

Labour breaks out the riot gear!

Anarchist Communist Federation

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Contents

Straw Dog	3
Wet Blunkett	3
Cuts and gagging	3
Firm and Unfair	4

AS THE POLITICAL parties gear up for an impending election, Labour is energetically seeking to mark itself out as the party that speaks for the “Nation”. To do this, it needs to show that it is the defender of so-called social unity, that it is the inheritor of the social consensus constructed by both the Conservatives and Labour in the immediate post-war years. It has to underline national unity, it has to speak as the voice of reason. It has to show it enthusiastically supports the values of what is portrayed as a Golden Age of Britain before the last 15 years of ruling class attack under the Thatcher and Major regimes. This means it has to show it is able to govern well. It has to impress sections of the boss class, who are showing themselves more open to backing Labour, both verbally, financially and through the ballot box. It seeks to get the support of some of the press barons, whose support at election time would be valuable. It looks towards the vote of sections of the population that have traditionally voted Conservative or Liberal. This means that it has to present itself as a staunch advocate of law and order, and of traditional values.

Straw Dog

This is why Jack Straw has stated that when Labour are in office they will adopt “zero tolerance” towards “anti-social behaviour”. Part of this get-tough policy will apparently include a curfew on under 10 year olds after 9pm. This will not be carried out by the State. Straw would offload the burden of this extra policing onto local councils. At one fell swoop he can demonise children and prepare the way for methods of the Strong State. Not surprisingly, seeing as how New Labour look towards the US Democratic Party as a model, Straw has taken a leaf out of Clinton’s book. The US President gave his backing to a 8pm curfew imposed on under-17s in New Orleans. Straw also proposed a single final warning for young offenders to replace the present system of a series of cautions.

Wet Blunkett

David Blunkett, Labour’s spokesman on education, has demanded a return to traditional teaching methods. What this means is not smaller classes and good facilities, as well as well qualified teachers, but larger classes and lessons by rote. Labour will make no effort to put any more money into schools, but instead seeks to steal one of the Conservatives’ traditional slogans. Earlier he had stated that student grants would be abolished under Labour, with a saving of £1 billion. He proposed a system of extended loans. This would aggravate the situation for any working class student, already suffering hardship. But as Blunkett himself said:” The great advantage of this scheme is that it helps substantially the middle and lower-middle income parents”. Tough if you’re working class.

Cuts and gagging

For his part, Gordon Brown, Labour’s Shadow Chancellor, made clear that the squeeze on public spending, initiated by the Callaghan-led Labour government and then perpetuated by the Conservatives, would continue under his rule. He talked about “making Britain great again”, about partnership with the private sector, about cutting out waste. Translated into plain English, this means that the rundown of the public sector will continue, as will the creeping privatisation, as

well as continuing sackings and virtual wage freezes for public sector workers. Brown is ending out signals to the boss class that things will be the same in Labour hands, in fact this way of carrying on will be applied more efficiently!

Chris Smith, speaking on Labour's plans for welfare, stressed the increasing role of private insurance. He also called for a redefinition of poverty, copying Conservatives' oft-expressed views. This means that millions can be taken off welfare benefits by saying that they're not poor in the first place! Coupled with proposals to cut child benefit and the projected "work for benefit" schemes Labour shows that it is as fully committed to the dismantling of welfarism as the Conservatives.

Any signs of dissent, indeed any indications that Labour will adopt even 'liberal' measures are quickly stamped on by the Labour leadership. When Clare Short, Labour's Shadow Transport Secretary, echoed what several chief constables had already said about the legalisation of cannabis, she was promptly reprimanded. Her later pronouncements on taxing the rich were also slapped down. Mark Fisher, the Shadow Arts spokesperson, was similarly reprimanded after he announced that the Elgin Marbles might be returned to Greece. Ron Davies, Shadow Welsh Secretary, was mugged by the Labour leadership after his mild criticisms of the monarchy. In the aftermath Tony Blair fell over himself in showing how much he adored the Royals.

Firm and Unfair

Every indication is that if Labour come to power either later in the year or next year, they will continue to supervise the boss class's attacks on the mass of the population. Further, that they will be prepared to use very strong measures to carry their policies out, increasing police powers and deploying the Armed Forces if necessary, to counter any strike action. There should be no complacency that things will be better, if only slightly, under Labour. We must be ready for attacks on our class from Labour, ready with the arguments against Labourism and ready with plans to organise the resistance.

Since the above was written, the new stance of Labour was firmed up in late June. In preparation for The Road to The Manifesto, a policy prospectus put out by the leadership, Blair made it clear that the national executive will draw up a list of approved parliamentary candidates after the next election from which local parties should choose, in order to weed out any dissidents. Trade spokesman Kim Howells stated that Labour was pro-competition-he was speaking the truth!- and his counterpart for Home Affairs George Howarth said that he would be tougher on drugs than the Conservatives.

The Road to the Manifesto itself gave full form to the Labour Party's policies. It emphasised its toughness on crime with fast-track sentencing of "persistent young offenders", and swift reduction in unemployment which can easily be translated into forcing people off the dole into low-paid jobs, it stated that it would do little to reverse anti-strike laws, it encouraged private pensions, it condoned privatisation in the health service, it pledged to keep on with building Trident nuclear submarines, it emphasised it was for one nation and for a stake-holder economy. There can be no excuse at all for anyone calling themselves a socialist to remain within the Labour Party. The Labour Party is a capitalist party, it always has been. The fact that developments in capitalism have forced it to drop any "socialist rhetoric" should not blind us to this fact. Any vote for Labour, with or "without illusions" is a vote for the continuing of Business As Usual.

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