SOCIALIST RENEWAL

New Labour as Past History

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My first purpose in this pamphlet is to demonstrate that when it comes to a way with words Mr Tony Blair is more than a match for Humpty Dumpty. It will be recalled that Humpty Dumpty announced: 'When I use a word . . . it means just what I choose it to mean — neither more nor less'. When Mr Blair says 'advance' he means 'retreat'. When he refers to modernisation he means a return to a former state of things. When he talks about the rebirth of Labour he is pointing to an infantile regression (the repeal of Clause IV) to be followed by a return to the womb (the world before the formation of the Labour Alliance). New means old and birth means death.

> 'Roused from their slumbers,
> In grim array the grisly spectres rise,
> Grin horrible, and obstinately sullen,
> Pass and repass, hushed as the foot of night.'
> – Blair: *The Grave*, 1743

So far as I know Mr Blair has not been obliged to respond to the charge that he is engaging in double-talk. Yet it is not to be imagined that a man of such expensive education is unaware of it. Some of his ablest lieutenants have flown straws in the wind which indicate how a defence might be mounted. It has to be argued that circumstances have so far changed during the last century that what was progressive yesterday has become outmoded today. Mr Blair himself in his magnum opus, *Socialism*, (Fabian Society pamphlet 565, 1994, pp.7 (sic), £3.50), has

suggested as much without spelling it out. Yet that is what he and his supporters need to do as a matter of urgency.

This pamphlet concludes that there are indeed new conditions which have to be recognised. But these conditions require Labour, not to go back on its traditional commitments, but to go beyond them. Having identified a few of them, the reader is invited to add to them and to respond to them. The only way of ensuring that the 'Forward March of Labour' is neither 'Halted' nor Reversed is to enlist that participation, not of hundreds, not of thousands, but of millions of people in a great enterprise of *Renewal.*

Language, truth and history

In his conference speech of 3 October 1995, Mr Blair employed the word 'New' 37 times within one hour. Of these 37 references, 13 were to 'New Labour'.

Bitter experience should have taught us to distrust those who introduce their projects or concepts with the term 'new'. They are usually found to be boastful or inarticulate or both and, in being both, to be deceitful. They are boastful because they are laying claim to a discovery or invention without being able, or willing, to specify precisely what it is. If the New World led to disappointed hopes, the New Party and the New Order led to horrors which all decent people long to forget until their decency reminds them that forgetfulness is impossible.

To be sure, British labour history does supply examples of great undertakings and movements which properly laid claim to the term 'New'. The most prominent was Robert Owen's 'New Moral World'. It was novel to denounce as an unholy Trinity, private property, marriage and all existing forms of organised religion. It was daring to propose that Man's character was made for him and not by him. It was refreshing to project communities in which co-operation would displace competition. The New Model Unionism of the mid-Victorian years and the New Unionism which occurred at the end of the last century

were neither as original nor as daring as Owen's project, but their claims to originality were defensible. The New Left — which was rarely at a loss for words (save when it came to naming itself) — was more obviously in a great tradition than seen to be improving upon it.

Nevertheless, it broke with insularity and demonstrated anew the indestructible excellence of Prometheus. Mr Blair's New Labour Party is not in this great tradition. It threatens a regression so pronounced as to amount to an unraveling of the entire history of the Labour Party. Thus, what is at issue in the matter of Clause IV is not just the deceitfulness of Mr Blair. Before he was elected Leader on 12 June 1994, he declared: 'I don't think that anyone actually wants the abolition of Clause IV to be the priority of the Labour Party at the moment'. The moment arrived the moment after he had been elected Leader! Nor is it the case that we needed to get rid of Clause IV so that the aims of the Party were seen to relate to its ends rather than its means. The smart slave, serf or wage-earner would always settle for the abolition of slavery, feudalism or capitalism before accepting 'a community in which power, wealth and opportunity are in the hands of the many not the few, where the rights we enjoy reflect the duties we owe . . .' and so on through question-begging terms and incompletely-descriptive ones down, down, down into the grave of all that is nothing. Mr Blair assures us that his 'social-ism' is a Christian Social-ism. He forgets that the Christian Socialists of the last century stood for producers' co-operatives and free trade unions and not the *disembodied* social-ism which is all he is left with. If the great moral principle is that we must always treat other humans as we would be treated ourselves, always treat them as ends and never as means, that clearly rules out capitalist contracts of employment. The capitalist is forced by competition to get more out of the worker's labour than he pays for it. When that ceases to be true he sacks the worker or else goes to the wall himself. It is no accident that,

having abandoned socialism, Mr Blair is forced back into the discredited rhetoric of 'a fair day's wage for a fair day's work'. All wages are unfair differing only in the extent of the unfairness which proceeds from the extent of the inequality between the employer and the employed. To dismiss all this as relating to mere means and not ends is humbug!

However, the main point to grasp is that the original Clause IV, the Webb-Henderson clause, bolted together a new constitutional settlement upon which the Labour Party and the Labour movement have depended ever since 1917-18. In exchange for accepting the Socialist goal the trade unions secured increased representation upon Labour's National Executive Committee. Similarly the Independent Labour Party and the Fabian Society relinquished their virtually exclusive position as recruiting agencies for individual socialists in favour of the newly constituted constituency Labour Parties. Take but this bolt away and witness what a dismantling follows! Everything has, is, or will, fall apart.

One of Mr Blair's most able lieutenants, Jack Straw, anticipated the difficulty in a pamphlet which he persuaded his own Blackburn CLP to publish in 1993. In this pamphlet he obscured the long birth of Clause IV behind the short-term conditions of its delivery. Drawing upon the work of professional labour historians he rightly noticed that it was adopted as a response to the experience of the war economy: public ownership and control was no longer an academic issue. These practical necessities made the 'Conscription of Riches' as serious a possibility as the conscription of men. In addition, the Russian Revolution demonstrated the mortality of privilege. Finally, the disintegration of the Liberal Party at the end of 1916 opened the way for a new Party of popular principle to emerge and counter the Party of superstitious reverence for our traditional arrangements.

Unfortunately, Mr Straw missed the distinction between the *occasion* and the *cause*: between the match and the long accumulation of combustible material. He argued that we were

no longer at war and no longer at risk from the Bolsheviks. Since these circumstances accompanied Labour's conversion to socialism he assumed that their disappearances allowed for its abandonment. He ignored 45 years of argument and advocacy of common ownership. Argument and advocacy from such dissimilar people as the 'Marxist' H.M. Hyndman; the Libertarian Socialist William Morris, and the Fabians G.B. Shaw and Sidney Webb. Without *England for All*; without *News from Nowhere*, without *Facts for Socialists* and without *Fabian Essays* and without *The Soul of Man Under Socialism* and without *The Ragged Trousered Philanthropist*, without such papers as *Justice*, *Commonwealth* and the *New Leader*, Labour's conversion to Socialism would not have happened. War and Revolution and the Strange Death of Liberal England amounted to the occasion, not the cause, of the triumph of Clause IV.

Independently of each other Frederick Engels and Keir Hardie had concluded that what was wanted was an Independent Labour Party which would be impartial in its dismissal of Liberals and Tories. They believed that a Party which put the interests of working people ahead of all understandings or arrangements with established parties was bound to become Socialist. Doubtless this was probable, considered as a theoretical principle. It was far less secure considered as a forecast. In the event it proved to be a fair approximation. With the advent of Clause IV it was at least formally correct. As George Orwell knew, Labour's Socialism always had an element of false pretences. It did not take itself entirely seriously. A few years after it had adopted his form of words, Sidney Webb warned the Labour Party against attending too much to the form of words which he had himself supplied: lest they became a 'shibboleth'.

With the removal of Clause IV the scene was set for a redistribution of power within the Party. The reduction of trade union votes within Conference to 50 per cent. The demotion of Conference itself from the Parliament of the entire Party to an

occasional consultative assembly in favour of policy forums. The reduction of bloc voting, an essentially working class practice which diminished the power of plutocrats and parliamentarians even if it elevated the power of some popular bosses. The withering away of the National Executive into a mere *alter ego* of the Parliamentary leadership. The assumption of Despotic Powers, as in the case of the duly adopted candidate for Leeds NE. And new rules are to allow these despotic powers to be exercised by the leadership over every Party member and would-be Party member. The General Secretary may veto membership applications 'for any reason which s/he sees fit' while the NEC is 'to determine any dispute which may arise in respect . . . of membership of a member or members and its decision shall be final and binding'.

Having 'modernised itself by going back on 1917', the party is now hell bent on further 'modernisation' by returning to the Leicester Isolation Hospital and the secret agreement of 1903 where J. Ramsay Macdonald and J. Keir Hardie made a deal with Gladstone's son whereby each side gave the other a 'straight run' in some 50 constituencies! Whether this new secret agreement can be kept secret is less important than whether it can be 'kept'. Will Labour be able to deliver? Will the Liberals? To be sure, the Liberals are well to the 'left' of Mr Blair's New Labour when it comes to redistributive taxation and some other policies. However, there is the thorny question of the restoration of trade union rights. Liberals — even the best of them — tend to hate the thought of uppity working class people. But then so does Mr Blair. He declines to offer a pledge to repeal Thatcher's anti-union laws. The most he promises is 'fairness without favour'. Thus, the door is open to rehabilitation of the old 'understanding': an understanding by which Labour and Liberals managed to imprison themselves in neighbouring cells.

Mr Peter Mandelson MP has denounced Clause IV as 'infamous'. He will go to all lengths necessary to reassure Big

Business. If Big Business says: 'Yes, my dear Blair, we trust you, but what about Benn, Livingstone and the rest of them in the Socialist Campaign Group?', then Mr Mandelson will be around to offer his oily hand. He has hardly bothered to conceal his desire for a Lib-Lab pact whether or not such an arrangement will be required to carry Mr Blair into No.10. I do not pretend to know the exact shape of the deal he intends to do — or has done — with Paddy Ashdown. I do know that he needs Ashdown in order to protect New Labour from vestigial socialism.

This brings us to the re-enactment of the first/last act: the collapse of the Labour Alliance. Important trade unions and socialist societies came together in the Memorial Hall in London in January 1900 to form the Labour Representation Committee. The LRC was not socialist. Its aim was simply to create a Party in Parliament with its own whips: a Party which would put Labour questions in front of all others on the political agenda. This had been Hardie's programme. Before 1900 many thought it 'too classy still'. They thought the Irish question; the Empire; the rights of women; reform of the Lords and other constitutional changes could neither be accommodated within a Labour programme nor be subordinated to it. Mr Blair barely tries to conceal his unhappiness with Labour's class character. If there is one thing better calculated to alarm and to alienate 'Middle England' than a Socialist Party it is a self-declared Workers' Party or Labour Party. 'New Labour' is but a halting on the way to the 'Peoples' Party' or indeed, the 'Democratic Party'. After a century the Labour Party will have become just like the other parliamentary parties. Nearly all the traces of its humble, extra-parliamentary origins will have been eliminated. Like its rivals, all power will be concentrated in the hands of the parliamentary leaders. Its vocabulary will become flabbier and flabbier. Thus, it will demand fairness rather than equality: respect for others rather than fraternity, and a discreetly regulated freedom rather than liberty. A century of struggle will

have been completely unraveled. History will repeat itself, not in the expected cyclical fashion, but simply by going back on itself in the name of going forward. Disembodied socialism is necessarily the social-ism of the Grave.

> 'Roused from their slumbers,
> In grim array the ghostly spectres rise,
> Grin horrible, and obstinately sullen,
> Pass and repass, hushed as the foot of night.'

Historians will recognise that all this is apt. Yet they may raise two objections. First, the Labour Party was born in the legal crisis of trade unionism which preceded the Taff Vale judgement and which culminated in that judgement. It was a series of bitter encounters in the courts which led more and more trade unionists to see the need for their own party. Today the trade unions are in a strictly comparable crisis. Yet they cringe before the charge that they want to go back to the days of beer and sandwiches in 10 Downing Street. Bruised and beaten they have found no Spartacus among themselves unless it is he who has already left them.

Second, before the Labour Party there was the 'New Liberalism'. This was not a Party but a mood. It was high-minded, but also woolly-headed. If the old Liberals of the Manchester school in celebrating the market turned political economy into a code of morals, the New Liberals were repentant. They aspired to moralise politics. Beneath the dreaming spires of Oxford T.H. Green saw that the State had a responsibility to create a social environment conducive to moral growth. Just how this task was to be accomplished was left unclear.

The attempt to boost the claims of the New Liberalism by identifying such formidable figures as Hobson, Beveridge and Keynes in its ranks does not work. All of them did their best work after the 1900s. Beveridge was very much under the protective shade of the Fabians. Keynes was not a man of moods or parties although he was decidedly anti-socialist in his intent.

Hobson was the most original and he went on to become a socialist. So the return to New Liberalism turns out to be a return to nothing. And out of nothing Nothing comes.

Circumstances alter cases?

There is one way and one way only to save the 'modernisers' from disgrace. If their use of words is not untruthful or unhelpful it must be because the world has changed, changed beyond all recognition in the 20th Century. The proletariat is no longer the poorest and most numerous class.

Successive waves of innovation have been associated with the virtual annihilation of leading sections of the traditional proletariat. One thinks first and foremost of the coalminers, but they have been joined by the dockers, textile and steel workers and agricultural labourers. In Sheffield, which along with Lille was probably the most proletarian city in Western Europe, the vast industrial centre in Attercliffe has been virtually swept away in favour of Meadowhall, the biggest shopping mall in Britain and on the entire continent. This is one of the most dramatic examples of the switch away from manufacturing industry in favour of services. With this switch has come the increasing employment of women. They may be the great, great granddaughters of the match girls of 1888 but they rarely see themselves in that light. If they need an Annie Besant or Bernard Shaw to organise them, they are unlikely to be aware of it. Some may still sit together in tightly packed offices, but more and more have become distance workers who can work at home thanks to the new information technology. Too late to learn that the condition of this second homeworking system is often less than idyllic. As Kim Hendry pointed out in her M.A. *Invisible Threads* (Warwick University): 'Because the homeworker is paid only according to output, the owner is not obliged to fund an idle workforce during lulls in demand'.

Blair, in his Fabian pamphlet, thinks that Marx failed to think about classes historically. This must rank as one of the silliest of all the silly readings or non-readings of Marx's writings. Everything he wrote from the *Communist Manifesto* to *Capital* about class demonstrates his sense for it as an evolving and historical phenomenon. Yet Marx's expectations were not always fulfilled. In the developed world of technological explosions the centralisation and concentration of capital have no longer gone hand in hand. The concentration of managerial power no longer tends to coincide with the geographical concentration of workers in vast numbers on one or two sites. Accordingly, the social character of the productive process is no longer in such obvious contrast to the private character of appropriation. This concealment has been further effected, if only to a limited extent, by the development of New Corruption. Old Corruption, as wonderfully documented in John Wade's successive editions of the *Black Book* 1819-1834, was about the sale of the rotten boroughs and other public offices. New Corruption is about the sale of public property, generally well below its market value. This trade in 'the family silver' has no place among the Victorian values which Mrs Thatcher liked to evolve. It is neither thrifty nor enterprising. However, it does allow at least for a moment, lower taxation without an obvious or dramatic reduction in public services. It creates the possibility for a share-owning democracy. In fact, most of the participants appear to have been stags rather than bulls or bears: i.e. they have made a quick profit and left the serious gambling to the very rich and the very rich institutions. If the Thatcherites were looking to the Stolypin effect, home ownership was a much better bet.

Students of the last years of Tsarism know and respect Stolypin. He knew how to combine severe repression with the encouragement of divisions within the peasantry such that the upper stratum (the kulaks) would be able and willing to identify themselves with the existing order. One of the distinctive features of British

capitalism is that it arose upon the basis of a prolonged, cruel, but comprehensive process of enclosure or primitive accumulation which virtually eliminated the peasantry save for a few crofters, hill farmers or market gardeners. This was wonderfully advantageous economically, but highly dangerous socially and politically. The Shopocracy and the Labour Aristocracy provided only a limited security for the 'Rights of Property' in such a property-less world. The Englishman's home was his landlord's. This at least could be corrected by extending the reach of New Corruption. Council housing could be sold off for a song. To the Grantham tinged petit-bourgeois mind, the threat from the Council estate loomed far larger than that from the landed estate. Let the proletarian dwell in his own house with his own car, TV set, video and computer and telephone and he would fancy that he was no longer a proletarian — at least when he was not at work. He might even take a holiday in Paris or Corsica or Naples where he could experience 'aggressive begging' by the cochards or the attention of bandits or the predations of the 'lazaronni'. Of course the bourgeois with his *maison secondaire* in the Dordogne scorns the tripper in Benidorm, but both have experienced the joys of foreign travel no matter the diversity of forms.

Many of these changes in the occupational structure and the character of social experience are associated with the retreat from common ownership at home and abroad. The easiest way to interpret events in Russia, Eastern Europe as well as in China or Cuba is to see them in terms of the collapse or retreat of Socialism in face of a recovery of capitalism. At home, too, public ownership is being abandoned at almost every sector of the front. As Gaitskell affirmed in his *Socialism and Nationalisation* Fabian Tract 300 (1956): 'The great companies are serving the nation well'. On the other hand a large and expanding public sector was not seen as the one and only means of achieving high levels of employment. To use it to correct cyclic crises was damaging to the efficiency of the industries which had been nationalised. It did little to promote

equality since compensation had to be paid to the former owners and some approximation to the 'going rate' had to be paid to higher management if men and women of the right quality were to be recruited. Nor was public ownership associated with any marked improvement in industrial relations. Workers complained that it was like being employed by a ghost. The public found little evidence that strike proneness was diminished.

In outline such must be the main lines of Mr Blair's response to the charge that he is engaging in double-talk or new-speak. He must maintain that the objection that his modernisation amounts to a retracing of steps, to an unraveling of Labour history, is only valid in a formal, merely scholastic sense. The real world of work is changing. The tendency is for a return to a *second domestic system.* The giant factory; the huge office; the enormous bank; the great supermarket; the big comprehensive school and the vast university; all are doomed to be replaced by the distance worker or customer or student. Even when he is sick, the 20th Century patient may be diagnosed and operated upon from afar with the aid of non-intrusive surgery. Perhaps Mrs Thatcher's insistence that 'there is no such thing as society, only individuals and their families' was not so absurd as it was taken to be at the time. Perhaps Mr Blair's 'socialism' which requires us to remember that we are all of one blood, you and I, is not a retreat so much as a dogged defence of ancient assumptions. As his tone and style make him appear to be more and more Gladstonian, his critics and supporters might both find it appropriate albeit in different ways. Of course Mr Blair is no William Ewart Gladstone. But that is hardly the point. The want of an appearance of serious moral force is not relevant. Retrenchment and political reform have been placed once more in front of social and economic questions. The old pre-socialist order of priorities is being restored — witness the extraordinary eclectic lumping in Charter 88.

In short the old socialist order of priorities and convictions have all had to be profoundly revised to the point at which socialism as hitherto understood disappears altogether. Since the poorest is no longer the most numerous class (if it ever was) it can't come first. 'Globalisation' means that co-operation in one country has to be displaced in favour of greater competitiveness. Common ownership has failed in East and West alike. With the re-awakening of nationalism in Scotland and Wales and a preoccupation with the development of the European Union, the political has reasserted itself against the social. Constitutional reform has re-established itself as *the* Order of the Day. This is not what Tony Blair has said. It is what he needs to say if his talk of New Labour for a New Britain is to be delivered from the realm of nonsense to which it must otherwise be consigned, and given some plausibility.

But is it true?

The answer is: 'yes, but by no means entirely!'

During its first hundred years the old social foundations of the Labour Party have been partially eroded. As heavy industry has declined so it has become less a 'Party of check-weighmen' and more a Party of lawyers, teachers and other sorts of chatter-boxes. But notice that the check-weighman in a coal mine was most necessarily a chatter-box. The distance between working by hand or by brain has always tended to be exaggerated. If it is narrowing now, that should enhance, rather than diminish, the prospects for 'workers' control'. The producers are better qualified than ever before to decide — without the aid of shareholders or a superior caste of managers — what to produce, where, how and when. The trend towards a second domestic system does not affect the essence of the matter. The great division in modern society remains between workers and non-workers; between employees and employers; between those who sell their learning, intelligence, dexterity and muscle for wages and salaries to those who buy those skills and aptitudes in

order to make a profit out of that transaction; between those who habitually give orders and those who must obey them. This remains the great, central division in our society. Those who rightly take up the claims of women or ethnic minorities or the old or the young or the disabled do so best when they relate their own discontents and their own demands to this central issue. Shall production be for need or for profit? Shall need be determined by who is best able to pay for goods and services in the market or by agreeing a minimum standard of civilised life and improvements upon it which are appropriate to continual shifts in real movement of faculties and desires.

As for the much trumpeted collapse and failure of socialism. Given that socialism is the common ownership of the means of production, distribution and exchange under the best available means of democratic control, the Russian experience has little or nothing to do with it. For a few months at the start of the Revolution some real power did pass to the Soviets. But for most of the time power resided with a self-perpetuating oligarchy or an Oriental Despot. Common ownership through a centralised state is problematic at the best of times. When the most elementary conditions for the accountability of Government to the Governed are absent it is impossible. In Russia there was neither freedom of election, speech, association nor assembly. Accordingly, socialism was simply not agenda. Its rhetoric and its institutional forms were, however, most perfectly adapted to the task of industrialisation upon the basis of a transfer of an already achieved technology under the conditions of imperialism. Marx was correct in affirming that all Revolutions have proceeded under the protective shade of delusions about their own nature. He was wrong in imagining that a Revolution made in his name would be any different.

As for the experience of common ownership or nationalisation within the liberal democracies: its achievements were sufficient to supply many determined defenders if few passionate

enthusiasts. Nationalisation was intended to promote efficiency; equality and improved industrial relations. A whole succession of official reports issued before 1939 catalogued and analysed the failure of private ownership in one basic industry after another. Nationalisation was associated with increased productivity and production in most cases and that without recourse to the old myopic, robber economies. Some of the disappointments of nationalisation at an industry level were due to the fact that the public sector was used as a milch cow by the still predominantly capitalist economy. For example, for the first 10 years after nationalisation coal was sold at about 10 per cent below the ruling price in the world market thus confering a great competitive advantage on British capitalist enterprise. Moreover, the use of the public sector investment programme for counter-cyclical purposes (although a decided advantage for a Government committed to full employment) could be disadvantageous for the immediate purposes of the public sector. Nor did Sidney Webb allow for the marvellous opportunities which a valuable public sector might confer upon an unscrupulous and reactionary capitalist government. What a temptation to sell off cheap to its friends or to those who most aspired to be friends. One might protect public spending without raising taxes: although the truth of the matter is that taxes have been raised and public expenditure cut despite trading in the 'family silver'. Selling off the public sector at bargain prices was bound to be popular with rich businessmen: those who aspired to become of their number and all those who saw great political and social advantages in enlarging the petit bourgeoisie even as you diminished the proletariat. If someone had told 'Sid' (Webb), he would have paused; looked at the results; remarked 'perhaps we were wrong about the Enlightenment', and then resolved to try again.

The encouragement of the Co-operative movement is one way in which one might expect this to be done. The traditional co-operative store has done no more than barely hold its own

against Tesco, Sainsburys and Safeway's. However it has more than held its own in banking and in dairying. Among new enterprises, those established on co-op lines, have proved healthier and more long-lived than those established on the old individualistic principles. Discussion is proceeding about how the Workers' Co-op might overcome some of its traditional weaknesses; how management consultancies — organised themselves on co-operative lines — might assist the workers to overcome the old resistance to innovation, also how the State might be enlisted to cope with short-term redundancies. If the Government honestly entered into such commitments they might well cost it less than standing idly by and feeding the dole queues.

The clothes of disembodied socialism

Everybody knows the story of the little boy and the Emperor's clothes. Mr Blair's problem is how to attire his disembodied socialism so that it appears to be decently dressed. There are two outfits available.

The first is the 'stakeholder'. At first sight this mode of dress does not appear at all promising. Rousseau for all his indifference to actual history got it about right when he wrote: 'The first man who, having enclosed a piece of ground, bethought himself of saying *This is mine*, and found people simple enough to believe him, was the real founder of civil society. From how many crimes, wars and murders, from how many horrors and misfortunes might not anyone have saved mankind, by pulling up the stakes (sic), or filling up the ditch, and crying to his fellows, "Beware of listening to this impostor; you are undone if you once forget that the fruits of the earth belong *to us all*, and the earth itself to nobody".'

However, the stakeholders were already doing extremely well, in the New Worlds of America and Australasia. 'Red Indians and Aborigines were plainly not human and could be expropriated and exterminated at will by every good stakeholder.

Maoris were only marginally better. They might be spared a mission of civilising slaughter and granted a certain nominal political equality. However, they are still having trouble getting their original 'stakes' back. In fairness there was a more attractive, democratic or Jeffersonian tradition in which it was fondly imagined that every man might live by his own vine and under his own fig tree. This was what was being evoked when, in the midst of the Civil War, the Americans introduced the Homestead Act of 1862. Here the stakeholder if he acquired a relatively small area of land for a small sum (a selection from 160 acres) and occupied it for five years, he might count it as his property. It was, to a degree anticipated, by Robertson's Crown Lands Alienation Act passed in Victoria Australia in 1861 after the Eureka Stockade. With these measures poor men might acquire land on the easiest terms ever given.

There were two great limitations attached to stakeholding. Even in the new world it by no means ended the class struggle. The Jolly Swagman still engaged in 'social crime' by stuffing the jumbuck in his tucker bag, whereupon up rode the squatter mounted on his thoroughbred accompanied by troopers, one, two, three. As for the old world, reformers and revolutionaries tended to prefer demands for the nationalisation of the land which despite interruptions, grew from the start of the 19th century. The Owenite attempts to create Co-operative communities which would end the division between town and country, master and men, had their short-lived presence in both the New World and the Old. The Chartists had their land plan which was more akin to the Jeffersonian ideal. Keir Hardie and others favoured forms of Home colonisation, but the Emigration societies had more practical success. In the first industrial nation there could be but limited response to Joseph Chamberlain's cry for 'three acres and a cow'. Where to find an urban cow! He soon changed his populist programme by insisting that the rich must pay a 'ransom' to the poor — a far more realistic proposal.

Mr Blair has made it perfectly plain that he will require no ransom from the rich. Indeed, his concept of the stakeholder has more in common with the tradition associated with Disraeli. The worker could have a stake, not in the land, but in the open institutions of the country; the rule of law; and the 'Empire of England'. Speaking at the Guildhall in 1874 he declared: 'I have been alarmed recently by learning, from what I suppose is the highest liberal authority, that a Conservative Government cannot endure, because it has been returned by Conservative working men, and a Conservative working man is an anomaly. We have been told that a working man cannot be Conservative, because he has nothing to conserve — he has neither land nor capital; as if there were not other things in the world as precious as land and capital! . . . What for instance is land without liberty? And what is capital without justice? The working classes of this country have inherited personal rights which the nobility of other nations do not yet possess. Their persons and their homes are sacred. They have no fear of arbitrary arrests and domiciliary visits'.

It is this enlarged, less personal, less class-related sense of stakeholding which Mr Blair is in search of. He is in search of a sense of togetherness which will transcend divisions of capital and income. Those who have nothing must become all — despite the fact that they continue to have nothing or next to nothing.

No! Mr Blair is not looking to some lost world in which it was imagined that everyone lived by his own vine and under his own fig tree. He is more interested in the Asian and especially the Japanese experience. The wonderful oneness of highly efficient and most competitive companies of the Far East. One suspects that this sense of oneness is ascendant in Mr Blair's mind when he refers to the 'stakeholder'. The Japanese worker organised in his enterprise or company union, thinks of himself not as an engineer or a fitter, but as a Mitsubishi man or a Toyota man. He may no longer sing the company hymn or sleep in the

company dormitory, but the company comes before family or any stirrings of class consciousness. The so-called Spring offensive of the Japanese trade unions is best regarded as a ritual: a cure for serious class struggle rather than an example of it. Toyota man does not fight against his employer, but has a stake in his high status and enjoys life-time employment; or did until recently.

If this is the stakeholder economy which Mr Blair advocates, there are a number of cautions which must be borne in mind. The project was developed more than 20 years ago in *British Factory: Japanese Factory*. If this fascinating and learned work failed to enjoy much practical success, that was because it seemed to be generalising from a limited number of cases. Like less well informed observers, the author (Ronald Dore) tended to make the Japanese company equivalent to the giant or dominant company. He left out of consideration the subsidiary enterprises producing components or engaged in retailing, called out of or in activity upon demand from the giant enterprises. Besides, there is still a public sector in Japan which retains considerable importance and which does not merely reproduce the sort of industrial relations found in the dominant sector. Still more important, Dore in declaring that Japan supplies the model of the future, made far too little of the historical and cultural peculiarities of the Japanese. All assertions about some imagined National Character are rightly suspect yet no one who has visited or studied Japan can fail to be impressed by the relative ease with which the individual submits to the collective to which he belongs. Whether he identifies with the Right or the Left, he wishes never to act alone. Of course there are dissenters, but there is no strong dissenting tradition. In the British Isles excluding Ireland, there is a great tradition of each person endlessly negotiating the competing claims of solidarity and dissent. It is not to the present point to argue whether this is a condition of frailty or strength; of decay or a progressive civilisation. As E.J. Hobsbawm noticed, Japanese society is

remarkably *vulnerable*. At every level of Japanese society there is a sense of insecurity. There is a universal sense of the shortage of raw materials and the risk to markets. If Japan affords an example of a 'stakeholder society' it is partly because the stakes are felt to be desperately insecure.

Not all these considerations appear to have crossed Mr Blair's mind. Indeed, his 'stakeholder' appears to be a multiple personality capable of playing the selfless Japanese worker and the incorrigible individualist. It is characteristic of New Labour that it presents itself as the champion not merely of a group, Stakeholders, but of a universal category, the Individual.

To assert that there is no such thing as 'the Individual' is as absurd — no more and no less — than to follow Mrs Thatcher in contending: 'There is no such thing as "Society"'. Yet the Individual is a very tricky concept. It is tricky *philosophically* because he/she lacks all individuality! Each of us is but a sense of self made up of a *structure* of *shared* characteristics and a *sequence* in which the *common* characteristics were acquired or shed. We cannot communicate about ourselves except in terms which relate to features of age, gender, class, country, disposition etc., which are understood because they are *not* uniquely ours. Politically, the Individual is recognisable only in soliloquies or within face-to-face groups. To evoke the Individual in other circumstances is to attend a masked ball in which rival social types pass themselves off as being peculiarly universal: as something other than themselves. Thus, the Individual has been most commonly the man of property in conflict with public authority or else the more congenial eccentric in conflict with accepted standards of taste and decorum.

By identifying with the Individual, minority interests stand a chance of making themselves popular, at least among those who do not reflect about what is going on. They are lined up behind a special interest on the misunderstanding that there will be no

special interests left. One fears that this is what Mr Blair and 'New Labour' have cottoned on to.

To this general rule, there is one vital exception. A Party or State which sincerely cares for Individuals will promote the spheres of life left to small groups. It will oppose hugeness unless hugeness can make a serious case for itself. Thus, it is only in small classes that teachers can get to know children individually and find the most efficient ways of helping them to speak, write, number and think. Of course, the cost of small classes and small schools is having less choice of subjects and a smaller range of extra-curricular activities. It is in this limited but vital context of face-to-face groups, as against vast, impersonal associations that it makes sense to make claims for the Individual.

Who whom?

We lack a clear and distinct idea of the Stakeholder and, indeed, of the Individual. Yet they serve a common purpose. Their job is to displace the spectacle of class division and to hush up the class struggle. In a remarkable aside to his John Smith Memorial Lecture, Mr Blair remarked: 'As the clash of the all-encompassing and absolutist ideologies of the first part of the 20th Century grows muted and distant — the right have accepted the need for social provision, the left the necessity for a market economy . . .'

This is an astonishing characterisation of our time. While Mr Blair was trying to bury Clause IV, Mrs Thatcher and her successors were hell bent on putting the ownership of the means of production, distribution and exchange at the top of the political agenda. They aim to privatise everything in sight. Nothing that even began to be ours is our own. It has been sold at knock down prices to the rich and to those who aspire to be rich without producing any useful goods or services in return. All of fuel and power; most of water; most of transport have gone. Even policing and the prisons are under threat as private security services like

the old societies for the Prosecution of Felons start to outnumber the police themselves as they did before 1829-55.

As for 'social provision', Mr Blair is correct to insist that the right have accepted the need for it. What he omits to say is that they have accepted it on the basis of the principles of 1834. No one is to receive support except that it is 'less eligible' than it would be in any form of paid employment. As for foreigners, refugees and asylum seekers, they are to get nothing. To our lasting disgrace they can be left to starve in the gutter or to cross the Channel to France where even Chirac will offer them some semblance of the minimum conditions for civilised life.

The class struggle is alive and well and it is being prosecuted with enormous enthusiasm and with great success, not by Arthur Scargill, but by the rich and the powerful. Mrs Thatcher and her successors have been determined to make the poor humble again. To teach them deference by denying them employment and reproaching them with laziness. Everyday we are solemnly informed that the beneficiaries of 'dependency culture' are sodden with pleasure while engaging in the 'politics of envy'! The audacity of these charges is only matched by the insolent assurance of failed businessmen who take over the responsibilities of elected citizens upon 1,000 'Quangos'. We are asked to wave goodbye not merely to the achievements of Keir Hardie and Sidney Webb, but to those of the Northcote-Trevelyan Report. Civil servants, and all approximations to them, must think first of costs and last of the needs which they were supposed to identify and serve.

Cutting public services to make room for tax cuts for those who are very rich is the 'bottom line'. Mission statements; business plans; quality assessments; self-assessments; the impoverished idiom of failed businessmen intrude into every sector of our public life. There they stand in serried ranks monitoring their own inactivity — as well as that which their malign presence enforces.

I have always thought it lavatorial — as well as inaccurate — to say with Ernie Bevin that the Labour Party emerged out of the 'bowels' of the TUC. Yet no obsession with his own 'Marxist' past would have prevented Ernie from recognising what is happening now. With the return of mass unemployment; with the growth of 'distance working' and the emergence of 'the second domestic system'; organised labour is enfeebled as it has not been before in our life-time. The inherently unequal bargain between employer and employed in which all the advantage lies with the former when it comes to reserves, initiating changes in the organisation of working, knowledge of the market and negotiating skills, is massively enhanced once trade union assets are put at risk and solidarity made a punishable offence. Where Heath rashly attempted to shift the balance of power in favour of the employer in one great measure, Thatcher wisely preferred to proceed step by step through six or seven. Of all John Major's 'Charters' none has been more effective than his Sweater's Charter: his offer of employment unregulated by trade unions; ending minimum wage legislation through Wages Councils; and diminishing the health and safety inspectorate. It is in this cruel jungle that Mr Blair would have the lamb lie down with the lion only given the protective shade of the social chapter and the minimum wage (amount unspecified).

It has been well said that there are two kinds of politics. The first imagines the world to suit its policy and ends in the company of ineffectual angels. The second devises its policies to correspond with the realities of the world and ends in betrayal and boundless cynicism. Mr Blair does not fall between these two stools: he bestrides them. As realist he promises nothing and as leader of New Labour he promises nothing less. He knows that privatisation means New Corruption. He knows that the rich are becoming richer and the poor poorer. He knows that the trade unions are in chains. But he knows that Mum's the word. With his mouth tightly closed he invites the electorate to read his lips.

Attaining and maintaining office

More than 60 years ago Nye Bevan grasped the central dilemma of democratic socialism. To *attain* office it must arouse the hopes of all the hard-pressed, outcast, unemployed, insecure and alienated people. (Almost half the electors under 25 abstained at the last election.) To *maintain* office it must disappoint those self same hopes! It must prevent a crisis of business confidence which would have the immediate effect of worsening unemployment and bringing further downward pressure on wages. Accordingly it suffers a fair approximation to total amnesia when it comes to recollecting its pledges to its own supporters. It keeps faith with them by rushing to reassure their adversaries. It's not so much a matter of directly reassuring the CBI or the Institute of Directors but to break its promises so that the vast impersonal forces of the market may be given time to settle down.

Business is a system of power even when it is not organised for that end. Employers acting from strictly business motives can exercise coercive power upon democratically elected governments. Before the advent of Labour, Business sometimes tried to influence parties by withholding supplies or washing them away in a torrent of beer and gin. They rarely, if ever, subjected them to the sort of direct and indirect coercion which has come at the heart of politics in the 20th century.

Some of the leaders of Old Labour proposed to escape from this dilemma by taking on the gods, by behaving like Prometheus, by preferring to go beyond their promises rather than go back on them. But even these heroes preferred to identify themselves as bearers of the white-heat of technology rather than the torch of freedom. Their adversaries proposed to escape from their difficulty by capitulating in advance. Harold Macmillan welcomed the presence of Hugh Gaitskill because he assumed the responsibilities of government while he was still in opposition.

Everyone with a head on his shoulders knows that this is what Mr Blair is doing. The great dilemma disappears if the Opposition has no need to win the election because the Government is all set to lose it. But how much reliance can be placed upon that? The memory of false promises about tax cuts fades. Even the reality of diminished health and educational provision imposes itself. TESSAs mature; nursery vouchers arrive; interest rates and inflation fall. If the 'feel good factor' does not return, the agreeable expectations associated with greed tend to displace the disagreeable ones which go along with fear.

Lord Desai has associated himself with these cautions. He asserts: 'These dribs and drabs add up to a staggering £18 billion influx of cash into the economy. If the recipients of this bonanza spend only half of this, the impact will be massive — £9 billion is equivalent to 6p off the basic rate of tax . . . Come election time the economy may very well not be the strong card that Labour thought it would be'.

It is not only the duty of the Opposition to oppose, it is in its great interest to do so. The correct tactic for a Left Opposition is to begin by listing what needs to be done to repair the damaged infrastructure, considered socially and culturally as well as economically. Then it makes a provisional outline of its priorities. Finally, it must make its costing and decide how the bill will be met: how much will be raised by direct taxation of this or that order of progressiveness; how much by indirect taxation with so much falling on superfluities and so much on the bare necessities of life; how much by borrowing; how much by revenue derived from growth when associated with a controlled rate of inflation. This operation cannot be completed in its entirety while Labour is still in opposition. Every informed and honest person knows that we have had 17 years of government which rejects both measurement and publicity: fiddling the unemployment statistics and withholding the facts about poverty.

Towards a renewed Labour Party

New Labour is not even a convincing exercise in Opportunism. New Labour will not win the next election because it has left everything to its opponents. If privatisation has led to filching from the public purse: to worse provision and rising prices for the consumers; obscene salary increases for some managing directors and excessive payouts to functionless shareholders; New Labour offers no prospect of re-nationalisation or some improved mode of public ownership and accountability. If millions are out of work and millions more in increasing fear of unemployment, New Labour declines to commit itself to full employment. If pensioners and the 16-18-year-olds live with diminishing support or no support at all, New Labour goes to the rats who left the sinking ship to learn how to refloat the Poor Law of 1834. If the Tories salute the growing inequalities which they have promoted. If they defend the new rich by denouncing 'the politics of envy' and condemn the new poor by denouncing the whingers who dwell in a dependency culture, New Labour denounces every attempt to depict it as the Party of tax and spend. A renewed Labour Party must begin the process of renewal by proudly taking up where traditional Labour left off. It must proudly affirm that it will tax and spend; that it will restore and extend public ownership and control; that it was, is and always will be the Party of the majority — of the productive population including those who are condemned to be unproductive against their will — as against the 'ossified ones' as Saint Simon called them. What it must not do is to sit still and wait for something to turn up. In Russia in the context of War and Revolution, millions voted with their feet. In Britain in 1996-97 millions will vote with their backsides so that the Conservative charlatans retain the prizes which have been the object of their long and unscrupulous ambition.

What a renewed Labour Party must do is to reclaim all that has been best in its tradition: namely the new social settlement which followed victory in the Second World War. It was, it is and it always will be the Party of full employment; comprehensive

social services and extended common ownership with public accountability. It must reaffirm that it always was and it always will be the Party of the many against the privileged few. It must reaffirm that the class war is a wasteful and disgusting experience, but one which must be prosecuted until we extinguish classes.

To this end it will not do to reiterate Marx. When Marx and Engels distanced themselves from their 'Utopian' predecessors, who wanted every detail for the building of the New Jerusalem, they may have been right in their time. It won't do any longer. A renewed Labour Party must endure the hard toil of thought involved in preparing the way for a renewed Britain in a renewed Europe and reunited world.

Renewed Labour will not treat the end of the Cold War as an opportunity to go into a deep sleep about atomic weapons and international order. It will not join in the deceitful business of telling other states: do what I say, don't worry about what I do. It will not follow the deplorable example of the French under Chirac or the Chinese under God knows who. Renewed Labour must be internationalist in a more sincere and serious way than Old Labour — never mind New Labour — have ever been. It must be for a renewed International. A working people's international which will extend — as neither the first nor the second International did — to Asia and Africa. (I am prepared to leave a few pedants to quarrel with that judgement.)

These are large matters. Yet the greatest task of Renewed Labour is to offer a vision of a Good Society. A Society in which the claims of Humanity have displaced those of Empire and Class. It will not be able to do this if it ignores the existing state of play. The democratic deficit in the European Union must be corrected. The democratic deficit within the United Kingdom — the need for devolution in favour of national and regional accountability — must be addressed.

The hereditary principle must be systematically rooted out. The monarchy and peerage must be abolished. The thing must

be done calmly and rationally. It must not be placed at the top of the agenda so as to obscure the more urgent need for the restoration of full employment; a return to comprehensive social services; a reversal of privatisation in favour of diverse and well considered forms of common ownership and control.

The death of Socialism has been proclaimed many times. For example, Owenism and other forms of 'Utopian' socialism which flourished between 1820 and 1848 were declared to be stone dead. Few noticed that Karl Marx and J.S. Mill, in their different ways, were preparing the ground for the socialist revival which came in the 1880s. As Marx observed of proletarian revolutions and movements: they 'criticise themselves constantly, interrupt themselves continually in their own course, come back to the apparently accomplished in order to begin it afresh, deride with unmerciful thoroughness the inadequacies, weaknesses and paltrinesses of their first attempts, seem to throw down their adversary only in order that he may draw new strength from the earth and rise again, more gigantic, before them, and recoil again and again from the indefinite prodigiousness of their own aims, until a situation has been created which makes all turning back impossible . . .'

I began by inviting the reader to construe lines on the Grave by an earlier Blair in a purely secular and historical way. I conclude by inviting the reader to reflect on the following contemplation of the Grave in the same manner without appeal to any religion, even a secular one:

> What though my bodie runne to dust?
> Faith cleaves into it, counting every grain
> With an exact and most particular trust
> Reserving all for flesh again.
>
> (George Herbert, 1593-1633)

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