy contributed via international institutions such as the United Nations. Other countries have shown real leadership on multilateral nuclear disarmament discussions – an area where Britain has a dishonourable record.

In 2013, Norway hosted the first of a series of international conferences on the humanitarian consequences of nuclear weapons which initiated a dialogue that resulted in the UN Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW, commonly known as the Global Ban Treaty) of July 2017. Nuclear weapon states including Britain were embarrassed into attending the third of these conference in Vienna and signed up to what became known as the Humanitarian Pledge to 'fill the legal gap for the prohibition and elimination of nuclear weapons'.

But the UK voted in the UN against opening negotiations on the text of the treaty, boycotted the talks, and absented itself from the General Assembly vote to adopt the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons.

There is widespread support for getting rid of nuclear weapons. Two-thirds of all countries support the global ban. In Britain between 2006-2016, while parliament debated replacing Trident successive opinion polls showed a majority of the British public opposed it. A Times-YouGov poll last September suggested 70% of Labour Party members opposed nuclear weapons.

The term global leadership is not neutral. It can be code for negative and reactionary actions by governments. British society is currently reflecting the on-going legacy of our colonial history brought to the fore by Black Lives Matter protests, emphasising the link with Britain's colonial history.

Past Labour governments are not immune from criticism. In 2007 the then Deputy Leader Harriet Harman acknowledged the 'anger and bitterness' amongst party members caused by Iraq war. Three years later a new Labour leader, Ed Miliband, stated the party had been 'wrong to take Britain to war, and we need to be honest about that'. When the Chilcot Report was published in 2016, Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn told the House of Commons: 'Military action in Iraq not only turned a humanitarian crisis into a disaster, but it also convulsed the entire region.' Former head of MI5 Baroness Manningham-Buller's evidence to the Chilcot Inquiry made clear that the war had increased the threat of terrorism in Britain.

Recent history shows the Labour Party should not draft policy on the presumption of 'needing' to offer global leadership. Illusions of grandeur and delusions about the nature of any so-called 'special relationship' with the United States, show how wrong our international orientation can be.

It's time for Labour to break with bipartisanship and strive for an independent, non-aligned foreign policy, based on the primacy of peace outlined in the 2019 manifesto. Labour should acknowledge our history, accept Britain's role in the world is not always benign even under Labour governments, and take care not to fall into lazy colonial language that assumes we have a right to lead the world.

ENDS

498 words