

Labour's lobbyists in search of a fast buck

Julie Hyland
10 July 1998

Those alleged to be involved in Britain's 'cash for access' scandal, exposed recently by the *Observer*, are leading figures in Tony Blair's New Labour Party. Moreover, they are representative of a substantial layer of party functionaries and advisers who have sought to trade on their 'inside knowledge' and contacts in order to make a killing for themselves.

Derek Draper, the figure at the centre of the scandal, was an MP's research assistant in 1992. Just five years later he had entered the lucrative world of parliamentary lobbying, earning a six-figure salary with all the associated benefits. Draper reportedly told Palast, 'I don't want to be a consultant. I just want to stuff my bank account at £250 an hour.' On other occasions he had boasted that the Labour government would ensure he was a millionaire by the age of 35.

Draper worked part-time for Peter Mandelson until 1996, and co-authored the sycophantic diary *Blair's First 100 Days*. He was an unofficial government spokesman on the *Newsnight* and *Channel Four News* programmes. He also publishes the pro-Blair *Progress* magazine, aimed at Labour Party members. He wrote a column for the *Daily Express* newspaper, 'Inside the Mind of New Labour', from which he has since been sacked after reportedly telling Palast that he had sent his comments to Labour's Mandelson for vetting.

Roger Liddle was a special adviser in the Callaghan Labour government in the 1970s. He defected from the Labour Party in 1981 as part of a right-wing split, which led to the founding of the Social Democratic Party. He later supported the SDP's merger with the Liberal Party, the formation of the Liberal Alliance and later the Liberal Democrats. He wrote the Liberal Democrat's 1995 European manifesto. The same year, he defected back to Labour and co-authored with Mandelson, *The Blair Revolution: Can New Labour Deliver?*

The lobbying firm Lawson Lucas Mendelsohn

(LLM), formed by former Labour aides, was set up just two months after Labour came into office. According to reports, there are now at least 19 individuals, formerly associated with the Labour Party in prominent positions, working as lobbyists. The *Times* of July 7 reports: 'Ever since Tony Blair began transforming Labour into an election-winning machine, lobby groups and public affairs consultancies have been falling over themselves to hire party apparatchiks and officials to get on the inside track of the new regime.'

'What was initially a slow trickle became, in the run up to and immediately after the election, a flood. Senior Labour officials were quickly head-hunted and lured away by large private sector salaries that dwarfed their party wages.'

Those who have taken positions as lobbyists include: Colin Byrne, former chief press officer and Mandelson's former deputy in the Communications Unit; Andy Corrigan, former aide to Welsh Secretary Ron Davies; Rachel Blackmore, who until recently worked for Mike O'Brien, the Home Office Minister; Mike Lee, former adviser to Education and Employment Secretary David Blunkett; Jo Moore, former senior Labour press officer; David Hill, former Labour Chief Press Officer; Nicholas Williams, former adviser to David Clark, Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster; Amanda Francis, former advisor to Northern Ireland Secretary Mo Mowlam; and Gez Segar, a former senior Labour press officer.

Blair not only relies on such figures for contacts with big business, but to discipline and shape the character of the party. Later this year, Draper and Liddle were scheduled to do a series of national seminars with Ministers. Open to all Labour Party members, the purpose of the seminars was to identify Blair 'sympathisers' and prime them to support the leadership line at the forthcoming Labour Party conference.

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