



Policies matter more than leaders

Whichever Blairite claimed that a change of leadership was needed rather than a change of direction could not have been further divorced from reality. After their failed coup we anticipate they will all head quietly towards whatever quangos and directorships are the reward for a decade of squandered opportunity and abandoned principles. They should leave us with the job of taking the Party back to its roots.

The rejection of Labour in the European election was overwhelming, but not surprising to those of us who have disagreed with the government on so many issues. So it is with some relief that we see the "green shoots" of a more enlightened approach. The £2.1 billion to be spent on affordable housing is a policy that should be welcomed. Likewise the partial abandonment of ID cards and of Post Office privatisation indicate a retreat from if not yet the abandonment of Blairist privatisation, centralisation and production for profit.

The Prime Minister does need to avoid the errors of judgement that stem from trying to wrong foot

and outflank the Tories. But our problems stem from the policies and not from their presentation. Fundamental to our policy failure is the inability to listen to the Party membership, who are the main two way link with the electorate. Our membership have proved both to be right and in touch with the public on issues from Iraq to abolition of the 10p tax rate. We must abandon the curtailment of democracy in the Labour Party, recently demonstrated by the NEC's refusal to endorse Janet Oosthuysen as our candidate in Calder Valley, before we can again claim to be properly representative of the people.

We must examine how, after bank bailouts, illegal adventures abroad and attempting to outbid

the Tories on reducing inheritance tax, we can produce a budget that will be sufficiently expansionist to redress the recession, largely the result of the unfettering of the banking industry, yet keep borrowing at a sustainable level.

That is why it is even more important to highlight the folly of spending on Trident replacement. That is why we should abandon spending on new aircraft carriers, irrelevant to the notion of defence, but relevant to the discredited imperialist policies that lead us into Iraq and Afghanistan. That is why we continue to campaign inside the Labour Party for the policies that will bring us peace and socialism irrespective of the current leadership.

It was with great sadness that we learnt that Alice Mahon, who was a chair of Labour CND, has left the Labour Party. Alice, who retired as MP for Halifax at the last election, has spent a lifetime campaigning for peace and socialism. Unfortunately Alice no longer sees a way to bringing the Labour Party towards those

policies. We hope she will rethink and rejoin us in the struggle as it is the only Labour Party that can deliver peace and nuclear disarmament.



Afghanistan: a time to rethink

By Mark Seddon

THERE have been three Anglo-Afghan wars; two in the 19th century and one in the early 20th century. All ended in failure. Now Britain is involved in the Anglo-American Afghan war, which to my reckoning makes this the fourth conflict Britain has been involved in a country whose main claim to fame is beating off foreign intervention.

Recently I reported from the annual Munich Security Conference, a gathering of political and military bigwigs from Europe and America. A flavour of that meeting can be gained from the fact that the conference saw no sense of irony in awarding one of the attendees, Henry Kissinger, a 'life time peace award'. Vice President Joe Biden gave what in essence as the first major Foreign policy statement of the new Obama administration, and as an illustration of the return of the United States to 'realpolitik', it could not have been clearer — and frankly more welcome. Gone was the bombast of the Bush era, instead here was the United States reaching out to what Donald Rumsfeld had disparagingly called 'Old Europe'. Here was an olive branch to Russia, there was recognition that Iraq had been sheer folly, and topping it all, here was a US administration that had come to listen.

But when it comes to Afghanistan, is this new US administration really in listening mode? Or has it already made up its mind?



Mark Seddon (L) with Jeremy Corbyn MP

By far the most hawkish Minister of any government present in Munich was the then British Defence Minister, John Hutton, who has already distinguished himself by comparing — in terms of importance — the war in Afghanistan with the war against Nazi Germany. A more fatuous, and frankly egregious comparison barely seems possible, but the increasingly manic-looking Hutton had the rest of Europe in his sights. For Hutton is angry that the Europeans have demonstrated a marked reluctance to get sucked into the Afghan imbroglio.



John Hutton MP

Germany, France, Italy and the Nordic countries were castigated for only being interested in 'hearts and minds' and not committing more combat forces to take on the Taliban. In the weeks since, many of those countries have relented slightly, aware that President Obama is determined to push ahead with his surge in Afghanistan, believing that the surge can finally put the Taliban on the defensive and restore the writ of the increasingly corrupt Khazai regime beyond Kabul. Our own Prime Minister, Gordon Brown has just committed a further 900 troops, although the Chief of the Defence Staff, Sir Richard Dannatt was talking in terms of an extra 2000 barely a week before Obama arrived in London for the G20 Summit.

The surge may work — temporarily — in forcing the Taliban onto the defensive, and it is true that Nato is far better equipped than the Soviets were when they took on the Taliban's predecessors, who in many cases

were one and the same.

But if anything, Afghanistan's tribal system is far more complicated and intractable than anything that the West has been used to in Iraq. And what is the end-game? When does President Obama and Prime Minister Brown imagine that they will be able to claim victory and withdraw? The answer is that they do not know.

In the event, the very real challenge from hard-line, militant religious fundamentalists is in Pakistan, a nuclear power, and a country of far more economic and strategic importance than Afghanistan. Most moderate Pakistanis, including democrats and secularists are deeply alarmed by the rise of the Taliban in their country, and are just as convinced that outside military interference only feeds the incubus.

The rest of the world, including Britain and the United States cannot simply walk away and abandon Pakistan and Afghanistan to warlordism and religious extremists, and yet it is not for us to act unilaterally, still less as military enforcers. For once even a sizeable minority becomes convinced that foreigners are interfering, even if many don't like the Taliban, the battle for hearts and minds becomes more difficult still.

The truth, however uncomfortable, is that once the Western military is taken out of the equation, the Taliban lose their recruiting sergeant. There are plenty of ways of helping ordinary Afghanis and Pakistanis; something that countries such as Denmark know all about.

It is time for a re-think, not a military surge. Not another British soldier should lose his life in a war without end, in a country where every foreign intervention has ended in ignominious failure.

Mark Seddon is Diplomatic Correspondent for Al Jazeera TV

Will Obama support US missile defence?

By Ben Folley

As European elections approach it is always interesting to note how Labour's sister parties are doing. The news that in the middle of its six month presidency of the European Union, the Czech Republic's conservative government has lost a vote of confidence is something of a knockout blow following the pummeling it received over its support for US Missile Defence a week earlier. Between the two victories the Social Democrats held a buoyant party congress where amongst other votes, they reaffirmed their commitment to forcing early elections and continuing to oppose the US Missile Defence plans.

On the 17th March, Czech Prime Minister Topolanek was humiliatingly forced into withdrawing from the parliamentary agenda the treaties agreed to deploy a US Missile Defence radar when it was apparent they would lose a vote in the Chamber. He was forced to call a recess where he then made a TV address announcing he would 'temporarily withdraw' the treaties and prevent a vote taking place, but said 'we have not given up on the ratification process.'

The vulnerable Czech government has taken a major risk backing US Missile Defence, as has the Polish government who had bargained hard before suddenly signing up at the time of the conflict in South Ossetia. Last week Polish Foreign Minister Radoslaw Sikorski said 'When we started discussing this with the United States, the US assured us they would persuade the Russians that it was purely defensive and it would be a non-controversial decision.'

In the Czech Republic public



opposition has not shifted from around 70% in the past two years, producing what some commentators are calling the first major social movement since 1991, and during which the Social Democrats have surged ahead of Topolanek's party. In October last year, when a third of the Senate came up for election, they took 23 of 27 seats. At the same time, in votes for the thirteen regional governments, the Social Democrats became the largest party in twelve regions. The US hope to build the radar at Brdy in Central Bohemia region, but the new Social Democrat governor David Rath is a strong opponent of

the proposals and has announced he will write to Barack Obama and ask him to withdraw his plans.

Such a change of heart is not entirely inconceivable. Obama has committed only to supporting US Missile Defence if it can be proven to work and is cost effective, both of which can be questioned given the results of the tests carried out following the billions ploughed into the project by George W. Bush.

The government here should bear this in mind. Over 100 MPs are now calling on the government to scrutinise US missile defence deployment plans in the UK and their implications for UK and European security as a whole, particularly given the destabilising effect on relations with Russia.

Opposition is widespread across the continent and polling in Britain shows our own involvement is unpopular. Anyone discussing the subject with members of our sister parties will find that opposition to the system is widespread from those in the Czech Republic and Poland, where Bush had proposed two new bases, in neighbouring Germany, Austria or Slovakia, or leading Socialist Group MEPs such as Martin Schulz, Jan Marinus Wiersma and Ana Maria Gomes.

Given the uneasy stance of both Obama and the Democrats, this is an area of US foreign policy where European social democracy could be pushing at an open door to find another way.

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Why Trident must be scrapped

Morays Ireland. Chair, University of Portsmouth Labour Students

Now one can deny that right now the public finances are in a bad way. In order to pay back the debt incurred by the state over recent months taxes will have to be raised and public spending cut. So what better way to alleviate some of the pressure on the public purse than by ditching the plans to update the totally unnecessary Trident nuclear missile system?

The true cost of replacing the system, including maintenance costs of the new system spread over its 30 year life-span, is estimated at an eye-watering £76 billion. The fact that the cost is spread over 30 years is irrelevant given that it is likely we will still be paying for the recent government spending for at least half of that time and future governments will be looking to make savings wherever they can.

In June Nick Clegg became the first major party leader to call for the scrapping of Trident, identifying the fact that such weaponry is outdated and no longer meets our defence needs. His position has been given more credibility by a recently released IPPR report which suggests that Britain should stop 'punching above its weight' and start looking into alternatives to Trident. It is a shame however that



Labour CND MPs with Bianca Jagger and Annie Lennox outside parliament to protest against the cost of Trident.

neither Clegg, nor the IPPR have called for outright decommissioning of our nuclear arsenal.

We no longer live in the Cold War era and the dizzying pace of globalisation has resulted in an economic interdependence between countries that makes the chances of a full scale world war seem very remote indeed. The threats and problems we face today cannot be solved by nuclear weapons. We cannot fight terrorist cells or Somali pirates with weapons designed to take out entire cities. Furthermore, our possession of nuclear weapons and our determination to upgrade them totally undermines our position when attempting to lecture

countries like Iran and North Korea about their own nuclear ambitions.

However, the arguments about the cost of the deterrent or the type of system used are largely irrelevant when you consider the moral implications of possessing such weapons in the first place. The nuclear weapons used today are many times more powerful than those dropped on Japan in 1945. Should just one warhead ever be used millions of innocent people would die. The only way that we can ensure our planet is safe from nuclear holocaust is not through the threat of mutually assured destruction should one of these weapons ever be used, but by eradicating nuclear weapons altogether.

Where we stand

Labour CND is a specialist section of CND campaigning within the Labour Party and trade unions and across the peace movement. We work to publicise the case for nuclear disarmament and we campaign to change the government's nuclear policies. We highlight the dangers of the government's support for the latest offensive US Nuclear Missile Defence plans. We continue to highlight the arguments against Trident replacement and campaign for the opposition to Trident

to be reflected in Parliament. We continue to oppose the government's utterly shameful plans to keep our weapons of mass destruction. We are winning the debate, now we must win the vote.

Labour CND wants to consign to history the failed and dangerous policies that rely on massive military power, invasion and war. We campaign for an independent foreign policy, based on the search for international peace and justice, using respect and dialogue not the threat of war.

Labour CND opposes the

illegal war and occupation of Iraq, the war in Afghanistan, the military threats to Iran and the subservience of the Labour government to the military ambitions of the US. We continue to publicise details of the human rights abuse suffered by the remaining British Residents, illegally imprisoned in Guantanamo Bay, victims of callous disregard by our government and the US.

If you are a Labour Party member and a supporter of CND then please join us and support us.