

Tony Blair - a journey to Thatcherism

TONY BLAIR'S memoirs show that he really was Thatcher's heir. He tries to justify New Labour's capitalist economic policies, ferociously attacking Gordon Brown for daring to "depart a millimetre from New Labour." Blair and Brown, of course, jointly fathered the 'New Labour project'.

Roger Shrivess

When the present recession started, Brown and his chancellor Darling spent hundreds of billions of pounds bailing out the banks. But they also put up the top rate of income tax for people earning over £150,000 a year to 50%. People were angry at rich business people giving themselves high salaries and bonuses and paying very little tax.

Blair savages this policy from the position of the free market right. He says: "We should have taken a New Labour way out of the economic crisis: kept direct tax rates competitive (ie low - Eds), had a gradual rise in VAT and other indirect taxes to close the deficit."

Even after the stock market falls, Britain's richest 1,000 people still had a combined wealth of £258 bil-

lion. Yet Blair supported regressive indirect taxation that hits hardest at people on low or average incomes and opposed even ameliorative measures for the working class.

He argues that under Brown, 'tax and spend' policies were 'Keynesianism' and wrong. Keynes was a capitalist economist who argued that, in a recession, the state should step up its spending to stimulate demand.

Blair, though, does not think a mere crisis is any reason to change New Labour's pro-market neoliberal policies. His memoirs say: "The role of government is to stabilise and then get out of the way as quickly as is economically sensible." He thinks government measures could "squeeze innovation out of the financial sector."

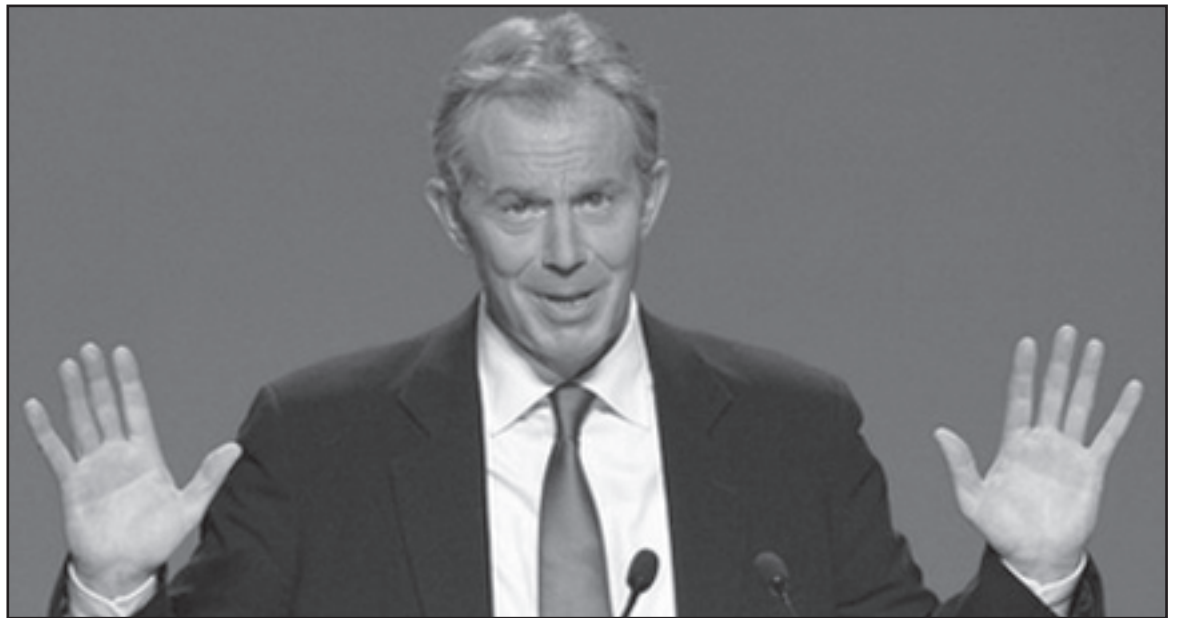
New Labour

RECESSION, HOWEVER, made capitalist governments desperate to save their system. Brown's government was forced, to Blair's chagrin, not only to pump in taxpayers' money but part-nationalise banks such as Northern Rock and RBS.

The capitalist class in general welcomed the measures taken to stop the banking system collapsing. But Blair hates all aspects of Keynesianism and sees any deviation from neoliberalism as Bolshevism! Even leaders of capitalist parties such as the US Democrats can attack the rich in words at least but not Blair.

Blair speaks like a Tory right-winger because he'd changed Labour, a party based at grassroots on the working class and the ideas of socialist nationalisation, into New Labour which - under the thumb of big business - favoured privatisation and thought wrongly that capitalism was possible without booms and slumps.

When this proved wrong, and the weak, unstable boom collapsed, Blair may have thought all his work was unravelling. Possibly he had



Shoot the messenger!

nightmares of battles such as those Labour had with the Socialist Party's predecessor Militant in the 1980s!

But what is this red dragon that Blair aims to slaughter? Brown's economic measures after the recession were very mild Keynesianism - little state spending was increased apart from the bank bail-out. And Darling's post-recession budgets started cutting public spending to pay for the bailout. This policy continues under the Con-Dem government.

Keynesian policies would not end this crisis - that would need socialist policies based on nationalisation. But Blair has fallen out with his New Labour soulmate Brown because their attempt to build a permanent party of government based on free market capitalism has failed.

Workers will take heed of this furore at the top of the Labour Party. Instead of choosing between almost indistinguishable potential Labour leaders, they should join in campaigns to resist the cuts and fight for a new mass workers' party.

HOW INTERESTING to read that Tony Blair admitted in his book that he got something wrong. Could it be his decision to leave in place the Tories' anti-trade union laws? Could it be his decision to push council housing into the hands of private landlords or even his decision to continue with the discredited Tory privatisation of our railways?

Perhaps it was his decision not to give us a referendum on the European constitution (simply renamed the Lisbon treaty) after he promised us he would give us a say? Might it have been his decision to part-privatise our National Health Service - and mortgage the future of the NHS with PFI hospitals?

Taking our country into an illegal war in Iraq might have been another possibility, misleading us that there were "weapons of mass destruction" that simply didn't exist?

No, Blair apparently tells us that his biggest regret was to ban people from inflicting unnecessary suffering on wild animals by allowing our MPs to vote to ban hunting wild animals with dogs (a piece of legislation that's full of loopholes anyway).

When Blair and his brigade took over the Labour Party they indicated they were taking it on a journey. For many of us that journey was in entirely the wrong direction and we left the party we had campaigned for and loved for years.

Reading the media articles on Blair's book, even our friends and comrades who stayed with Labour must be shocked, saddened and dismayed about just how far in the wrong direction they have actually travelled.

Craig Johnston, RMT transport union national executive, Manchester and North West England

Academies will lead to a two-tier education system

THE GOVERNMENT'S plans to encourage 'outstanding' schools to take a fast-track to 'academy' status are a threat to the future of comprehensive local authority schooling. They could introduce a fragmented two-tier education system where 'successful' schools opt-out of the local authority, taking money with them as they go, leaving cash-starved councils with the schools - and pupils - that need most help.

Martin Powell-Davies,
National Union of Teachers (NUT)
executive (personal capacity)

The ability of outstanding schools to continue with high quality teaching and learning will not be enhanced by becoming an academy. Research on existing academies presents a very mixed picture of their educational performance.

The government has made it crystal clear that they wish to remove national pay and conditions arrangements from teachers. Allowing individual academies to set their own arrangements is intended to be one of the mechanisms to achieve this aim.

Fortunately, many schools have held back from rushing into becoming academies this September. In fact only 32 schools have reopened after the summer break as independent academies. But Tidemill



Despite the lure of extra cash, only 32 schools reopened as academies.

school in Deptford, south London, is pursuing academy status.

The school hit the headlines when it was revealed that its headteacher, Mark Elms, was paid around £250,000 in 2009/10.

Campaign

UNDER PRESSURE, the government has conceded that parents should be consulted over plans to become an academy - but Tidemill's timetable shows how limited that 'consultation' can be.

As last term drew to a close, Tidemill children were handed a letter for parents on 19 July saying that the governors were consulting for two months (ie over the summer

holidays) before they make a decision early in September!

But some parents were not prepared to accept this sham consultation. An inaugural meeting of 'Tidemill Parents Against Academies' was held over the summer and, with the support of the NUT and Anti-Academies Alliance, leafleting has already taken place in Deptford with a lot of support from local residents and parents. A subsequent campaign meeting on 6 September was informed that the deadline has now been extended into October.

Local councillors are now beginning to ask questions - but time is tight to put enough pressure on the governors to hold back.

Jobs and services are facing axe in Cornwall

PROPOSED CUTS in Cornwall council's expenditure that are due to be announced in October will have a devastating impact on services and jobs.

Terry Turvey
Socialist Party - Penzance

The Tory council leader, Alec Robertson, says the council is looking to shed an unprecedented 2,000 jobs out of a workforce of 22,000. He has also indicated that cuts in vital services for children and adults are not out of the question in a bid to cut £110 million over the next four years. Given that many communities across Cornwall are very poor this does not bode well for the most vulnerable and needy.

Certainly in Penzance, where I live, this is only too apparent. For example, a day centre providing physical and emotional support to the elderly and their relatives that

had been previously threatened with closure (but reprieved after community resistance) is, once again, a likely target.

Feared cuts in council grants to organisations providing services to adults with drug and alcohol dependency problems is of significant concern. The same applies to essential children and family services.

Cuts by the Con-Dem government in housing and other benefits will make matters a lot worse for the poor and as high levels of unemployment rise further there is little doubt social problems will increase too.

However, it is not all bad news in Cornwall. As the capitalist elite protect themselves, at the cost of making the poor even poorer and allowing working class communities to decay, the annual salary of the chief executive of Cornwall council has just entered the top 30 of chief executive earnings across the country. He 'earned' a 'mere' £238,000.

PCS denounces union busting

CIVIL SERVICE union PCS branch secretary Sam Buckley is the fifth union officer at the Child Support Agency office in Hastings to be sacked on trumped-up charges since 2007.

PCS conference this year described CSA Hastings as "the Bermuda Triangle of the Civil Service"

- because of the way that people who stand up to management disappear.

PCS, backed by Hastings trades council, have called a demonstration and rally for Saturday 18 September. Assemble 1pm, at Hastings Pier.