

New Labour – Same Old Danger!

Anarchist Communist Federation

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The landslide Labour victory had the backing of large sections of the ruling class via the media, with the notable support of the *Sun* and the *London Evening Standard*. Indeed, the proprietor of that last newspaper, Lord Rothermere, whose two national dailies the *Mail* and the *Telegraph* continued support for the Tories signalled his approval by moving over to the Labour benches in the House of Lords. Explaining his move, Rothermere volunteered the information that Labour “were carrying out many of the policies I believe in”. What he means is that Labour supports a pro-Europe line, as well as being favourable towards supporting small businesses, giving independence to the Bank of England and creating a regulatory body for financial services. Firming up this support for Labour, the *Mail* came out in praise of Blair and his Foreign Secretary the day after Rothermere’s move to Labour benches.

This highlights the splits in ruling class ranks over Europe. Some continue to look towards anti-Europe positions and continued go-it-alone stances. This translates as close co-operation with the United States. However, whilst the USA administration is aware of the dangers of Europe as a rival power bloc, they are also fully conscious of the role the European Union can perform in policing the whole of Europe and pushing through austerity measures necessary for capitalism on a world scale. They would prefer to exercise their influence on the European bloc through their new ally in Britain, Tony Blair.

It is in this context that valuable support from sections of the boss class showed itself in increased financial support, media backing, and indeed in votes. Growing numbers of tax investment advisors, for example the firms of Arthur Andersen, Coopers and Lybrand, Binder Hamlyn, told investors that a Labour government might be good for their financial health. The increased support in the City for Labour had a knock-on effect as advice was handed on to stockholders and investors.

There are other reasons for such support besides a pro-Europe position from Labour. There is anxiety that the constitutional structure of Britain is creaking and antiquated and does not fully serve British capitalism’s needs. There is fear over the break-up of the United Kingdom. There is an awareness that many people are disillusioned in Parliament and Democracy, particularly over the snowballing revelations of sleaze and corruption. It is felt by some in the British boss class that the Irish problem has to be resolved, and that a fix-up could not be effectively carried out by the Conservatives who were too much in pawn to the Unionists in Northern Ireland.

Streamline

Labour will move to streamline certain constitutional processes with the enthusiastic backing of liberals in the media and the intelligentsia organised through Charter 88. It will head off separation moves by nationalists with its sops of a Scottish referendum and devolution for Wales and Scotland. Through its well-publicised stands against sleaze and corruption it will hope to head off disillusion, even though its reputation for corruption in particular in municipal councils is notorious. With a massive majority it will be ruthless in driving through austerity programmes, cuts in jobs and welfare, continuing attacks on the health service and public transport, further bolstering of police powers. The Labour Party has actively sought the support of the police in its law and order campaigns. This will be eased by a majority that the Conservatives no longer had.

The unions of course will play their role in policing Labour’s New Britain. Already John Monks, TUC general secretary, has met with Prime Minister Blair and talked about a “substan-

tially changed mood in Whitehall". Another sign of better union-boss link-up was the planned visit of CBI director general Adair Turner to this year's TUC conference.

The vote in the general election itself has to be looked at. First of all, it has to be stated strongly that the Labour victory was not so much because of increased support for Labour, but because of an anti-Tory vote. There was a perception among many that the Conservatives must be voted out. This was a cross-class phenomenon, more noticeable among sections of the ruling class and "professionals" than among the working class. There were also many abstentions by many who had previously voted Conservative. On the other hand, in some working class areas, in particular in north east England, the number of abstentions shot up drastically. Commentators in the bourgeois press recognised the anti-Tory, rather than pro-Labour significance of the vote. The turnout of voters for the election was a post-war low. It can be said that the election was notable for the high level of working class apathy and suspicion, and indeed hostility, among the working class, and the anti-Tory abstentions and tactical voting.

Cosmetic

Labour will carry out a number of cosmetic changes to give the illusion that it is a government of action, indeed that it is a government that is pro-working class. So we have an authorised investigation into the Gulf War syndrome, a moratorium on the closure of London hospitals for six months, various moves on the minimum wage etc. Within a short space of time these cosmetic changes will be eclipsed by the attacks that Labour is planning on us.

This should not be seen as a "crisis of expectations" scenario which many on the Left are putting forward. There are no heightened illusions in Labour soon to be disappointed leading to rising militancy. There are *no* expectations in Labour to carry out radical reforms in favour of the working class. The working class at the moment is in a period of profound defeat. Struggles will only happen when we fight back against planned attacks. At the moment the period of quiet, of class peace, can be seen as lasting a long time. The only signs of hope are to be seen in the action of BA workers and of continuing wildcats among postal workers. There will be a continuing and slowly increasing, we hope, guerrilla warfare of unofficial strikes, more and more outside the control of the unions. As regards activity on the environmental front, Labour may well make moves to buy off some of those involved with various sops, whilst some may be increasingly radicalised as they realise that the Labour agenda on the environment is not significantly different from that of the Tories.

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