

2003 war inquiry: Blairism should have been killed off in Iraq. Chilcot could finally bury it

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New Labour deserves no epitaph - it should have died in the deserts and cities of Iraq. As Jeremy Corbyn said, it's time for a new politics.

The Chilcot report provides an utterly devastating indictment of Tony Blair's preparations for and conduct of the Iraq war, the most lethal and grotesque aspect of his legacy. Blairism included the certainty that overriding international laws, undermining international bodies and misleading the British public and the House of Commons was in the greater interest.

But whose interest was Blair defending? He was never comfortable as a Labour leader or Labour prime minister. He attempted to refound it as New Labour, and launched the "third way" project along with key allies such as Peter Mandelson to remove all that is distinctive about the Labour party from the political scene. Members of the party were excluded from the decision-making process. Unions were regarded as a nuisance, only important insofar as New Labour still needed funds from them. The constitution of the party was altered in order to signal this shift towards liberal politics.

The model for this project was the US political system, with two parties almost indistinguishable in policy terms. Neither the Democrats nor Republicans challenge vested interests and big business, they are funded by them. These parties are almost incapable of producing any significant reforms. They do not defend the living standards of ordinary people, offer no restraint over systematically racist police forces and provide no outlet for the large and growing popular anti-war sentiment.

In 1997, the late Anthony Howard wrote that the US Democratic party "lighted the path" for Blair's New Labour. But this was more than lessons in presentation or even an orientation towards big business at the expense of organised labour. It was a fundamentally more assertive policy primarily in the interests of the United States.

Of course, this reorientation was not explicitly announced. Instead, there was a series of half-truths, deceptions and outright lies employed in order to change political direction. So, domestically it was stated that the unions were the obstacle to public sector "reform", when unions are most frequently the best partners in improving efficiency - especially in the public sector.

We were told that privatisation and PFI were more efficient than public provision. The collapse of Railtrack, the huge cost of PFI and the imminent crisis of capacity in the energy sector speak otherwise. Internationally, it was the big lie that bombing and invasion would improve the lives of the population of Iraq. Even now, Blair still defends the transparent falsehood that Saddam Hussein was in league with al-Qaida.

Blairism deserves no epitaph. It should have died in the deserts and cities of Iraq. But the Chilcot report should be its memorial. As Jeremy Corbyn has said, it is time for new politics. A new politics

based on truth, not lies and based on the real needs of the people in this country.

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P.S.

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