
LABOUR'S ELECTORAL PROGRAMME

On 29th March, Labour published its campaign document, 'The New Hope for Britain', which had been agreed by the Shadow Cabinet and National Executive Committee. In conjunction with 'Partners in Rebuilding Britain' (the TUC-Labour Party Liaison Committee document), this sets out the policies on which the Labour Party will fight the next election. Together, they comprise the most extreme programme of Left-wing measures the Labour Party has ever put before the British people.

Labour's central economic commitment is to reduce unemployment to below one million within five years of taking office. They propose to achieve this by implementing an emergency programme of action within days of taking office. The central plank of this strategy is a 'massive programme of expansion', including a public investment programme which will channel £30 billion over five years into major construction and investment projects. Labour explain that: 'Like any other expanding industrial enterprise, we shall borrow to finance our programme of investment', although they go on to say: 'once the economy gets much nearer to full employment, some taxes will have to be increased.'

Whilst carefully avoiding any mention of incomes policy, Labour recognise the necessity of some moderation in wage settlements. They propose a National Economic Assessment which will 'set out the likely growth in the national output and how it could be shared. It will cover the allocation of resources, and the distribution of income between profits, earnings from employment, rents, social benefits, and other incomes' (ibid.). However, they categorically state that 'We will not, however, return to the old policies of government-imposed wage restraint'. As the price for union acquiescence, Labour have acceded to all the unions' demands. They pledge to repeal all the Conservative industrial relations legislation and to provide new statutory support for collective bargaining. In addition, workers will be given statutory rights to information, consultation and representation within their companies, up to and including boards of management.

Labour recognise the danger that increased spending will suck in imports. To prevent this, they propose to reintroduce exchange controls, devalue the pound and introduce back-up import controls.

Nationalisation Again

A massive programme of nationalisation is proposed. All newly privatised assets will be returned to public ownership at no more than the original denationalisation price. A 'significant public stake in electronics, pharmaceuticals, health equipment and building materials' will be established, 'and also in other important sectors, as required in the national interest'. In addition, they propose major reforms of financial institutions, and, in a clear threat, state that if the major clearing banks refuse to co-operate, 'We shall stand ready to take one or more of them into public ownership'.

Massive New Bureaucracy

Where firms are allowed to remain in the private sector, their freedom of action will be severely curtailed. In a move strongly reminiscent of Harold Wilson's Department of Economic Affairs, they propose to create a new Department of Economic and Industrial Planning. In addition, a new, tripartite National Planning Council will be set up and agreed development plans will be negotiated with all leading companies. A new Price Commission will be given powers to control prices, a Foreign Investment Unit will monitor multinational companies, and a recast National Enterprise Board will be able to invest, or acquire an equity stake in companies. The Labour proposals will create jobs in the Civil Service, if nowhere else. In addition to the bodies already mentioned, they also propose: a National Investment Bank, a new Product Research Unit, a new Co-operative Investment Bank, a Securities Commission, a tripartite investment monitoring agency, a re-established Energy Commission, a new Housing Tribunal, a National Ports Authority, a National Transport Authority, a Legal Services Commission, a British Film Authority, new land authorities and agencies to monitor air and noise.

Withdrawal from the International Scene

The document also categorically commits the Labour Party to Britain's total withdrawal from the EEC, to be completed well within the lifetime of a parliament. On defence, Labour has adopted total unilateral nuclear disarmament and the establishment of a non-nuclear defence policy. They pledge to cancel the Trident programme, to veto the siting of Cruise missiles in this country, and to remove all nuclear bases and weapons on British soil or in British waters. The existing Polaris missile force will be included in the nuclear disarmament negotiations. Expenditure on defence will also be reduced to bring Britain in to line with other European NATO countries. Almost laughably, Labour also state that 'the next Labour government will maintain its support for NATO'.

The Left-wing Sweeps the Board

Labour's campaign document also commits the Party to:

- Repeal the right-to-buy and empower councils to repurchase council houses sold under the Conservatives at first resale.
- Create elected police authorities with statutory responsibility for determination of police policy.
- Limit police powers, disband the Special Patrol Groups and reduce maximum sentence lengths for non-violent offenders.
- Abolish the House of Lords as quickly as possible.
- Outlaw hare coursing, fox hunting and all forms of hunting with dogs.
- Introduce a wealth tax and reverse most of the Conservatives' concessions on capital transfer tax.
- End the de-rating of agricultural land.
- Remove private practice from the NHS and take into the NHS parts of the profit-making private sector.
- Withdraw charitable status from private schools and introduce VAT on school fees.
- Repeal the Education Act 1979 and prohibit all forms of academic selection.
- Scrap the Pressurised Water Reactor programme and reassess the need for a continuing nuclear programme.
- Abolish corporal punishment.
- Establish a directly elected Scottish Assembly with legislative and executive powers.
- Repeal the Prevention of Terrorism Act and work towards a united Ireland, on the basis of consent.
- Restore normal links between the Falklands and Latin America and involve the UN in finding a permanent settlement.