

The Emperor's New Clothes

The Millenium Dome

Anarchist Communist Federation

1998

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The Millenium Dome is a huge construction being built on derelict land on the banks of the river Thames in South London. It is a prestige project, effectively a re-run of the Great Exhibition of 1850 (history repeating itself as farce) which trumpeted the wonders of the Industrial Revolution, and of British Capitalism. This time around the structure is only intended to be temporary, lasting 25–30 years, and it will be a snip at a mere 758 million pounds.

Why oh Why?

The Dome will ‘celebrate the Millennium’ – the year 2000 (though a number of people argue that it falls in the year 2001!), and promote Britain plc and New Labour. British Capital will be promoted to investors and consumers abroad in terms of ‘look at our high quality, low cost products, and skilled but cheap labour’. For the punters at home the main message is that of ‘One Nation – a peoples’ Britain where everyone is equal as a citizen/consumer. Accordingly, everyone must work together to make Britain plc profitable – workers and bosses, all political parties, all races and religions – in order that they all profit, though not equally of course. The Millennium project itself is a shining example of this, it is run by a cross-party committee headed by the prominent Tory Michael Heseltine (ex-deputy Prime Minister under Major). Appropriately, the Dome is the pet project of Peter Mandelson, the Minister without Portfolio aka the government’s chief spin doctor. It is significant that one of the main places visited by the committee members for inspiration has been Disneyland in Florida, which has been described as ‘a marvel of technology applied to mass psychology’, which is what the dome aspires to. Similarly the designers want to appeal to people’s hopes for future worlds which are different but essentially similar – like Blair’s Labour and Major’s Tories- or was it the other way around?. The project is an important part of the spin doctoring strategy, which consists of misinformation and managing the news in order to maintain and increase power and influence. It is characterised by the triumph of form over content – good-looking (sic) smiley politicians selling politics-as-product, dressing more-of-the -same policies with words such as new and people’s, with the underlying message that they were better and fairer. What are the reasons for this ‘Americanisation’ of power politics? It is partly a consequence of technology which atomises people e.g elections campaigns are increasingly fought by television. This is itself political however, in that technologies form and content (use) are the product of the dominant social and economic forces in society. More importantly spin-doctoring is an essential part of the ruling class strategy. In the latter days of the Tory government a significant proportion of the ruling class, exemplified by media mogul Rupert Murdoch, decided that the Tories had lost their ability to manage the population for Capital having lost their authority as a result of pigs in the trough and other scandals. A new regime, different and cosmetically fairer was needed in order that it would have the authority to administer the harsh medicine to the workers that Capital required (workfare, benefits cuts, hospital closures, rail privatisation etc.).

Opposition

The Millennium dome project continues to be controversial, arousing much criticism and opposition on a number of fronts. The huge cost is a major factor, for a temporary building , at a time of huge cuts and attacks on the working class and poor with attacks on unemployed, sin-

gle mothers, people with disabilities etc. The secrecy surrounding the proposed contents of a 'public' project, the artistic/cultural merits of exhibits, whether there will be a religious theme — yep, Christianity, the desirability or otherwise of commercial and nationalist elements. We are totally opposed to the whole kit and caboodle. We applaud the direct action of the Reclaim The Streets protesters who occupied the construction site for several hours late last year. We should support all such direct action against this and other prestige projects such as Olympic Stadia and contrast the obscene waste of resources with poverty and suffering in a world of plenty. May the dome be Labour's and the Ruling Classes' Titanic!

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