

Review: Blue Labour 'Shame on you for turning Blue'

Steve Score

Secretary, East Midlands Socialist Party

BBC Radio 4's Analysis programme recently looked at 'Blue Labour' (BL).

I thought we already had 'Blue Labour', given the complete acceptance by New Labour of the Tory Party's 'neoliberal' agenda and many of its social policies. But apparently it's not 'blue' enough! Behind BL is an attempt to shift Labour even further to the right on social issues and, in particular, a further attack on the welfare state.

In the internal debate about the future direction of the Labour Party a group has been formed around Maurice Glasman, recently appointed to the House of Lords by Labour leader Ed Miliband.

Glasman has previously been quoted as saying that Labour needs to 'return' to the values of "a deeply conservative socialism that places family, faith and work at the heart of a new politics of reciprocity, mutuality and solidarity".

On the programme he was supported by the likes of former Labour minister James Purnell. BL is being promoted as Labour's answer to Cameron's 'Big Society', yet another code word for cuts and privatisation. It certainly sounds suspiciously similar to Tory rhetoric.

In Labour's working class heartlands many voters have broken with their previously traditional party. Instead of drawing the conclusion that this breakaway is because Labour carried out pro-big business policies, presided over the decimation of jobs, cut and privatised public services, and stopped representing working class people, BL looks for other solutions.

They quote the fears that many people have over immigration, for example, due to the scarcity of jobs and stretched public services.

But instead of answering those fears with a programme of creating jobs and homes, expanding services, and pointing to the real cause of those problems - big business and capitalism - they adopt a British National Party (BNP) style programme on immigration.

The rise of the BNP vote has everything to do with the abandonment of working class people by Labour. Attempting to wear the same clothes merely increases the far-right, racist BNP's credibility.

The programme tried to categorise Labour's support as middle class graduates who were socially 'liberal' and concerned with equality on the one hand, and working class people, who were socially 'conservative' but were yearning for a return to community values on the other. The former were apparently won over to Blairism, but it was the latter's fault that Labour lost the 2010 general election!

What a false dichotomy! Blairism brought us such socially 'liberal' things as clamping down on civil liberties and the 'war on terror'. Of course working class people want equality - it reflects the middle class prejudices of the authors of Blue Labour to think they don't! Not many people in either of those falsely separated social categories supported Labour's university tuition fees.

The proponents of Blue Labour have in particular attacked the post-1945 welfare state as being 'bureaucratic'. Instead they put forward 'mutuals, co-operatives and friendly societies, the creation of local banks and worker representation on company boards'. They want 'more localised provision of services, an end to



Blue Labour provides no real answers for housing, jobs or public services photo Paul Mattsson

Labour's obsession with post code lotteries!

But this sounds to me like a token reference to genuine democratic control of services with an agenda behind it of further privatisation and break-up of services. The 'post code lottery' exists because of inadequate resources being put into local services.

Yes, the Socialist Party supports proper democratic control by the workers and users of services; yes we support real workers' control and management of companies. But that firstly needs public ownership - you can't control what you don't own -

and secondly not just a token workers' "representative", but a board of management elected by the workers and users of services.

In reality they are talking about the dismantling of services in the same way that the Big Society does, after all even Cameron talked of "co-operatives".

It is a comment on how far Labour has shifted to the right that Roy Hattersley, a solid right winger in 'old Labour' terms was brought on to criticise Blue Labour from the left!

The working class does need political representation, but it will not come from the Labour Party. A new

party of the working class is needed, one that opposes the capitalist agenda of cuts and privatisation of all the main parties.

The likes of Miliband can pose on demo platforms, but they are offering more of the same cuts, except 'slower'.

Blue Labour proponents bandy around words like 'solidarity' and 'community', but a real sense of solidarity and working class community will come out of the battles to defend public services we are now embarking on, and a real working class alternative to New Labour will be created out of those struggles.

Bellingham by-election: A warning to Labour councillors

Martin Powell-Davies

Lewisham Socialist Party

Socialist Party member and former councillor Ian Page received 12% of the vote in the 24 March Bellingham ward by-election in Lewisham, south London. The support for Ian is a warning to Labour councils: working people are growing tired of their excuses!

Lewisham Socialist Party, standing jointly with Lewisham People Before Profit, understood that Labour won the seat as many voters want to punish the Tories and Lib Dems. But our message was clear: Labour won't stop cuts!

Lewisham's Labour council is making £88 million of cuts over the next four years, slashing jobs and services. Yet Labour councillors want to put all the blame on the Con-Dems.

Voting for anti-cuts candidate Ian Page was the best way to show that working class areas like Bellingham need councillors who will fight all cuts.

In a few weeks, the Socialist Party secured a real base of support in a ward where we had not previously



Campaigning against all cuts: Socialist Party candidate Ian Page photo Lewisham SP

campaigned. We pointed to Ian's fighting record as a socialist councillor in Telegraph Hill ward.

In Bellingham, hatred for the government was mixed with anger at Labour councillors who are carrying out the Tories' dirty work - slashing jobs, closing libraries and privatising children's centres.

One Labour councillor had to come up to a Socialist Party campaigning stall for directions. "I'm meant to be meeting the Labour team outside the Housing Office," she explained.

"Yes, but you closed it," came our reply, pointing to the boarded up office behind us!

On election day, when Ian finally finished knocking on people's doors, he realised he had dropped the keys to his scooter. A group of lads came out of one house to say they had found them. When they realised it was Ian, they said that their family had voted for him. That's working class solidarity!

Labour 1,100 51%
Tory 340 16%
Lib Dem 334 16%
Ian Page SP/LPBP 264 12%
Greens 100 5%
Turnout 22%

Against cuts? Support the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition

The Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC) will be standing anti-cuts candidates across Britain in May's local, Scottish Parliament and Welsh Assembly elections.

TUSC was set up last year with the backing of fighting trade unionists, including RMT general secretary Bob Crow, leading national officers of the PCS civil service union, and Nina Franklin, vice president of the National Union of Teachers.

TUSC is a federal 'umbrella' coalition with an agreed core policy statement. Its core policies include opposition to public spending cuts and privatisation, student grants not fees, the repeal of the anti-trade union laws, and the clear

socialist commitment to "bringing into democratic public ownership the major companies and banks that dominate the economy, so that production and services can be planned to meet the needs of all and to protect the environment".

• See those detailed policies on the coalition's website - www.tusc.org.uk

Nominations to stand in May's council elections have to be submitted to your local council by 4 April.

Organisations and groups that want to be involved in the 2011 TUSC local council election challenge should urgently contact TUSC at: electioncoalition@btinternet.com



TUSC is backed by RMT general secretary Bob Crow photo Paul Mattsson