

## The Left Attacks Thatcherism

Today our nation, after eight years under the Tories, is on the brink of utter chaos, facing both social and economic collapse. Our basic industries have been butchered. Our manufacturing base has been eroded with hundreds of businesses, large and small, gone to the wall while the nation has become increasingly dependent on imported goods.

The human consequences of this industrial and economic devastation are terrible. Over eight million people struggle for survival on or below the poverty line and four and a half million people are unemployed...

Sickness and ill health of all kinds are rampant, and they are made even more terrible by the cirsis in the National Health Service and throughout the welfare system.

The Tories have been utterly ruthless in their butchery of health and welfare provisions. The NHS, once the pride of our nation, has been reduced to a critical condition through hospital closures, medical staff cutbacks, the lack and withdrawal of resources and vital equipment, and the privatization of key services. Approximately 700,000 people wait today for hospital treatment before it is too late. Thousands of people who are suffering from serious, often fatal diseases, are being turned away through lack of hospital beds and staff...

This has become a grim and desperate society - fuelled by unemployment and its social consequences, frustration, rage and despair are rampant all around us. More and more people, I believe, are coming to see themselves are under attack - and they are correct.

We are indeed facing a deliberate political attack by Britain's ruling class. A war of attrition is being waged as capitalism, in a condition of acute crisis, lashes out with increasing ferocity to protect itself. The existence of this crisis is now clear for all to see. It has been exposed by the recent collapse of stock markets throughout the capitalist world, triggered off by the slide on Wall Street (which according to experts is the worst slump since 1929).

This collapse will in my view lead inevitably to more hardship for the British people, with a massive increase in unemployment and reduced living standards as capitalism seeks once again to make working people pay for its pursuit of profit and power...

In seeking to win that absolute control which it must have for even limited survival, the State through the Tory Government has introduced twin measures to destroy or render ineffective all those who oppose it. On the one hand, it has deliberately increased unemployment from just over one million to four and a half million in eight years creating as in the 1930s a situation where thirty to forty people pursue each job vacancy, driven by this emotional blackmail to increasing fear.

At the same time it has introduced vicious legal measures designed to render the British trade-union movement completely ineffective. Indeed Margaret Thatcher has made it absolutely clear that she wants to wipe socialism off the agenda of British politics; to achieve this aim the Tories are determined also to wipe effective trade unionism off the industrial agenda.

Since 1979, we have seen a whole range of anti-trade-union legislation - all of it designed to dismantle the gains achieved by trade unionists in more than a century of struggle. Today, the extent of this legislation is such that Britain's trade-union movement must now be regarded as one of the most oppressed in the world!...

The steps taken against British trade unionism can probably only be compared with those taken against our German comrades by Hitler in the 1930s. If this new Tory legislation is left unchallenged, then civil liberties and human rights in Britain are in danger of being wiped out...

Arthur Scargill, Speech in Merthyr Tydfil 1987

### The Peace Process

...But a return to normal life in Northern Ireland requires much more than just a paramilitary ceasefire, important though that step is. It requires a permanent end to violence; and it requires a balanced political settlement under which all parts of the community can live alongside each other without fear or antagonism.

5 That is the purpose of the talks process, started in 1991. We need to seek new arrangements for the internal government of Northern Ireland, for the relationship between north and south, and for the relationship between the two governments.

The British Government have discussed these matters at length with the Northern Irish political parties and with the Irish Government...

10 The circumstance in Northern Ireland are widely recognized to be unique in the United Kingdom. There are two traditions with very different political aspirations. What is needed is a structure of government that combines democratic legitimacy with a system of checks and balances. That calls for mechanisms different from those appropriate to the rest of the United Kingdom.

15 It was those historic differences that meant that, until 1972, there was a Northern Irish Assembly with a wide range of functions. Since then, however, those functions have been the direct responsibility of central Government - unlike anywhere else in the United Kingdom, where many of them are carried out by elected local authorities. In Northern Ireland, local accountability has been lost, and political talent has been unused...

20 The next step will be for further negotiations to take place with the political parties in Northern Ireland. In those negotiations, others will be naturally free to put forward their own proposals. I very much hope that everyone will agree to negotiate seriously. There is too much at stake for anyone to stand aside from these discussions.

25 If agreement is reached in the negotiations, the outcome will be put for approval to the people of Northern Ireland in a referendum. I should equally make it clear that there is no question of putting proposals to referendum before there is agreement between the main political parties.

30 There is a triple safeguard against any proposals being imposed on Northern Ireland: first, any proposals must command the support of the political parties in Northern Ireland; secondly, any proposals must then be approved by the people of Northern Ireland in a referendum; and thirdly, any necessary legislation must be passed by this Parliament. That provides a triple lock designed to ensure that nothing is implemented without consent.

35 The prize from a successful outcome to the peace process is immense. We want to see the people of Northern Ireland permanently free from the fear of terrorist violence. We want to see institutions that reflect the different traditions in Northern Ireland in a manner acceptable to all, and we want to enshrine the principle, both north and south, that no change in Northern Ireland's constitutional position can take place without the consent of the people of Northern Ireland.

John Major, Speech in the House of Commons, 22.2.95 in *Parliamentary Debates*, 6th series, vol. 255, cols. 355-8.

Thursday May 10, 2007  
Guardian Unlimited : Blair's resignation speech

*Tony Blair resigned today at Trimdon Labour Club, in Sedgefield.*

I have come back here, to Sedgefield, to my constituency. Where my political journey began and where it is fitting it should end. Today I announce my decision to stand down from the leadership of the Labour Party. The Party will now select a new Leader. On 27 June I will tender my resignation from the office of Prime Minister to The Queen.

5 I have been Prime Minister of this country for just over 10 years. In this job, in the world today, that is long enough, for me but more especially for the country. Sometimes the only way you conquer the pull of power is to set it down. It is difficult to know how to make this speech today. There is a judgment to be made on my premiership. And in the end that is, for you, the people to make.

10 I can only describe what I think has been done over these last 10 years and perhaps more important why. I have never quite put it like this before. I was born almost a decade after the Second World War. I was a young man in the social revolution of the 60s and 70s. I reached political maturity as the Cold War was ending, and the world was going through a political, economic and technological revolution.

15 I looked at my own country. A great country. Wonderful history. Magnificent traditions. Proud of its past. But strangely uncertain of its future. Uncertain about the future. Almost old-fashioned. All of that was curiously symbolized in its politics. You stood for individual aspiration and getting on in life or social compassion and helping others. You were liberal in your values or conservative. You believed in the power of the State or the efforts of the individual. Spending more money on the public realm was the answer or it was the problem. None of it made sense to me. It was 20th century ideology in a world approaching a new millennium. Of course people want the best for themselves and their families but in an age where human capital is a nation's greatest asset, they also know it is just and sensible to extend opportunities, to develop the potential to succeed, for all not an elite at the top.

20 People are today open-minded about race and sexuality, averse to prejudice and yet deeply and rightly conservative with a small 'c' when it comes to good manners, respect for others, treating people courteously. They acknowledge the need for the state and the responsibility of the individual. They know spending money on our public services matters and that it is not enough. How they are run and organized matters too.

25 So 1997 was a moment for a new beginning, for sweeping away all the detritus of the past. Expectations were so high. Too high. Too high in a way for either of us. Now in 2007, you can easily point to the challenges, the things that are wrong, the grievances that fester. But go back to 1997. Think back. No, really, think back. Think about your own living standards then in May 1997 and now.

30 Visit your local school, any of them round here, or anywhere in modern Britain. Ask when you last had to wait a year or more on a hospital waiting list, or heard of pensioners freezing to death in the winter unable to heat their homes. There is only one Government since 1945 that can say all of the following: More jobs, fewer unemployed, better health and education results, lower crime, and economic growth in every quarter. This one.

35 But I don't need a statistic. There is something bigger than what can be measured in waiting lists or GCSE results or the latest crime or jobs figures. Look at our economy. At ease with globalization. London the world's financial centre. Visit our great cities and compare them with 10 years ago. No country attracts overseas investment like we do. Think about the culture of Britain in 2007. I don't just mean our arts that are thriving. I mean our values. The minimum wage. Paid holidays as a right. Amongst the best maternity pay and leave in Europe. Equality for gay people. Or look at the debates that reverberate round the world today. The global movement to support Africa in its struggle against poverty. Climate change. The fight against terrorism. Britain is not a follower. It is a leader. It gets the essential characteristic of today's world: its interdependence. This is a country today that for all its faults, for all the myriad of unresolved problems and fresh challenges, is comfortable in the 21st Century. At home in its own skin, able not just to be proud of its past but confident of its future.

January 28, 2009

## Leading article: We must preserve what is best of the House of Lords

### *The chamber needs reform, but non-partisan service still has a place*

The case of four members of the House of Lords who apparently offered to influence legislation in return for a fee has been greeted by general uproar. It is not surprising, given the echoes of the toxic "cash-for-questions" affair that convulsed the House of Commons in the 1990s.

This latest scandal emphasises the lack of transparency in relation to the lobbying links of peers and also the vagueness of the rules governing their behaviour. Whatever the results of the inquiry into the conduct of the four peers, the system manifestly needs to be tightened up. 5

The argument that this is merely a case of a few bad apples will not do. There have been several recorded instances of peers handing their Westminster passes, intended for researchers, to lobbyists. And how many of us were aware before this week that 145 of the 743 members of the Lords are engaged in paid consultancy work? Most of these peers are doubtless offering innocent political advice for their services, rather than altering legislation in their clients' interests. But the point is that the present disclosure arrangements leave a good deal of room for doubt. At the very least, peers should be compelled to reveal how much they are earning from their outside interests. 10

Such problems flow from the half-reformed nature of the House of Lords. The Government cleared out most of the hereditary peers in 1999 but, in other respects, the House remains as unaccountable as it ever was. Nowadays, a peer is appointed rather than born to the title, but the seat is still considered his or her personal property. They cannot be expelled from the house or stripped of their titles for corruption; not even if they end up spending time in prison for their crimes. It is difficult for a democracy to tolerate an upper chamber that is, in many respects, a feudal relic. 15

All this is true. And yet some wider perspective is important in considering the future of the second chamber. It is important to remember that many peers do much good work painstakingly picking through the legislation that is sent up by their professional colleagues in the Commons. When they come across something wrong-headed or dangerous, they send it back. And most of them perform this service for no salary. The lords have certainly proved their worth as a revising chamber in recent years. Last year, the House rejected the Government's legislative plans to detain domestic terrorist suspects for 42 days without charge. In 2005, the law lords ruled that the Government's internment of foreign terror suspects was incompatible with the European Convention on Human Rights. 20 25

The argument for completing the reforms set in train a decade ago is strong. At least a proportion of peers should be made democratically accountable to the electorate, but a wholly elected chamber would be a mistake. The last thing we want is another chamber of professional politicians. It is worth asking whether the House of Lords would have proved such a stubborn check on the Commons over the years if it had been full of individuals keen to secure party funds for re-election? It is unfashionable to speak of non-partisan public service in the present cynical era, but there is still a place for it. 30

By all means, let the Government clean up and reform the Lords, but in the process we need to be careful not to

wipe out what makes the chamber such a valuable check and balance on our democracy.

*The Independent*