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The Tories are trying to out-left New Labour. Not difficult to do, but it really is a joke considering their track-record and current notions.

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George Osborne, the Tory shadow chancellor, decided to show how much the Conservatives respect the intellect of the people. In *“A blueprint for fairness”* (*The Guardian*, 20/08/08) he asserts his party are now *“developing a policy agenda that delivers fairness and social justice”*! It is hard not to laugh.

He proclaims that it is shocking that *“the gap in life expectancy between rich and poor now at its widest since the Victorian era”* and that *“there is nothing progressive about growing inequality, falling mobility and rising poverty.”* Which is true, but what he failed to mention (never mind address) is that is precisely what happened under Thatcher and Major. So the real reason for Britain’s growing inequality is due to the neo-liberalism Thatcher introduced in the 80s. Has Osborne really forgotten how inequality and poverty exploded under that witch and her bland successor? And has he failed to notice that these were continued by New Labour? Has he forgotten how the Tories denounced New Labour for stealing its policies?

Is Osborne really unaware of the overwhelming evidence across the globe that neo-liberal policies lead to greater inequality? He proclaims, in his best **ex cathedra** tones, that “*we have established, after a long and bitter ideological argument over two centuries, that the free market economy is the fairest way of rewarding people for their efforts.*” Yet free market capitalism has always been marked by massive inequality. It is not hard to see why. A free exchange between two parties will benefit the stronger, i.e., those whose market position is stronger, those with capital.

Then there is the claim that capitalism rewards people for their effort. Which is why, presumably, nurses, cleaners, shop workers, and so on, all have two homes, yachts and flashy cars while hedge fund managers, company directors and bankers struggle to make ends meet? Moreover, every society rewards effort and work. Even slaves received food, clothing and housing and their owners rewarded the most productive, probably the least rebellious, more. What he should have said was that “*a fairer society*” rewards effort and work **in a fair way**, so suggesting that the Tories, unsurprisingly, do not know what “*a fairer society*” is.

In reality, capitalism rewards people for owning things other people use. In return for being bosses about by the owners, said owners get to keep the product of their labour – and so make money on other people’s effort, and so increasing inequality. It is doubtful that Osborne is now proclaiming that old socialist demand that labour receive its full product! And does his comment that a fair economy “*rewards effort and work*” while “*a fairer society means ensuring fairness between generations*” means that the Tories will increase inheritance tax to penalise unearned wealth and hereditary inequality? His comments, considered out of political and historical context, definitely would suggest that, but we can safely assume the Tories intend the opposite. Particularly as Osborne was seriously proposing flat taxes a couple of years back, which are designed

to give a massive tax rise for those on low to middle-incomes and a massive income tax cut for the extremely wealthy.

Does free market capitalism work best for the working class? Looking at the Conservative's record on the matter while they were in office, we can conclude the opposite. Reality hardly provides a glowing endorsement for Osborne's platitudes. Particularly when Labour's feeble attempts at social welfare had a limited success: "*Data from the Office for National Statistics showed that without the redistributive measures Mr Brown has introduced, the UK would be a far more unequal society.*" (Larry Elliot, "**Inequality at same level as under Thatcher**" **The Guardian**, 18/05/07)

And best not to mention the glaring contradiction between proclaiming "*the free market economy is the fairest way of rewarding people for their efforts*" while grudgingly admitting that "*unfettered free markets are also flawed.*" Then he proclaims that the Tories will take "*sensible steps to create a robust framework for a free and fair economy.*" So a free economy is now a fair economy. What happened to the flaws? Would that be the inequalities associated with Thatcherism and Blairism? Or the drop in social mobility that started under Thatcher but over which Osborne cries crocodile tears when it continued under Blair/Brown? If, as he proclaims, "*a fairer society spreads opportunity*" then he is again denouncing precisely the Thatcherite legacy he wants build upon. Unsurprisingly, his article fails to mention any actual policies beyond belief that the free market is the solution.

Needless to say, Osborne remains silent on all those state interventions which benefit property and the capitalist class. Thus redistribution is attacked, so suggesting that the only intervention in the market is on behalf of the working class. When he proclaims that the Conservatives "*have always stood against the utopianism of controlled economies*", you would be mistaken in thinking that he considers New Labour are Marxist-Leninists. And as any worker will tell you, capitalism

is based on workers being controlled by their bosses. The Tories spent most of the 1980s ensuring that control was maximised by breaking the unions. It is doubtful that fighting the top-down control inherent wage slavery will be at the top of the Tory's plans.

It is somewhat ironic that the Tories are trying to benefit from New Labour's fall from favour by trying to promote a more extreme form of the very policies which caused the problem in the first place while, at the same time, wittering on about fairness and equality! But then, there is rarely anything politicians will not say to get votes – no matter how surreal given their previous track record. So waiting in the wings to replace a corrupt neo-liberal government is an even more corrupt and neo-liberal one. Anyone who thinks that the Conservatives will reverse the positions of Labour is in for a very rude awakening. Need the 1979 Tory election campaign ("*Labour is not working*") be mentioned? They were right: but they quickly turned 1 million out of work into over 3 million.

The reason for the inequalities generated by Labour is because they have behaved just as the Tories propose. As New Labour has messed up they will, rightly, be held to account. Unfortunately, this will mean the taking of office of a party which will be just as bad, if not worse. This implies only one thing – we simply cannot rely on politicians to act for us. We must impose from the streets and workplaces that what politicians cannot do and that means self-organisation, direct action and solidarity. If we do that then perhaps we will be able to be in a position to create genuine freedom rather than tolerate a system in which we pick one gang of politicians to run capitalism other another.