

## GOODBYE MY BLAIR



Be nice to him. This will be Tony Blair's last Labour Conference as undisputed Leader.

It will be full of bluff and bravado: grandiose claims about an unfinished agenda of New Labour reforms; resolute statements about work still to be done; a polished Leader's speech full of energy and zeal. But this will be swansong conference not a sing song revival.

This year's Trades Union Congress conference has already fired warning shots across the path of New Labour. They will no longer play along with further privatisations, cuts in pensions rights or adventurist wars. Their warning shots were as much for Gordon Brown as Tony Blair. It is time for a change in direction, not just musical chairs for the Leaders seat.

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In the coming year, a succession of trade union conferences are likely to pass a simple resolution to be moved at next year's Labour conference. The resolution will say little more than "Conference calls for an election to be held, within the next 3 months, for the leadership of the Party". A number of Constituency parties – those that have not either died a death or surreptitiously changed from political parties to Tuppaware parties – may also pass the same resolution. It only requires a simple majority in favour at the Conference, for this to become policy. The succession will be underway.

The beauty of this is that it skips past continuing obsessions of the Prime Ministers office: their demands for loyalty on all issues (and the veiled threat that he will not step down early if he doesn't get it) and the presumption that Labour is only electable if it is synonymous with Blairism.

Most of the Party, as well as the country, know how dangerously self-deluding this belief is. The ongoing debacle of the illegal war on Iraq; Blair's silent agreement to support Bush on a new generation of nuclear missiles; the pursuit of further adventurism against Iran if it wants to do the same; the transatlantic consensus that modern politics amounts to little more than policies that ensure the survival of the richest. These are the core elements of the Blair-Bush agenda. 'Blush-ism' may be a comfort zone they and their corporate sponsors are happy to occupy, but from New Orleans, to Boscastle, to the shores of Indonesia, it is a dead loser.

The extent to which the plot has been lost can be found within the different elements of this consensus. Blair's misguided attacks on the BBC, during his 'Confidences Trop Intimes' meeting with Rupert

Murdoch, highlight the paranoia at the dusk of his reign. It was absurd to brand the BBC's coverage of tragedies in New Orleans as being driven by a hatred of America .

The BBC had picked up on a sense of international outrage (shared by many in America ) about bodies left floating in the water for 5 days or more, with none of the guards or emergency workers having a duty to remove them. Bush may have talked about treating the dead with dignity, but none of this transmitted itself to doing so in practice.

Of course, the dead were overwhelmingly black and universally poor. They were the ones who could not flee or had nowhere to flee to. They were the civilian front-line that was going to take the biggest hit when Bush's disinvestment in maintenance and renewal programmes for the levees finally caused them to fail. None of these were matters that either Blair or Murdoch has seen fit to comment on.

It is bizarre that this conversation between the two should even have taken place at all. Murdoch is not only the BBC's main rival, he is also owner of the USA 's biggest non-news channel, Fox News. It is almost Bush's official propoganda channel. Want a war against a country most American's would not know where to find? Fox News will come up with the caricatures and fan up the fear. Want a smokescreen for an illegal presidential victory that never was? Fox News will declare your man the winner. Bugger the scheming dishonesties that had been used to exclude huge numbers from the voting process, for the excluded too were poor and mainly black.

I have no doubt that if Bush decides to go for Iran , Fox News will bang the drum for him. I have no doubt that it too will denounce, as anti-American, the demands that British and American troops have to pull out of Iraq when the current UN mandate expires in December.

Back in Downing Street the belief is that opposition to the 'Blush' consensus is not only based on hatreds, but also becomes the greatest threat to civil liberty. The war on terror becomes a war on ourselves. Ministers demand more draconian powers over citizens and liberties on order to 'protect' society from the terrorist threat. Yet none will ask who is responsible for giving terrorist groups an open platform in Iraq that they never had before the war.

Now we have either silence or endorsement of the actions of British troops, dressed as Arabs, shooting Iraqi police, being arrested and held in an Iraqi jail, and then being broken out by other military units. This is not the role of peacekeepers; it is the role of insurgents. It is not the restoration of the rule of law, it is the making up of law as you go along.

Internationally and domestically, we are locked into an agenda that is terminally self destructive and driven largely by its own paranoia and prejudices. The big structural challenges are all being ducked in favour of mantra's that chant of individual empowerment and personal choice. In reality, there may be no individual solutions left to the biggest of the challenges we face. It is this return to more collective, interventionist solutions that the Blair project fears most, and why it has to go.

Climate change can not now be avoided. We can probably manage our way through this century, reversing much of the damage. But to do so we will need to dump the free-for-all of globalisation. Micro-economic systems – with different ways of accounting for the use of water, energy and land – will replace current obsessions about market liberalisation.

The energy agenda has to shift from fossil fuels to hydrogen and renewables. Cities that are already generating more than 100% of their energy needs from renewable sources are finding that the National Grid leaks like a sieve. The time has come to re-visit the days when local authorities set up their own Gas, Water and Electricity companies to provide security of services for their local communities. In this century, the exciting prospect is that we could do so again, but on sustainable and renewable terms. And not a drop of this would need to come from nuclear power.

The same is true in welfare economics. Provide people with decent pensions, based on public pension funds, and you have the capital you need for infrastructure programmes.

In a country that is economically rich, the poverty we face is in vision, intellect and political courage. New Labour never had this. It was a merchandising machine, highly skilled in selling the superficial on behalf of the powerful. The events that have taken him long past his sell-by date, now demand a different vision. Time to move on.

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