

New Labour: Working for Capital, Listening to the powerful

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This morning I received a leaflet through my door from the Scottish Labour Party.

It is headlined: “*Your* Labour Team – Working for Glasgow, Listening to You”. It has quotes from my local Councillor, my MSP and the prospective candidate for Westminster, who just happens to be the son of the current MP.

On the reverse is a mock up of a report card for Labour for 2007/08, outlining how well they’ve done, although the “Mark” given is only a check. The “Subjects” are “Labour at Westminster”, “Glasgow Labour” and “Labour Locally” and in the comments bold text, reminiscent of Tony Blair’s non sequiturs, outlines Labour’s achievements – here’s a selection: “**More Money!** A record settlement of over £30 billion to the Scottish Executive”; “**Going for Gold!** Won the 2014 Commonwealth Games for Glasgow”; “**Local problems sorted!** Secured funding to have part of Gary Street recobbled.”

The leaflet encourages me to get in touch: “We are proud of our achievements but recognise there is no much more to do in our great City. We want to hear your views, so please get in touch and tell us your priorities.”

And yet, I have been in touch, many times. I have emailed, sent letters, phoned and gone in person to see my representatives. I have never come away with the impression that it made any difference or that my “local Labour team is committed to standing up and fighting for Glasgow.”

When my local Labour team, in the form of Glasgow City Council, decided to close down what should have been my son’s primary school (Kelvinhaugh), along with four others, I went to my Councillor and expressed my concerns. I didn’t want a “super-school” of over 700 primary school students. My wife and I wanted a local school, with small class sizes that our son could eventually walk to on his own – obviously not right away, but when he was mature enough to do so. After all, it is a constant refrain from politicians and the media that children don’t get enough exercise. And too many children today fail to develop the skills that will lead them towards independence because they are shuttled to and fro, never learning how to safely cross roads on their own, among other skills. Dr Malcolm Green’s reaction? “Responsible parents don’t let their children walk to school on their own”.

When I asked the Education Department what strategies they would use to deal with bullying in the new super-school, they responded that they didn’t “anticipate” any bullying.

We were told that the super-school would be better, that larger class sizes were now shown by research to be better than smaller class sizes and anyway – and this was the real point – financial constraints meant that the City couldn’t afford to maintain schools with low enrolment. But when one

parent at a meeting asked why, if low school rolls were the problem for Kelvinhaugh Primary, why was the Council giving planning permission for so many single-occupancy luxury flats to be built in the neighbourhood? Why not build more social housing? Their answer? That's not our department, you want to talk to Housing.

New Labour's problem is that they came into power in 1997 backing Reagan/Thatcher neo-liberalism, which Edward Herman defines as "advanced class warfare"¹. Labour stuck to Tory spending, courted the "Business Community" and encouraged a gluttonous consumerism. The results of this break with "stale ideology"² are self-evident, but a few examples should suffice:

- s "The divide between rich and poor in Britain has widened to its greatest gap for more than 40 years"³
- 3 Racist attacks have risen sharply in the UK in recent years⁴ and the fascist British National Party has enjoyed growing support⁵
- 5 The UK is facing a recession – as is the rest of the planet, and yet the decision to encourage "home-ownership", (ie, renting from a bank) now appears less than wise⁶

Amazingly, this all pales in comparison with Labour's criminal behaviour.

"The great lie is that we are represented by people like Gordon Brown, described as 'our leaders'. Because they represent us and we are not monsters, we are to believe that 'our leaders' are seeking to resolve problems afflicting humanity in general, while working more specifically to protect us from terrorism and other threats. In other words, we are to believe that 'our leaders', like us, are rational, compassionate and well-intentioned."⁷

Tony Blair once described himself as a "pretty straight kind of guy"⁸. Blair was open in his admiration for business and the USA, which put him at odds with many Labour members and supporters.

¹ Edward Herman, "The Triumph of Lunacy", Z Magazine, 2 June 2008, <http://zmag.org/zmag/viewArticle/17795>

² Tony Blair, Speech at Nexus/Guardian Conference, 1 March 1997, <http://www.netnexus.org/library/papers/blair.htm>

³ Reuters, "Gap between rich and poor widest in 40 years", 17 July 2007, <http://www.reuters.com/article/lifestyleMolt/idUSL1777256220070717>

⁴ Times, "Racist attacks up 12 percent in a year", 28 October 2007, <http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/news/uk/crime/article2753846.ece>; BBC Online, "Rise in racist attacks reported", 27 February 2007, http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/northern_ireland/7266249.stm

⁵ Searchlight, "Where now?", June 2008, <http://www.searchlightmagazine.com/index.php?link=template&story=233>

⁶ Market Watch, "London shares close flat as bank stocks decline", 29 May 2008, <http://www.marketwatch.com/news/story/miners-oil-producers-help-spur/story.aspx?guid=%7BCC4AFDF5-122B-4934-B009-06F9E5464412%7D>

⁷ MediaLens, "Somalia – Hidden Catastrophe, Hidden Agenda", 13 May 2008, http://medialens.org/alerts/08/080513_somalia_hidden_catastrophe.php

⁸ Interview with John Humphrys on BBC TV's "On the Record", 16 November 1997

But few could have predicted that Blair would have proved his devotion to American elites by backing the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. The largest protests in history were those which took place **before** the war in Iraq, and yet in keeping with Blair's assertion that "the art of leadership is saying no, not saying yes", the UK government committed itself to a war that is illegal according to international law⁹.

The UK is now committed to a war which has killed over 600,000 people¹⁰. We were told that this was the right thing to do, that we had to do it, that if we didn't we would face disaster.

"He is a threat to his own people and to the region and, if allowed to develop these weapons, a threat to us also." Tony Blair, 10 April 2002

"It [the intelligence service] concludes that Iraq has chemical and biological weapons, that Saddam has continued to produce them, that he has existing and active military plans for the use of chemical and biological weapons, which could be activated within 45 minutes, including against his own Shia population; and that he is actively trying to acquire nuclear weapons capability..." Tony Blair, 24 September 2002

"We are asked now seriously to accept that in the last few years-contrary to all history, contrary to all intelligence-Saddam decided unilaterally to destroy those weapons. I say that such a claim is palpably absurd." Tony Blair, 18 March 2003

"There are literally thousands of sites. As I was told in Iraq, information is coming in the entire time, but it is only now that the Iraq survey group has been put together that a dedicated team of people, which includes former UN inspectors, scientists and experts, will be able to go in and do the job properly.

"As I have said throughout, I have no doubt that they will find the clearest possible evidence of Saddam's weapons of mass destruction." Tony Blair, 4 June 2003¹¹

Scottish Labour might claim that the war is nothing to do with them – not our department, after all. But Labour cannot pick and choose, just as our society cannot ignore its failings and pretend that all is well simply because we are unable to admit our errors.

⁹ Olivier Burkeman, "Invasion right but 'illegal' says US hawk", The Age, 21 November 2003, <http://www.theage.com.au/articles/2003/11/20/1069027255087.html>; BBC Online, "Iraq War illegal", 16 September 2004, http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/3661134.stm

¹⁰ Les Roberts, "Iraq's death toll is far worse than our leaders admit", Independent, 14 February 2007, <http://www.independent.co.uk/opinion/commentators/les-roberts-iraqs-death-toll-is-far-worse-than-our-leaders-admit-436291.html>; Burnham G, Lafta R, Doofy S, Roberts L, "Mortality after the 2003 invasion of Iraq", The Lancet 11 October 2006, <http://www.thelancet.com/webfiles/images/journals/lancet/s0140673606694919.pdf>

¹¹ BBC Online, "In Quotes: Blair and Iraq weapons", 29 September 2004, http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk_politics/3054991.stm

“Crucially, ‘our leaders’ front a political system that has an overwhelming advantage in high-tech military power. They are all too willing to use this power to convulse countries with bloodshed when doing so supports their lucrative version of economic ‘order’. Iraq is the obvious example - Somalia is another.

“Our leaders’ rule in the name of democracy, but they act in the interests of a narrow, extremely violent kleptocracy.”¹²

According to the leaflet I received, Scottish Labour are “proud” of their “achievements”, but accept that “there is so much more to do”. Labour claims to be “standing up for hard working individuals and ensuring that every child has the best possible start in life” and that “these will continue to be our priorities as opposed to the proposed Tory cuts” (seemingly at odds with Glasgow City Council’s plans to cut £50 million in its budget while spending £56 million on the Commonwealth Games, for which there was no referendum to determine whether the people of Glasgow actually wanted to host this event).

The leaflet emphasises that my representatives are “working hard” and “standing up” for me and other “hard working individuals”. Perhaps they would do well to stop working so hard, take stock and decide: who are they working for? The people? Or the powerful?

Whichever they choose, a little honesty would be appreciated. So next time, they can just say : “You will toil ceaselessly for our wars.” They wouldn’t need to print any more glossy leaflets, which would be an efficiency savings.

¹² MediaLens, “Somalia – Hidden Catastrophe, Hidden Agenda”, 13 May 2008, http://medialens.org/alerts/08/080513_somalia_hidden_catastrophe.php