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## **"New Labour, New Life for Britain"? Tony Blair's New Labour in the comments of the three main political journals of Britain**

**Jarna Lahti examines the public debate on the direction of the British Labour Party between Tony Blair's election as the Party Leader in 1994 and his victory in the general elections of 1997.**

When Tony Blair was elected the leader of the Labour party on 21 July 1994, the Conservative party had been in power for 15 years. As the Labour party had continued to suffer one electoral defeat after another, discussion about the future and the role of the party had intensified. In four previous general elections the British electorate had chosen to be governed by the Conservative party. It had become increasingly evident that the Labour party needed to remodel itself and to clarify and rediscover its purpose.

As the new leader of the main opposition Labour party, Blair continued and intensified the modernisation process that had been begun by his predecessors, Neil Kinnock and John Smith. That process resulted in an unforeseen general election victory in May 1997 that removed the Conservative party from the office for the first time in 18 years. During that time there was a wide debate in Britain covering various aspects and ranging from the left to the right of the political spectrum about Blair's New Labour and about the direction to which he was leading his party. This article offers a review of that debate through the comments of the three main political journals of Britain: *The Economist*, *The New Statesman & Society* and *The Spectator*. It presents the views of political commentators and analysts and provides thus a cross-section of a certain level of debate that took place in British society.

Though British quality newspapers and journals have not traditionally been directly linked to political parties, most of them maintain clear and distinct editorial policies. It is

evident that *The Spectator* has the best interests of the Conservative party at heart, whereas *The NSS (The New Statesman & Society)*(1) serves as a platform on which the developments within the Labour party are discussed. The editorial policy of *The Economist* could be described as being liberal-economist.(2)

### "Crowning of Tony Blair"

When Labour party leader John Smith died unexpectedly on 12 May 1994 it was widely presumed that Tony Blair would succeed him and that Blair would have no difficulties in defeating the other two candidates, John Prescott and Margaret Beckett. Blair was known to be a strong supporter of the Labour party modernising project. However, what was not known was whether Blair would be as moderate a reformer as Smith had been. There was speculation on whether Blair would increase the pace of modernisation and adopt a more strict and disciplinary style of leadership. Would he be a radical moderniser? Would he create a New Labour? Furthermore, there was deliberation on what type of policies Blair would promote and what he had to offer the country as a whole. Would he introduce a radical new vision for Britain, a "Big Idea" that would be a match for "the Thatcher agenda"? Would he present a plan for New Britain?

Due to its aim to serve as one of the platforms on which the developments in the Labour party were discussed, *The NSS* accommodated various different views on the leadership election. On its pages both Blair's supporters and opponents were able to express their views. *The NSS* editorial did not give formal support to any of the three candidates. Some writers criticised the absence of a real leadership contest and expressed the view that it was an indication of changed political culture that the media so strongly supported "a shallow person, a family man, a male bimbo who looks good on TV".(3) In addition, estimates on whether Blair would be a radical reformer varied. Paul Anderson believed that Blair would prove to be as moderate a reformer as Smith and Kinnock(4) whereas Martin Jacques and Ken Livingstone estimated that he would bring about a dramatic change. Jacques, the former editor of *Marxism Today*, believed that Blair might prove to be one of those rare leaders who begins a new political era.(5) On a more negative note, Livingstone, MP for Brent East, warned that Blair might become the party's "most extreme right-wing leader" yet.(6) In addition to the hard left of the party, the representatives of the soft left expressed their concern about the future of the Labour left wing and advised Blair to give it a meaningful position within the party's policy making process.(7)

Though *The Economist* considered "The crowning of Tony Blair" an indication of the desperate situation the party found itself in after four successive general election defeats(8), it also regarded Blair as the right person to continue the modernisation project.(9) *The Economist* advised that, first and foremost, Blair should abolish Clause Four of the party constitution as a signal of Labour's changed thinking. It approved of most of Blair's views on economy, with the exception of the disturbingly resonating idea of "a partnership economy" and his plans to set a national minimum wage. *The Economist* cautioned Blair not enter into the tax-cutting competition with the Conservative party, but to produce carefully planned policies on how the Labour party could offer more effective public sector services at little extra cost. Blair's plans to abolish hereditary peerage in the House of Lords, to decentralise government by giving local authorities more powers and to arrange a referendum on electoral reform were warmly welcomed by *The Economist*, though Blair's refrain from supporting proportional representation was a position the journal hoped he would reconsider.(10)

*The Spectator* looked at Blair and the Labour party mostly from a Conservative viewpoint. It was in the interests of the Conservative party to present as many shortcomings in Blair and the Labour party as possible. Boris Johnson wrote several critical articles on Blair. He ridiculed that Blair had tactically chosen John Prescott as his deputy leader to balance his "shining dentistry and vacuousness" with Prescott's "wobble-bellied blue-chinned hairy-arpittet syndicalism".(11) Johnson also wrote about increasing similarities between the Labour party and the Conservative party. Both Tony Blair and the Prime Minister John Major seemed to have decided to compete with the same "nice, but tough" image.(12) Johnson explained that one reason why the Conservatives found it difficult to place Blair under attack was the fact that his comments on key issues were extremely vague and scarce. He compared Blair to a bar of soap that had dropped into a bath tub and, in order to get a firm hold of him, the Conservatives should "pull the plug on Blair, let the water swirl away and see what brand of soft-soap he really is".(13)

## Clause Four

The assumptions that Blair would be a moderate moderniser were proven wrong already at the beginning of his leadership as he undertook the task of abolishing Clause Four of the party constitution. The significance of abolishing Clause Four and adopting a new statement of aims was symbolical more than anything else. Nevertheless, by suggesting it Blair asked his party for a permission to take his modernising project to the end

and by winning on the Clause Four issue Blair received both legitimisation for his project as well as immense power within the party.

In October 1994, at the annual Labour party conference in Blackpool, Tony Blair gave his first platform speech as the leader of the Labour party. At the end of his speech he declared that the party needed a new statement of aims and a modern constitution. By this Blair referred to the controversial Clause Four that had been adopted as a part of the original Party Constitution in 1918. The reason why Clause Four had caused so much debate over the years was that it contained a commitment to public ownership.<sup>(14)</sup> Traditionally it had been the revisionists and the modernisers within the Labour party who had been most keen to see Clause Four abolished. Before Blair, no Labour party leader had publicly dared to challenge its validity since Hugh Gaitskell bitterly lost on the issue in 1959.<sup>(15)</sup>

Both *The NSS* and *The Economist* greeted Blair's Labour party conference speech with enthusiasm. They welcomed the amendment of the Labour party constitution since it had not been representative of the party's thinking for many years. The editorial of *The NSS* repeated the same argument that had frequently been given as a justification for amending Clause Four: "Labour doesn't plan a major increase in public ownership - so it doesn't need a constitution that says it does".<sup>(16)</sup> Both of the journals also considered Blair's speech important as a whole. In their opinion, abandoning Clause Four was only a beginning for Blair's modernising project and its importance was symbolical more than anything else.<sup>(17)</sup> *The Spectator* barely mentioned Clause Four and it concentrated on other issues in Blair's speech. It regarded Blair's suggestion of a new statement of aims as just another way in which every new Labour leader disciplines the left of the party.<sup>(18)</sup>

*The NSS* represented the thinking of the soft left of the Labour party and it also took an active role in formulating the new statement of aims. After discussions with several MPs and key figures of the party, *The NSS* published a suggestion for a new statement of aims that was publicly backed by the journal's editor Steve Platt, *Tribune* editor Mark Seddon and the MPs Derek Fatchett, Richard Burden, Peter Hain, Angela Eagle and Clare Short. In an article accompanying the new Clause Four Steve Platt described the debate about the Clause Four as an "ideological battle for the soul of the left".<sup>(19)</sup> *The NSS* and the *Tribune* also organised a special Clause Four conference in the House of Commons where the suggestion was further discussed. Tony Blair and the deputy leader John Prescott produced their own document which set out the terms for the redrafting of a new statement of aims. The proposals of both the soft

left and that of the leadership were submitted to the NEC (the National Executive Committee of the Labour Party) and launched on consultation periods.(20)

*The NSS* editorial regarded the debate about a new statement of aims beneficial for the Labour party. At its best, the debate would help the party to redefine its purpose and identity as well as the role socialism in modern society. But *The NSS* also voiced the fears of many active members by expressing concern about the manner in which the leadership organised the process of adopting a new statement of aims. Blair had shortened the debate period and appeared generally reluctant to hear the opinions of the activists, which certainly did not enhance full and open discussion within the party that he had called for.(21)

*The Economist* was very excited about Blair's speech and called the conference "Blair's October revolution". It praised that Blair had shown exceptional courage in the way he had accelerated the pace of modernisation and stated that Clause Four had remained a lie within the party constitution, since no Labour government would have actually implemented it. *The Economist* declared that "British politics has changed". For several years the Labour party had been bound by its past and finally, if Blair continued the process of modernisation, it seemed that "Britain could have what it has lacked for so long: an electable, and desirable, alternative to Conservative rule". A small setback for Blair was when the party conference vote reaffirmed the commitment to Clause Four two days after his speech, but columnist Bagehot described the vote as "the left's last hurrah, the final twitch of an expiring dinosaur".(22) Those few remaining representatives of the hard left of the Labour party were ageing and becoming increasingly inactive. But *The Economist* also shared the viewpoint of *The NSS* that Blair should have better incorporated left-wing activists in the party. In its opinion it would have been tactically wise to include in his staff at least one person who had a working-class background and represented the traditional Labour member. Activists should have been given a respected, if minute, position in the party.(23)

In the beginning, instead of commenting on the Clause Four debate, *The Spectator* focused on factors of Blair's conference speech that the Conservatives should have criticised. Neither *The Spectator* editorial nor Boris Johnson considered the replacement of Clause Four an important issue, but they saw it as just one of those tools the Labour party used to obscure its true intentions. They warned that behind the disguise of youth and modernity, Blair echoed the ideas of Jacques Delors and offered nothing more than the same, old Labour thinking: more regulation, higher taxes and careless spending.(24) Later *The Spectator* claimed that, if the Labour party decided to abandon Clause Four, it would not have a



vision anymore. It would be an admission to the fact that the party had been "founded upon the vision of a collectivist paradise" and that "the whole of Labour's past had been based on a gigantic mistake: the mistake of thinking that a just and prosperous society for everyone could be achieved through common ownership". *The Spectator* considered that, if the commitment to public ownership was not reaffirmed, the only idea that would remain to unite the Labour party would be "the mere desire for political power".(25)

### **The new statement of aims**

On 13 March 1995 the NEC endorsed Blair's proposal for the new statement of aims of the Labour party with minor adjustments. Though the final vote on the new statement would not take place until in the special party conference in April, it was widely assumed that Blair's proposal would be accepted, since embarrassing their leader on this subject would have devastating consequences. Both *The Economist* and *The NSS* presented the view that, if the unlikely happened and the conference rejected Blair's proposal and would thus cause his resignation, it would "condemn Labour to perpetual opposition".(26)

The initial reaction of both *The NSS* and *The Economist* to Blair's statement of aims was disappointment. Though *The NSS* admitted that there was no alternative to embracing it, it regarded the statement as "a classic Labour fudge" and an example of "the old Labour movement trick of producing a form of words that allows everyone to read into them what they want".(27) Similarly, *The Economist* called the new Clause Four a "verbal inflation" and saw it bearing the marks of a typical Labour party statement that listed the issues the party opposed, but not what it supported.(28)

Nevertheless, both *The NSS* and *The Economist* emphasised the importance of abandoning Clause Four. They commended that finally the Labour party's attitude towards the market was the same both in practice as in principle.(29) Most importantly, by winning on the Clause Four issue, Blair had received democratic legitimisation for his leadership and modernising project. *The NSS* stated: "No Labour leader before has ever had the authority that Blair now has."(30) Also *The Economist* maintained that many of his predecessors had hoped to change the Labour party, but Blair was the first one who actually appeared to be able to do so.(31) Both journals also immediately turned their view towards the future and asked Blair to present his plans for Britain. *The NSS* editorial stated that, if Blair truly had the intention of transforming British society, he would have to produce something more substantial than vague wishes.(32) *The*

*Economist* wanted to draw attention especially to Labour's economic policy which it found seriously flawed. Blair's assurance not to raise taxes seemed to be in conflict with his promise of better public services. In addition, the promise to set a national minimum wage was "leftist nonsense at its worst" in *The Economist's* opinion.(33)

The comments of *The Spectator* on the new statement of aims were predictable. The journal called it a collection of miscellaneous pledges that was abundant in contradiction and phrased to disguise the old left-wing thinking. In addition, it claimed that the Labour party had no vision any more and that it seemed to be willing to discard any of its principles in order to win the next election. However, the real reason for most of the criticism was that rewriting its constitution had made the Labour party more electable and popular. The viewpoint of the Conservative party was summarised in *The Spectator's* painful realisation that Blair "has destroyed the most potent psychological reason for not voting Labour".(34) The journal speculated whether the Conservative party too was in need of clarifying its vision and rediscovering its purpose.(35)

### **Stakeholder economy**

One year into Blair's party leadership, the demands to produce detailed policies grew louder. All three journals were asking for a glimpse of a "New Britain".(36) Finally in January 1996 Blair gave a speech in which he revealed his idea of a "stakeholder economy". The idea supported his earlier notions of a strong community. *The NSS* editorial welcomed the idea with cautious enthusiasm and believed it might prove to be the overarching ideological theme that had been lacking. In addition to the welfare and educational systems, the idea of stakeholding would also be applied to the whole British business culture. *The NSS* believed that it would encourage citizen participation and diminish exclusion in the society. Though without concrete measures and legislation the idea of stakeholding would be of very little significance, the journal saw that Blair had an opportunity to truly and radically transform the British society. Ian Aitken of *The NSS* however listened to Blair's speeches with dismay. He declared: "Wanted: a Marxist tutor for Tony" who could explain to him what capitalism entails. The idea of stakeholding Aitken dismissed as just another catchword that was used because it was much easier to talk about stakeholding than socialism.(37) Though Aitken did not consider stakeholding an interesting idea, many other political commentators did and there was a lively discussion on the subject.(38)

The response of *The Economist* to the "stakeholding economy" was less enthusiastic. It reminded that the idea was by no means a novel one and the journal also found it somewhat irritating how "Britain's political commentator's went weak at the knees when they heard it".(39) *The Economist* criticised Blair for not stating clearly what his vision of a "stakeholder economy" meant in practical terms. It posed sarcastic questions and seemed deliberately to refuse to take part in the "stakeholder economy" debate. It gave the impression that the discussion was futile. Though *The Economist* asked Blair to clarify his views on the issue, it did not comment on the three speeches Blair later gave on the subject.(40)

Bruce Anderson of *The Spectator* regarded "stakeholding" as just another New Labour slogan, a "Blairfuzz". He traced Blair' ideas back to the Scottish philosopher-theologian John Macmurray, whose thinking Blair had admitted had influenced his own. Anderson stated that Macmurray had been a remarkable, Christian socialist thinker, whereas Blair was not. It seemed to him that Blair had remembered some Macmurreayite phrases from his student years, such as "community", and used them to spice up his speeches and to appeal to the middle classes.(41)

### **Constitutional reform**

In the beginning of February 1996 Blair gave the first of his three John Smith Memorial lectures in which he linked the idea of "stakeholding" to constitutional reform by stating that all citizens should have "a stake in the economy, a stake in society, a stake in the political system".(42) *The NSS* editorial agreed that Britain was in need of "freedom of information, reform of the Lords, improving the role of local government, and possibly electoral reform". The most significant pledge in its opinion was to legislate for a tax-raising parliament for Scotland and an assembly for Wales during the first year of Blair's government. But *The NSS* also considered that to be the most difficult constitutional reform to carry out. It reminded that 83 per cent of the electorate lived in England and that due to movement of people within British isles and post-war immigration, establishing "national" lines would appear senseless to many Britons. Whilst Blair put emphasis on "new nation-based institutions", the editorial urged him to pay more attention and to devolve power to "localism that is developing, partly as a healthy counterweight to the power and homogenising tendencies of modern, global capitalism".(43)

*The Economist* welcomed Blair's ideas on constitutional reform and stated that they were almost identical to the



ones it had itself advocated: setting up assemblies for Scotland and Wales, reforming the House of Lords, reinvigorating local government, passing a Freedom of Information Act, incorporating the European Convention of Human Rights into British law, reforming the House of Commons and holding a referendum on the voting system. Blair had stated that he wished to turn the tide away from "over-centralised government and an underdeveloped citizenship", but *The Economist* found fault with his plans. Firstly, Blair had not explained what powers would each level of government have and how the question of Scottish over-representation at Westminster would be solved. Secondly, Blair had not mentioned the role of voluntary citizen action and *The Economist* saw implications to statism in the huge number of new "state, or para-state, institutions". In its view, as reformed as the party was, the "old" thinking still resurfaced in the desire to have, "never less government, but always better government".(44)

*The Spectator* wrote very little about the New Labour's plans for constitutional reform. In her article in *The Spectator*, Petronella Wyatt actually wondered why the Conservatives' Central Office and the Tory press insisted on criticising the New Labour's taxation plans and highlighting its internal divisions, when what was "really frightening about Mr Blair", in her opinion, were his Scottish devolution plans. Wyatt claimed that "Mr Blair's proposal falls little short of dismantling the United Kingdom". In her opinion, the reasons for passing the Act of Union between England and Scotland in 1707 were still valid and ending it would result in growing nationalism and instability. In addition, if a Scottish parliament were already to be given tax-raising powers, could it later demand greater autonomy in other policy areas, such as foreign affairs? In conclusion Wyatt stated that Britons did not "need Brussels to destroy the nation state; Mr Blair is raring to do it for them".(45)

## **Welfare reform**

In the autumn of 1995 Blair had asked Chris Smith, New Labour's social security spokesman, to "think the unthinkable" and to produce courageous new plans for a welfare reform. Smith's proposals were published on 7 May 1996.(46) *The NSS* editorial regarded Smith's welfare reform proposals as a step into the right direction. It stated that the current welfare system did not adequately direct benefits to those who needed them most or help the unemployed to get into work. The editorial emphasised that what Smith had offered the New Labour was a framework for welfare reform and now the party needed to plan the details.(47)

*The Economist* was not satisfied with Smith's proposals. In its opinion the New Labour had once again presented admirable aims, but not the means through which they could be achieved. *The Economist* came to the conclusion that "Mr Smith seems to have thought the unthinkable - and then to have had second thoughts". The journal derided that the New Labour seemed to have three principles guiding its thinking: "spend no money", "help the poor" and "don't scare the voters". *The Economist* agreed with some of Smith's proposals, but also claimed that the only way to reduce state spending dramatically, was to cut pensions. Since it was extremely unlikely that Blair would introduce a far-reaching welfare reform before the election, *The Economist* advised him to "stop boasting about radical reform and his willingness to think the unthinkable".(48)

Bruce Anderson of *The Spectator* advised Chris Smith to set himself a more modest aim than "thinking the unthinkable" and to "just do some thinking". Though Anderson agreed that the British welfare system was in urgent need of reform, he found nothing in Smith's report that would help to amend it. Anderson stated that it contained "nothing of value on general questions and nothing specific about Labour plans" and that its "prose is as tedious as the contents are vacuous". In his opinion, the only noteworthy proposal in Smith's report was a watered-down version of the government's Job Seekers' Allowance scheme. In addition, Anderson claimed that a Labour government would actually increase youth unemployment by introducing a minimum wage and the Social Chapter of the Maastricht Treaty into Britain.(49)

### **New Labour, New Life for Britain**

On 4 July 1996 the Labour party published a policy statement titled "New Labour, New Life for Britain".(50) *The NSS* was somewhat disappointed at the statement and said that it was "ambitious and cautious, radical and conservative".(51) In its opinion the educational reforms appeared to be sound and well thought-out, but otherwise the document left many questions unanswered. *The NSS* stated that, though it was sensible not to go into too much detail before the election and to present only broad guidelines, it was time Blair added some more detail into his policies. In addition, he needed to work on building a sense of trust. *The NSS* claimed that Blair was sending contradictory messages with the combination of radical talk and conservative policies. The journal repeated this criticism after Blair's last party conference speech before the election. Though *The NSS* considered Blair's conference speech in October 1996 irritatingly grandiloquent, it also stated that it had "re-engaged the energies of the party as a whole" and that it had taken "a bold stride towards presenting Labour as a

government impatiently in waiting".(52) John Pilger's article in *The NSS* had a completely different tone. Pilger warned that all the signs indicated that "the next Labour government is quite likely to be more reactionary, nastier and a greater threat to true democracy than its venal Tory predecessor".(53)

*The Economist* presented very similar views as *The NSS* on Blair's policy statement and conference speech. The journal was discouraged by Blair's timidity and saw that there was a conspicuous gap between his talk and action. Blair talked about a radical change, but *The Economist* did not see any indication of it in the New Labour policies. The only area where Blair's policies clearly differed from those of the Conservative party was the constitutional reform.(54) The journal claimed that, despite his promises, it was not "a radical centre" that the New Labour represented, but Conservatism similar to what it was before Margaret Thatcher radicalised it. Furthermore, *The Economist* considered that Blair's speech had "set new standards in British politics for mawkish sentiment, smug religiosity and grandiose nonsense".

The critique of *The NSS* and *The Economist* was much more poignant than that of *The Spectator*. *The Economist* actually ridiculed the Conservatives for their failure to identify the real shortcomings in Blair's statements and their desperate attempts to label him as "old Labour in drag" or "New Labour, New Danger".(55) Two weeks later *The Spectator* seemed to follow the advice of *The Economist* as it published a critical article on Blair's contradictory plans on taxation and public spending. *The Spectator* claimed that Blair wanted to appeal to the voters by promising not to raise income tax, but that at the same time he had been swift to "denounce and spread fear about all efforts to keep taxes down; or to blame the Tories for ills which could only be quickly remedied by increased taxes".(56) Bruce Anderson and Anne McElvoy both commented on the Labour party conference in *The Spectator* and came to the conclusion it was a well managed show. Anderson claimed that it had been evident for some time that Blair was willing to make any statement as long as he thought it would please the electorate. He also commented on Blair's rhetoric and stated that apparently Blair had gone "onto oral auto-pilot" becoming finally "inebriated with the exuberance of his own verbosity". Finally, Anderson repeated one of the favourite criticism of the Conservatives, namely that the Labour party had not changed as much as it seemed. He warned that there remained many in Blair's front-bench team to whom increasing public spending was a natural instinct and a valid solution to many problems. McElvoy made use of the other critique most favoured by the Conservatives and claimed that a Labour government will be a divided one. She found it disturbing that Blair was still moving

towards the right with the help of his "ultra-modernisers" and predicted that within the next few years there would be a battle "for the soul of the party" "between budding neo-liberals and the Social Democrats".(57)

### **A vote for or against Blair?**

In the last issues before the general election in May 1997 all three journals summarised their views and gave advice to their readers on how to cast their vote. *The NSS* editorial proclaimed unreserved support for Blair and urged its readers to recall anew that "this is what we want" - "So, let's remind ourselves exactly why Britain needs a Blair government". Despite the fact that *The NSS* had both expressed and published criticism on Blair, it was evident that it would support their own candidate enthusiastically. It was the editorial policy and the aim of *The NSS* to accommodate differing opinions and to promote open discussion and constructive criticism. Though the editorial acknowledged that Blair's recent performance during the election campaign had not been perfect, it passionately believed that "a Blair government will start the process of transforming Britain according to progressive principles and values". There was admittedly a vacuity of specific and detailed policies, but *The NSS* editorial was convinced that "in all policy areas, Blair's instincts carry him in the right direction". The editorial regarded Labour victory in the general election as just one step in the right direction for Britain. It stated that, at that moment, "what we want is a Blair government, with a decent majority. Then we'll resume the argument about everything."(58)

Referring to the opinion polls that indicated a landslide victory for Blair, *The Economist* declared that "Labour doesn't deserve it". It advised its readers to cast "a vote against Labour" and stated that "for all their weaknesses, the Conservatives remain a better bet". Though *The Economist* was very impressed by Blair's performance as Labour leader, it was his economic policy that eventually weighed most in the scales and caused the journal to recommend its readers to vote for John Major. *The Economist* regarded Blair as a remarkable leader for the Labour party, but not necessarily as the right one for Britain. In essence, John Major and the Conservative party seemed more capable of managing the economy. *The Economist* believed very strongly in free and unregulated markets, minimum state intervention, liberalism and civil liberties. Looking back at Blair's comments it came to the conclusion that the New Labour was "the least liberal of the three main parties" since it still seemed to favour imposing state regulation and control even on individual citizens. In addition, *The Economist* was disappointed at Blair's plans on constitutional reform and his non-existent plans on

welfare, an area in which he had promised to "think the unthinkable". The journal concluded that the policies of the Labour party were "disappointing at best, illiberal at worst".(59)

The title of *The Spectator* editorial stated simply: "For Major". Strangely, the editorial published its endorsement for Prime Minister Major in an issue that came out two days after the election. Though the opinion polls had consistently pointed towards a Labour victory, the editorial proclaimed that Major's "cause is no less right because it looks like being lost". The reforms Blair had carried out within his own party and the fact that he portrayed himself as a strong leader with a radical, new vision had made him immensely popular. The commentators of *The Spectator* were extremely anxious of this fact. And to make the matters worse, also many Conservatives were beginning to adopt a more sympathetic attitude towards Blair. Therefore the writers of *The Spectator* tried to manifest either that the reforms carried out in the Labour party were purely cosmetic and had not truly changed the party or that Blair and his closest aides stood alone with their modernising project and that the majority of the party still represented the "old Labour". According to *The Spectator*, the strongest reasons to vote for Major were his ability to manage the economy and his views on the European Community and the single currency. The Conservative party had been severely divided on the issue of the European Community and there were several attempts to prove that the New Labour would also be disunited on the same issue. *The Spectator* acknowledged that there was a growing sense of insecurity and frustration in British society, which was one of the reasons why people wanted to have a change in government, but it urged people not to trust the New Labour. It claimed that there was no indication that a Labour government would be more efficient in creating stability in the society. Furthermore, *The Spectator* warned that, with a Labour government, "the hitherto silent battalions" would move in, the public sector would grow stronger at the expense of the private one and standards in schools "will be driven down" "in the name of equality". Most damagingly, Blair would bring back "the rule of union officials, educational administrators and European officials none of whom were elected by the country at all".(60)

## Conclusions

Both *The NSS* and *The Economist* had the view that Blair had genuinely transformed the Labour party. There was a New Labour. The new name represented the changed thinking of the party. Blair had accelerated the modernisation process that had been begun by his predecessors and had thus managed to present the party



as a credible alternative to the Conservative party in the next general election. Both journals considered Blair a remarkable Labour party leader who had accomplished something previous leaders had only fantasised about. *The Spectator* however was not convinced of the claim that there really was anything new in Blair's New Labour. The journal held the opinion that, despite the new image, old left-wing thinking still existed within the party and that the changes were only superficial. In the view of *The Spectator* there were many party members who did not share Blair's ideas, but who would remain silent until the general election. The journal claimed that for the moment the party seemed to be united by their thirst for power and that it would be only after the election that the true divisions within the party would be seen.

Estimates on whether Blair's New Labour had a plan for a New Britain were more doubtful. The most optimistic views were presented by *The NSS*. Though the journal had expected Blair to produce more concrete and detailed plans, it assured that Blair's notions on key policy areas indicated that he would strive to reform the British society also. *The Economist* however had come to the conclusion that Blair's radicalism existed only in his speeches. The journal considered the Conservative party more capable of managing the economy and claimed that Blair's New Labour appeared still to be in favour of excessive state regulation. Though *The Economist* had repeatedly appraised Blair for his achievements in remodelling the Labour party into a serious alternative to the Conservatives, it was due to the fact that the journal considered it beneficial to British democracy, not because it regarded Blair as the best choice for next prime minister. In the view of *The Spectator* life in Britain under a Labour government would be pestered by European and trade union officials and government regulations. The journal believed that behind the novel image of New Labour the party still held socialist ideas close at heart.

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1. In this article the journal is referred to as *The NSS*. The original name of the journal was *The New Statesman*. In 1988 the name was changed into *The New Statesman & Society*. In March 1996 the journal readopted the name *The New Statesman*.
2. The writers of *The Economist* are anonymous, but it claims that it speaks with a collective voice.  
[http://www.economist.com/tfs/about\\_us\\_tframeset.html](http://www.economist.com/tfs/about_us_tframeset.html)
3. *The NSS*, 20 May 1994.
4. *The NSS*, 17 Jun 1994.
5. Ibid.
6. Ibid.
7. *The NSS*, 12 Aug 1994.
8. *The Economist*, 11 Jun 1994.
9. *The Economist*, 23 Jul 1994.

10. Ibid.
11. Ibid.
12. *The Spectator*, 23 Jul 1994.
13. Especially Blair's comments on the European Union and taxation were vague in Johnson's opinion and did not necessarily represent the traditional Labour thinking. *The Spectator*, 13 Aug 1994.
14. Clause Four, Part Four of the Labour Party Constitution: "To secure for the workers by hand or by brain the full fruits of their industry, and the most equitable distribution thereof that may be possible, upon the basis of the common ownership of the means of production and the best obtainable system of popular administration and control of each industry or service". Jones, p. 4.
15. Jones, pp. 149-52.
16. *The NSS*, 7 Oct 1994.
17. *The Economist*, 8 Oct 1994; *The NSS*, 7 Oct 1994.
18. *The Spectator*, 8 Oct 1994.
19. *The NSS*, 28 Oct 1994; *The NSS*, 11 Nov 1994.
20. *The NSS*, 11 Nov 1994; *The NSS*, 25 Nov 1994.
21. *The NSS*, 25 Nov 1994; Blair's style of leadership was also criticised by Peter Hain, MP for Neath and by *The NSS* columnists Ian Aitken and John Pilger. *The NSS*, 12 Aug 1994, 20 Jan 1995, 27 Jan 1995, and 3 Feb 1995.
22. *The Economist*, 8 Oct 1994.
23. *The Economist*, 28 Jan 1995.
24. *The Spectator*, 8 Oct 1994.
25. *The Spectator*, 14 Jan 1995.
26. *The Economist*, 18 Mar 1995; *The NSS*, 17 Mar 1995.
27. *The NSS*, 17 Mar 1995.
28. *The Economist*, 18 Mar 1995.
29. *The NSS*, 17 Mar 1995; *The Economist*, 18 Mar 1995.
30. *The NSS*, 28 Apr 1995.
31. *The Economist*, 29 Apr 1995.
32. *The NSS*, 28 Apr 1995.
33. *The Economist*, 29 Apr 1995.
34. *The Spectator*, 6 May 1995.
35. *The Spectator*, 18 Mar 1995; *The Spectator*, 6 May 1995.
36. *The NSS*, 6 Oct 1995; *The Economist*, 7 Oct 1995; *The Spectator*, 30 Sep and 7 Oct 1995.
37. *The NSS*, 12 Jan 1996.
38. *The NSS*, 29 Mar 1996; *The NSS*, 31 May 1996; *The NSS*, 12 Jul 1996.
39. *The Economist*, 13 Jan 1996.
40. Blair gave speeches about "stakeholding" on 18th and 29th of January and 11th of February, 1996. *The NSS*, 29 Mar 1996.
41. *The Spectator*, 20 Jan 1996.
42. *The NSS*, 16 Feb 1996. Later, on 26 June 1996, Blair announced that before establishing Scottish and Welsh assemblies, a Labour government would seek the consent the Scottish and the Welsh peoples through a referendum on the matter. A further referendum would be arranged in Scotland to decide whether the Scottish parliament would enjoy tax-raising powers.
43. *The NSS*, 9 Feb 1996.
44. *The Economist*, 10 Feb 1996.
45. *The Spectator*, 1 Jun 1996.
46. *The Economist*, 11 May 1996.

47. *The NSS*, 10 May 1996.
48. *The Economist*, 11 May 1996.
49. *The Spectator*, 11 May 1996.
50. *The Economist*, 6 Jul 1996.
51. *The NSS*, 5 Jul 1995.
52. *The NSS*, 4 Oct 1996.
53. *Ibid.*
54. *The Economist*, 6 Jul 1996.
55. *The Economist*, 6 Jul 1996.
56. *The Spectator*, 20 Jul 1996.
57. *The Spectator*, 5 Oct 1996.
58. *The NSS*, 25 Apr 1997.
59. *The Economist*, 26 Apr 1997.
60. *The Spectator*, 3 May 1997.

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