

## **BLAIRISM, FIRST THE TRAGEDY NOW THE FARCE.**

*The Labour Party Conference is notable for two things. The failed rear-guard action by the left, followed by the takeover of the party by the Blairites. What a bunch of political clowns. Blair gained office at the height of neo-liberalism, but now neo-liberalism is at its end, reduced to rubble. And they want to resurrect the past. We are now in the white water of history, not the swamp of the 1990s.*

The class struggle is the great educator, not only of workers, but also of the capitalists. By the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century in Europe, Britain, and North America, the social weight of the industrial proletariat had multiplied. Increasingly urbanised and increasingly assertive, workers began to demand their rights. This presented the capitalist class with an ultimatum. They could either rule by the bullet or the ballot, through fear or consent.

It soon became obvious to the capitalist classes that long term political stability depended on rule by consent. But that came with a condition. The capitalist class feared the working class would overwhelm them politically and take over their institutions by weight of numbers. How to prevent this?

In a number of ways the very organs of working-class struggle had educated the capitalists. The craft unions had shown a willingness to negotiate with employers and to make compromises to prevent their unions being overtaken by the rise of the general trade unions. Within the ranks of the political movements of the working class it soon became obvious that there were leaders and theorists who sought an accommodation with capitalism which would be of benefit to their own careers. The leading exponents of this was Eduard Bernstein in Germany and Sydney and Beatrice Webb in Britain.

This accommodation took two forms. In terms of theory they proposed that there could be an evolutionary road to socialism while experience had taught them that the apparatuses of the working class itself could be used as steppingstones for the advancement of their careers and their elevation above the general conditions and anonymity of the working class. The “evolutionary road” was correctly interpreted as the waving of the white flag by the more astute members of the capitalist class. After all, if these working-class leaders now recognised capitalism was here to stay, that revolution was off the agenda, then it followed that they would end up negotiating with the capitalists in order to harbour the working class.

And most importantly, by presenting of the capitalist as willing to negotiate, they could help legitimise the capitalist class in the eyes of workers. All that was left was to reduce the aspirations of the working class to the possible, the pragmatic, all of which would no longer require the self-activity of the masses but could be left in the safe hands of these new professional cadre of working-class politicians.

Thus the condition for rule by consent was emerging in the first decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Working class leaders who were prepared to work within capitalism not outside it, were to be encouraged. Flattery for them and batons for the more radical ones. Leaders who could be willingly coaxed into the establishment though not into its inner sanctum. Leaders who knew how to restrain the class struggle, leaders who could become the transmission belt for the political ideas and priorities of the capitalist class into the working class, particularly the need for national unity.

It is important to analyse what was to become the modern establishment. Of course it included the capitalist class, the editors of the media, senior state and military officials, university deans, but it also

now included trade union and labour bureaucrats. As any architect or engineer will attest, the rigidity and stability of any structure depends on the insertion of the last strut, and that strut was the labour bureaucracy.

Thus the ideal perspective which emerged at the time was to delay suffrage until such time as a caste of labour bureaucrats had emerged to lead reformist parties pledging fidelity to parliament. This is why the world's most advanced industrial country, Britain only extended voting rights to all men as late as 1918 and then only to stabilise an increasingly restless working class following the Russian Revolution. In countries that had achieved earlier suffrage, new reformist parties were to be encouraged. After all, a minority can only rule a majority by means of agents within the majority, mis-leaders, who were now in the ascendancy.

The evolutionary road to socialism was a throwback to the revolutionary origins of working-class politics. After the second world war another strand of politics emerged. The rise in the productivity of labour and the concessions it provided under working class pressure, convinced a new generation of leaders that workers' political ambitions could be fulfilled by winning improvements to workers' standards of living within capitalism. That all it required was good management. Increasingly, the evolutionary road to socialism was relegated to folklore and "worker's parties" presented manifestoes in which they claimed they could manage capitalism more effectively than the real managers – the capitalist class. Politics became a clash over styles of managing the capitalist system. With the downfall of the USSR this became entrenched.

We should not underestimate the importance of this "management of the economy" issue. It and it alone explains why bourgeois parties such as the Conservative Party have held office for the majority of the time despite directly representing a minority class. The media has presented them as the better even natural economic managers though their economic record in office in reality is generally crap.

Jeremy Corbyn was to fall victim to this. It is said that Labour lost the 2019 election because of the issue of Brexit and anti-Semitism. Equally important was the issue of economic management. The British capitalist class was shocked by the results of the 2017 election, which Labour could have won were it not for the sabotage of the election effort by Labour Parliamentarians and officials within the Labour Party, who feared a Corbyn win more than a Theresa May win. Labour's surprise success was due to its manifesto. Poll after poll showed that voters were primarily attracted to Labour because of its economic programme and not because of Jeremy Corbyn.

Caught flat footed, the capitalists and their press sought to make amends. Thus they devoted the next two years to portraying Labour's programme as unaffordable, unachievable, reckless, and damaging to the economy and thus by extension, the prospects for voters. Their ideological onslaught worked. From being a source of attraction to many workers it became a source of repulsion. We should never underestimate the power of propaganda. The Tories were gifted two wins, the branding of one of the country's most prominent anti-racist fighters as an Anti-Semite and the trashing of Labour's economic manifesto.

Of course the capitalists' voice is always amplified by the sensible Labour Bureaucrats and Parliamentarians all of whom feared Corbyn and what he represented. Bureaucrats need to own the party-political machine to protect their jobs, positions, and influence. An active and inspired membership threatens this hold. And bureaucrats prefer manoeuvring and dark corners to the bright

light of popular decision-making meetings. Their professional positions would soon be at risk. While the capitalist class encourages bureaucratisation, the working class in motion discourages it. The officials and Labour Parliamentarians knew and know which side their bread was and is buttered on, and it's not on the members' side.

Following the fall of Corbyn, the mood music changed. Labour was to be made electable once more. That meant rendering it acceptable to the capitalist class and their media. A sensible party with diminished ambitions, led by members of the establishment, tin cans like Starmer. Who could be better than this man? He had already proven himself to the capitalist class by leading one of the pillars of the repressive state, the Criminal Prosecution Service. In this way the capitalist class began to re-consolidate their hold on the working class, refurbishing the Labour Party's primary role, to be Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition.

### **The Road Ahead or the Road that Fled.**

They say first impressions are important because they endure. So too with forewords to pamphlets or essays. A Foreword is the entranceway to an essay, it gives a view of the interior, and it directs the reader's attention to the purpose of the essay. Starmer's foreword does this and it carries weight.

In his foreword Starmer discusses the pandemic and then sets out the Labour's vision of the future. *"It is a future where a modern, efficient government works in partnership with a brilliant, innovative private sector to create good jobs and harness the potential of technology."* What a brilliant private sector it was which profited from the pandemic. What a brilliant private sector it was that cut costs and overheads to the bone which meant that when exiting the pandemic, everything was not only broke but broken. This country was not held together with brilliance, it was not held together by the private sector but by self-sacrificing, overworked, under-paid and often traumatized workers. Often when the private sector took the lead, all it did was get in the way. Starmer is forced to backtrack a bit in the body of the essay when he levels some low-grade criticisms of business. But let us not be distracted. The purpose of this essay as stated in the foreword is to eulogise business and welcome it as a friend of Labour.

It is worth alighting on the use of language – a modern government. This is code to the capitalist class. It means a clean break with the Corbyn vision of the state playing a leading role in the economy and large-scale nationalisations. How one can have an efficient government which is porous to the private sector is another matter altogether. The neo-liberal state so favoured by Blair turned out to be not so much a modern state as a Neolithic state.

Then without a hint of embarrassment he goes on to say: *"People in this country are crying out for change. The Labour path would give them real control over their lives and their local area."* *"It would give power to make decisions to local communities rather than people in Westminster."* The brilliant capitalists must be scratching their heads. A partnership with business is incompatible with giving workers control over their lives. If workers have lost control over their lives it is because business has taken it away, and not recently, but for centuries. So for workers to take back control they have to take it back from Starmer's brilliant new partners. Under these circumstances Starmer would be considered a duplicitous partner by business, except that he is not, he will be loyal to his brilliant masters and disloyal to the people in this country. How Starmer managed to pass his Bar Exam is inexplicable, if this Foreword is the best he can do. No wonder the Blairites would not allow him to write his own speech to Conference, but wrote it for him.

## His proposals.

It is not worth delving too deeply into the body of the pamphlet. He veers between how brilliant Britain was and how broken it is. He does so with only one purpose in mind. He wants to recast the Pandemic as Britain's 1945. A country drawn together by the Blitz and the war seeking to recreate the country as one fit for heroes. He is unconsciously drawing parallels with the 1945 Labour Government led by Atlee which won a landslide victory against that war hero, and Johnson hero, Churchill. More to the point Labour was to lose the following election because their Manifesto promises came up against the reality of a country bankrupted by war. Failing to inform the electorate that Britain had been bankrupted by their ally, the USA, the country was not prepared for bread rationing the following year which meant that shortly afterwards the Labour Government was toast. It seems that Starmer is following in Atlee's footsteps, because nowhere in this essay does he acknowledge that Britain today is bankrupt.

His hopeless proposals start to form when he discusses the future. *"They want to see a contribution society: one where people who work hard and play by the rules can expect to get something back, where you can expect fair pay for fair work,"* This has religious overtones, work hard, be obedient and you will be graced by a bit of heaven, fair pay. But obedient workers have always been at the mercy of the bosses. Disobedient workers have been the ones who improved their pay and conditions. And playing by the rules. These rules can only mean one thing - Thatcher's anti-union laws - which is not so much playing by rules but dancing to the tune of the bosses and their courts. Keeping to the religious narrative, on the issue of repealing these anti-working-class laws, Starmer has taken a vow of silence.

*"Business is a force for good in society, providing jobs, prosperity and wealth. But business has been let down by a Tory government that has failed to plan for the long term and provide the conditions in which long-term decisions can be made."* This is putting the cart before the horse. It is business lobbying government, pressuring government, that has led to, for example the trampling of fire regulations which resulted in the Grenville fire. It is business that championed deregulation and it is business that implemented just in time, that introduced lean and mean, that focused on the short term, not government. If government failed, it failed to restrain the brilliant private sector, and in doing so it did not let down business, it let down the country. But then what do you expect from this naked apologist for business, blinded by its brilliance.

*In the first 100 days of the next Labour government, I will sign into law a New Deal for Working People. It will provide security and opportunities for people across the country, with improved conditions, quality jobs, training and better pay. It will increase the minimum wage, ensuring proper wages that people can raise a family on."* Ah Mr Biden, you have a follower. I am reminded of a discussion between two people. The first person says "I am going to give you something". The second says, "but exactly what". The first replies, "I cannot say, but it will be something". The second sighs, "well I suppose something is better than nothing". This is Starmer's *New Deal*. The consequence of this came out in the Conference itself when delegates counter-posed a £15 minimum wage to the Blairite "at least £10" preferred by Starmer. True he goes on to take aim at the most grotesque forms of exploitation such as "fire and rehire" and he gives a nod to his trade union supporters that he will give stronger rights to trade unions at work, but of course he shies away from the very act that would support workers, getting rid of the anti-union laws which was respected throughout the Blair and Brown governments.

*"Labour in government would show that we take seriously people's demands for more control... But we will not do that by decree – we will put power and control in the hands of the people, whether at work, in*

*accessing public services, or over the decisions that affect their lives.*” The Tories were never serious about taking back control. This was a deliberate deceit designed to cover their real intent, to strengthen the control exercised by British firms over their workers through the shedding of EU restraints. But Starmer seeks to mimic the Tories only to crash into his own words. He rules out giving workers control by decree, that is through an Act of Parliament. But then his next sentence reads that a Labour Government will put that power into the hands of the people, (not into the hands of the workers note). But what is the difference between a “decree” and “putting”, nothing, it’s a mirage. So why has Starmer boxed himself in. Because he is terrified of the self-activity of the masses, the rule breakers. Workers take control, not by asking parliament, but by mobilising, by struggling to win control, all the things Starmer is set against, all the things the Corbynites were proposing.

When it comes to the NHS, not a word about renationalising it. It was Blair who introduced the internal market that is hollowing out and disrupting the NHS. The same government that Starmer seeks to emulate. But then what do you expect from a man surrounded by Blairites, who write his speeches, and most probably apply Grecian 2000 to his hair.

Starmer has lined his road ahead with billboards lit up with grand gestures, but he studiously avoids identifying, let alone removing, the rocks that cover the road ahead. But in the end bouncing over or even crashing into these rocks makes reading billboards impossible.

### **The Conference.**

The conference can be divided into three phases. The opening phases in which Conference got bogged down in constitutional matters. There was much criticism that the first day was devoted to internal matters instead of reaching out to the electorate. But the right-wing understand organisational matters much better than the left. The remnants of the Corbyn movement had to be put down first to move the Party “forward”. The middle part was the touch and go part. Really, the Unison leadership should be redesignated as Labour’s ‘emergency service’. Every time a right-wing leader is in trouble they come to the rescue. Had Starmer lost the vote to raise the threshold to 20% of the PLP before a leadership candidate could be nominated, Starmer could have fallen. But he won this vote courtesy of the Unison delegates breaking their mandate and voting in the opposite direction. Before that the likes of Angela Rayner and Andy Burnham were preening themselves for a leadership challenge. This was clear when Angela Rayner called the Tories scum, setting a more authentic working-class tone for the Party were she to become leader. The third phase was the triumph of the Blairites. By the time of Starmer spoke, having rehearsed a speech, written not by himself, but Blair’s speech writer, it was clear Starmer had triumphed. This was under-lined during his speech when he used the anticipated but sporadic heckling from the left to his advantage, smugly asking the audience whether conference was about shouting slogans or changing lives. The audience in their majority agreed with him that conference was about changing lives and drowned out the hecklers.

Although he was nothing more than an auto-cue with a larynx, Starmer exceeded expectations. But he did resemble a fisherman. He repeatedly spread his hands. “The fish I caught was this big” he seemed to be saying. Most fishermen exaggerate the size of the fish, but not Starmer, he had caught a big fish and he reeled it in, it was the audience that filled the Brighton Centre. By the end of his speech, they were well and truly hooked. It is likely he has seen off his challengers.

But these Labour fish get hooked and hooked over and over, only to be thrown back into opposition. Like fish they never learn. That is because they are electioneering fish. That was Starmer's trump card. The priority for the members of the Labour Party is to engage in and win elections. This prime directive subordinates everything else especially principles. Labour is an electioneering machine. The delegates know that Starmer and his fellow bureaucrats will tear up their votes. Despite this they applauded and applauded him, knowing this to be a photocall for the next election, and if they resented rather than disagreed with the hecklers, it was because heckling spoilt this picture.

Electioneering is the curse of the working class. This can best be seen at local level. In the 1980s Thatcher started cutting the budgets of local councils and she made it a legal responsibility for councils to pass budgets containing these cuts. It was exceptional for any Labour Council to resist these cuts. The Labour Movement came up with the slogan "a dented shield is better than no shield". In other words they justified their political existence by declaring that while they had to cut, they could cut more sensitively and better than would Tory councillors. This shield got rustier and rustier as the years went by and the cuts became more savage particularly after 2008. In fact, besides benefits, the cuts fell most heavily on local councils. But still they maintained that the highest priority was to keep councils Labour.

But here lies the contradiction. If you fight the cuts you have to oppose the council making the cuts. But if you need to keep these Labour councils in place then you cannot fight the cuts, at least not if you are the Labour Party with one hand tied behind your back. And soon the warning sounds came loud and fast. Turnout for council elections collapsed particularly in working class areas now dubbed "The Red Wall". Turnouts averaged 16%, meaning that only one in ten adults could be bothered to vote. And rightly so, workers are not stupid, they had long since learnt that whoever headed the council, it was going to be more cuts and poorer housing. (It is of course vital to point out that most of the services and housing that support workers are not provided by central government but by local government, so these cuts have major political consequences.)

Today with cuts in government funding exceeding 50%, councils are forced to jack up council taxes which today are equal to 4p on income tax. This is adding injury to insult. What should have happened instead was for Labour councillors to resign en masse across the country or pass illegal budgets and get thrown out. And to use this political act to declare local democracy dead because councils existed only to pass cuts. But instead they did the opposite, they clung to office preserving the myth that local democracy was alive. This is the curse which inflicts the Labour Party. This is the curse that ensures the Right always has leverage over the Left in this so-called Broad Church. That is why in the end, Corbyn's attempt to move the Labour Party away from electioneering and closer to its roots, a campaigning activist party, was unlikely to succeed, because Labour must be "electable" stupid.

### **Conclusion.**

The country lurches from crisis to crisis. All self-inflicted by the greed of capitalism. No sooner will the fuel crisis subside, then it will be replaced by another. The likely candidate being privatised adult social care. Whereas tens of energy providers folded, it is likely to be hundreds possibly thousands of care homes which will fold. This eventuality has been brought closer by the jump in energy prices, again exacerbated by privatisation, and consequently the heating bills these care homes will be forced to pay.

The chaos that is erupting, particularly with constipated supply chains, is of the capitalist's own making. In an article in the Financial Times dated 30<sup>th</sup> September, Gill Plimmer lets the cat out of the bag. The

main cause of the disruptions is the shortage of international transport workers due to the lack of vaccines and freedom of movement together with appalling working and living conditions past and present. Some sailors have not been allowed to return home for the full 18 months of the pandemic. The journalist points out that a coalition of business leaders have petitioned governments to treat these workers as key workers. The article points to the mistreatment of these workers which underlies many supply chain problems. (*World Leaders Urged To Fix 'Crumbling' Supply Chains.*)

Now pay attention Mr Starmer. You defined patriotism very well. Yes it is patriotic to celebrate your own and put them first. Yes it is patriotic to celebrate your army which has the habit of invading other countries, even if recently they have also been defeated both in Iraq and Afghanistan, and even if now, they are preparing for war with China. By applauding the army, Starmer finally rehabilitated Tony Blair, though most standing up and clapping were oblivious to this symbolism.

But patriotism is not only the preserve of the political scoundrel it is self-defeating. It is the equivalent of admiring your feet while standing in the middle of a busy road. It is predictable that patriots who look out for their own first, will also vaccinate them first. They cannot prioritise vaccination internationally nor intelligently. Politicians were warned that we were all in this pandemic together. The main concern then was variants evolving because the unvaccinated poor in the dependent countries would act as a petri dish for these variants. What was not seen was the actual damage to be inflicted on the world economy because the patriots' hogged vaccines for their own countries rather than directing them to where they were most effective both medically and economically. Now it is the case that patriotism has given the elderly, who are after all part of our own, a choice - die from the virus or die from cold.

And yet, while clapping and rehabilitating Blair, the audience did not realise that Blair in his prime ministerial role was not a patriot. Blair opened the flood gates to immigration, encouraged business to tap the reserve army of labour in Eastern Europe. In so doing he drove down pay and conditions as well as driving up unemployment for British workers. All it needed was the catalyst of 2008 to convert these structural changes in the labour market into political support for Brexit. Today, with employers having to sharply raise wages and improve conditions to attract British workers because they no longer have access to this reserve army of labour, many Brexiteer workers feel vindicated. The irony therefore is that it was the globalist Blair who forced his protégé to become a proud patriot. And I thought it was the Tories copying Corbyn and not the other way around.

Starmer talked up possibilities. He did not talk up realities, and when he did, he blamed it on the Tories and Johnson. The truth is that Britain is bankrupt. The truth is that the world economy is in deep trouble. The fact is that as soon as his proposals are costed they will turn out to be unaffordable. Instead of the three-course meal promised, it will be rationing all over again, or as it has come to be known, austerity. If Starmer is to be realistic and sensible in order to be endorsed by the media, he will have to govern hard and play by the rules, and he will play by the rules, the rules set out by his brilliant partners, the capitalists and the needs of their system.

Commentators are split on whether Labour will win the next election. They are in the running because the Tories are now in an even bigger crisis. Their broad marquee is bursting at the seams as the Red Wall and the Blue Wall jostle and as Johnson is seen as an increasing liability. They are likely to have a lively conference after which the opinion polls will tell their story.

Brian Green, 30<sup>th</sup> September 2021.