

Britain: Brown makes election appeal to Conservative voters

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Gordon Brown's address to Labour's annual conference was clearly a General Election speech. As such it demonstrated that, whenever it is held, the coming poll will be a contest between two Conservative parties—one led by David Cameron and the other headed by Brown.

This alone strips the election of any genuinely democratic content. But Brown's every action is dedicated to just one aim—to exclude the working class from exercising any political influence and thereby consolidate the monopoly of power exercised by big business through an only nominally *Labour* government. As well as the policies advanced, this is underlined by the ongoing consideration of holding a snap General Election—a move that would all but prohibit any debate and critical consideration of the government's record or the manifestos advanced by the major parties.

One did not need to even close one's eyes in order to imagine that Brown was delivering his first conference address as prime minister to a gathering of Conservatives, rather than the assembled party functionaries and trade union bureaucrats. The event was "true blue"—from a conference backdrop with no Labour Party symbol to his every utterance.

The word's Britain and British peppered his speech like a mantra—over 70 times—to numbing effect, reinforced by his appeals to patriotism, invocations of the terror threat, law and order and the need for immigration controls.

Brown wrapped himself in the Union Jack just as unashamedly if not more so than his predecessor Tony Blair, who he said was owed a debt of gratitude "as a party and as a country".

He spoke of the "resilience of the British people," citizens "who answered the call of the country" and had left "their mark on this island's story," the "bravery and heroism" of "our armed forces." He also staked his claim to be the guardian of Britain against separatist demands, insisting that "there is no Scotland-only, no Wales-only, no England-only answer" to either foot and mouth disease or "terrorist attacks that can strike at any time."

The church too was roped in, with homilies about the "moral compass" provided by the sermons of his father, the minister.

Brown avoided any mention of his Tory opponents, while pressing all the buttons designed to appeal to their electorate.

Labour was no longer the party of "the old equality of outcome that discounts hard work and effort," but of "aspiration and community." His answer to crime was to "both punish and prevent": "There are now 139,000 police officers and 16,000 Community Support Officers—more officers than ever before." These officers would be provided with "hand held computers..." so that they could "stay on the beat and not waste time" filling out forms.

Immigration control was now imposed by a new "unified border force" and "our new Australian-style points-based approach."

On foreign policy, too, Brown made clear that Britain would continue to "discharge our obligations" in Iraq and Afghanistan and "do everything to ensure the security of our dedicated armed forces."

Not content with stealing the Tories' clothes, Brown wants to deepen Blair's pioneering work in transforming Labour into a political "Big Tent," a new home for every right-wing rat seeking to desert the sinking ship of the Conservative Party. His aspirations to assume the role of a bonapartist leader of "the nation" are every bit as pronounced and just as deeply reactionary as those of Nicolas Sarkozy in France.

His was a "new kind of politics," one "not just occupying but shaping and expanding the centre ground" based on an appeal to "all those who work hard and play by the rules, who believe in strong families and a patriotic Britain who may have supported other parties [i.e., the Tories] but who like me want to defend and advance British values and our way of life."

Even Brown's description of himself as a "conviction politician" alluded to his glowing depiction of Margaret Thatcher in the same terms.

That this diatribe met with prolonged applause is the mark of a party that is dead as far as the working class is concerned. This was a gathering that in the past few weeks have seen Brown take tea with Thatcher at Number 10 without complaint, as well as hosting similar meetings with Republican presidential candidate Rudy Giuliani and Lord David Owen, "Doctor Death" himself—one of the original Gang of Four who set up the breakaway Social Democratic Party in the 1980s.

Earlier this week, conference delegates gave Tory defector Quentin Davies a standing ovation when he called on other

Conservative MPs to “take the plunge” and join Labour. Citing Davies, Lord Temple-Morris and Northern Ireland Secretary Shaun Woodward, Deputy Labour leader Harriet Harman pledged a warm welcome for anyone joining Labour’s “cause of social justice” “after leaving another party.”

Brown’s readiness to worship at the alter of the “blessed Margaret”—a women who presided over the destruction of the welfare state, three million unemployed and thousands of miners thrown into prison and who is still hated by millions of working people—speaks volumes about Labour’s real constituency.

Philip Stephens commented on Brown in the *Financial Times*, “He may once have called himself a socialist.” But now, “The big tent stretches ever further.” The *Independent* noted how he had “highlighted the traditional Tory themes of respect, responsibility, individual aspiration and patriotism as he pitched unashamedly for their natural supporters while implying the Conservative Party was irrelevant.” The *Evening Standard* wrote that Brown had “made a remarkable pitch at the Labour Party conference to patriotic Conservatives to jump ship.”

Peter Oborne, writing in the arch-Conservative *Daily Mail*, stated with grudging admiration that “the message to Conservative voters was much more than clever marketing. There were tough, right-wing policies as well—some far tougher than any David Cameron would ever dare to introduce.

“Brown promised ‘British jobs for British workers’. Had Michael Howard or William Hague ever dreamt up such a phrase, the BBC, *Guardian* and entire progressive establishment would have risen up in outrage against this lapse into populism and xenophobia...”

He continued, “Most astonishing of all was the Prime Minister’s pledge to repatriate immigrants who sell drugs or carry guns. Award-winning investigative TV reporters would have claimed a scoop if they had secretly filmed British National Party activists making this sort of undertaking...

“His proposals for health and education services were more or less taken lock, stock and barrel from the Tory handbook. Not merely that, he plundered the language used by Cameron in his recent speeches.... The much-maligned Tory leader is entitled to sue for breach of copyright for this wholesale and flagrant theft of phrases and ideas. If David Cameron were a wronged rock star, he would probably win billions of pounds in forgone earnings.”

In contrast to such assessments, the union bureaucracy fulfilled its role as professional liars, apologists for and accomplices of Labour’s anti-working class agenda.

Tony Woodley of the UNITE trade union declared that Brown’s speech “demonstrated he is in touch with ordinary working men and women.... It is the most Labour speech we have heard for a decade.” UNISON General Secretary Dave Prentis described it as “a breath of fresh air” and TUC General Secretary Brendan Barber said it was “fired with a commitment

to social justice and opportunity.”

Simpson and Prentis also admitted to the press that the unions had agreed not to oppose Brown’s bid to end the submission of emergency motions for debate, ending any possibility of the Labour conference voting against government policy. Given the diseased state of the Labour Party, this suppression was hardly necessary. The move to deny their own democratic rights was also overwhelmingly backed by the Constituency Labour Parties.

However, ensuring that there is no debate at conference is not enough. Labour cannot afford any debate on its policies amongst the electorate.

Britain’s press is dominated by speculation as to if and when Brown will call a snap election, either on October 25, November 1 or some other Autumn date. This is normally posed as simply a question of how best Brown can exploit the continuing unpopularity of the Tories and whether a delay will undermine the “Brown bounce” in Labour’s standing.

There is no legitimate constitutional reason for holding a ballot—Labour has only served two-and-a-half years in office since re-election in 2005. Yet no one has raised that it is the British people who are in fact being “bounced”—into giving a deeply unpopular government four more years in office based on nothing more than an elaborate PR campaign and the ongoing endorsement of Labour by the corporate and financial elite. A snap poll would serve to exclude the vast majority of candidates from the smaller parties from mounting a campaign. Labour has its millions from its billionaire backers and the Conservatives say they have amassed a £10 million war chest. Thus the electorate would be presented with a choice of possible governments—Labour or Tory—that is no choice at all.

Brown relies on the complicity of the media in refusing to raise such principled considerations. Ed Balls, the children’s minister, was one of the few to admit the true nature of Brown’s “gamble” in possibly holding a snap election when he noted, “If the public simply thought that this was a political calculation about when to call an election, I think they would rightly stand back and say: ‘Hang on a sec, what we want to know is what is the nature of the choice.’”



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