

Blair As Captain Of the Titanic

by Dean Andromidas

In a few short weeks, British Prime Minister Tony Blair has gone from leader of “New Labor,” preparing for an unprecedented fourth term for the Labor Party, to captain of the *Titanic*: There are calls from all quarters for Blair to step down or face the same fate as former Tory Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher, who was unceremoniously thrown out of office by her own party in 1990. It is a bitter irony that Blair should suffer the same fate as Thatcher, because for almost a decade he has modelled the policies of “New Labor” on those of the neo-liberal and radical free-market policies of Thatcher.

Commenting on Blair’s troubles, Lyndon LaRouche said that there is a “mood change” among British elites, and dumping Blair is an attempt to find an exit strategy from the complications in the United States, where the Bush Administration is beginning to disintegrate while the governments of France, Italy, and Germany are following closely behind.

Blair and Bush are neck-and-neck in the lowest approval ratings ever. While Bush’s ratings stand at 31%, Blair’s are now at 26%, making him the most hated Labor Prime Minister in the history of the party.

The good ship Blair began to sink last March. In fact, on March 10, the press was filled with obituaries for former British Defense Secretary John Profumo, whose affair with a 19-year-old call girl, Christine Keeler, more than 40 years ago helped bring down the government of Conservative Prime Minister Harold Macmillan. In the subsequent weeks, many Profumo-level scandals hit Blair’s government. First there was the “cash for honors” criminal investigation of Labor Party donors who were nominated for knighthoods or seats in the House of Lords, in return for secret multi-million-dollar donations for the re-election of Tony Blair’s Labor Party last year. Then there was the revelation that Blair’s wife, Cherie, charged the Labor Party treasury more than £7,000 for her hair stylist during the election campaign.

But these scandals were only the overture to “Black Wednesday,” April 26, when Blair suffered a “triple whammy.” First, Britons opened their morning papers to find that the British Prison Service released almost 1,000 foreign prisoners, including murderers, rapists, and other dangerous criminals who should have been deported, igniting calls for the resignation of Home Secretary, a staunch Blairite, Charles Clarke.

Then, a few hours later, the *Daily Mirror* revealed that Blair loyalist, Deputy Prime Minister John Prescott, 67, who

has been married for 45 years, was having an affair with his secretary. The tabloid press had a field day running compromising pictures and steamy excerpts from the secretary’s secret diaries, turning one of Blair’s closest and most powerful allies into a laughingstock. On that same day, Health Secretary Patricia Hewitt could not complete a televised presentation of Blair’s reform of the National Health System because she was booed by hundreds of nurses present at the conference, who forced her to leave the podium.

A few days later, on May 4, Blair suffered a major defeat in local elections for city council. Labor came in third with 26%, while the Liberal Democrats had 27%, and the Conservatives 40%. Of the 4,360 council seats up for election, Labor lost 306 and relinquished control of 18 towns it had held, to the benefit of the Tories, who gained 350 seats. Even the tiny neo-fascist British National Party took 11 council seats from the Labor Party, doubling the number of its councilors.

Rearranging the Deck Chairs

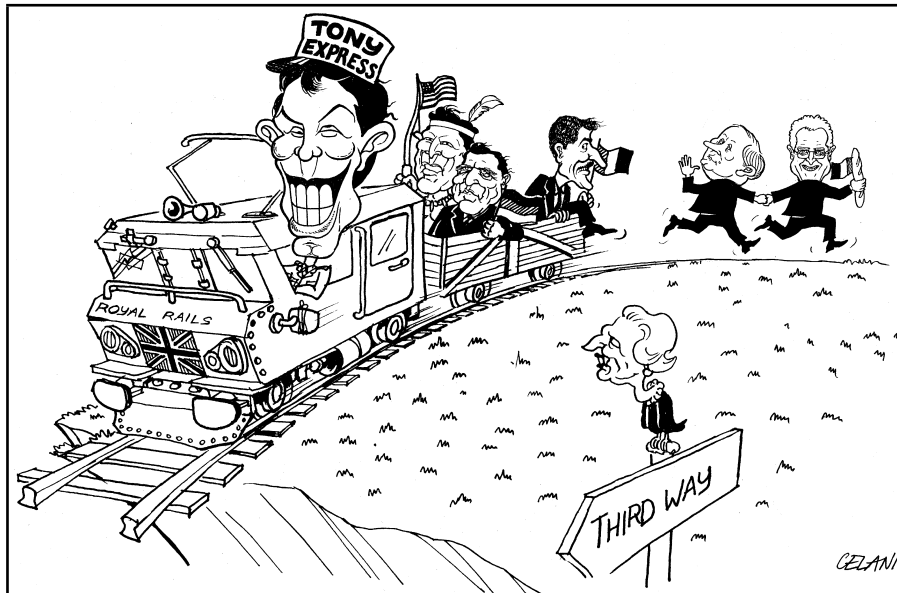
Within hours of the election results, Prime Minister Blair announced a wide-ranging cabinet reshuffle, but this appeased no one. The next day’s headlines included the *Daily Telegraph*’s “Nightmare on Downing Street” and *The Times*’s “Blair Turns Butcher Over Poll Carnage.”

As expected, Blair dumped Home Secretary Charles Clarke, who returned to the back-benches. The sex-scandal-ridden Deputy Prime Minister Prescott was removed from his departmental portfolio, but he was able to keep the title of Deputy Prime Minister, an outcome which fueled outrage that he would keep his £135,000 salary and his two rent-free official residences.

The unexpected dumping of Foreign Secretary Jack Straw and his replacement by Blair loyalist Margaret Beckett, led to widespread speculation in the press that that Straw was sacked under orders from the Bush Administration, because he had recently described U.S. contingency plans for a tactical nuclear strike against Iran as “completely nuts.” After hounding by the press on the issue, Blair for once had to choose between defending the insanity of the Bush-Cheney policy and saving his own neck. Choosing the latter, and looking nervous and haggard, he told a packed press conference that Straw was not fired over Iran policy, and said that a nuclear strike on Iran “would be absolutely absurd.”

But the storm continued. Within hours, the press revealed that Health Secretary Jane Kennedy resigned her post in protest of Blair’s reforms of the National Health Service. And former leader of the Commons, Geoff Hoon, came close to resigning after he discovered that he in fact had been demoted, because his new position as Minister for European Affairs was a non-cabinet post.

With every passing day, Blair’s crisis has worsened, reopening the chasm between New Labor and Old Labor, and between Blair and his would-be successor, Chancellor of the Exchequer Gordon Brown. Under the headline “Plotters



EIRNS/Claudio Celani

Tony Blair's neo-liberal express train to failure, rushes past ousted Tory Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher, with other "Third Way" losers (like former Vice President Al Gore) on board.

Move To Oust Blair" the Guardian revealed that there were calls from "Old Labor" and "New Labor" party factions for Blair to set a date for his early retirement. Seventy-five Labor back-benchers were reported to have signed a letter calling for Blair to agree to a transition, or face a formal challenge.

But despite his meeting with Labor back-benchers to assure them that he would give his successor, Brown, "ample time" to "bed down" and prepare for the next elections, Blair refused to set a date for his early retirement.

Commenting on the fact that Blair appears to have aged ten years through all this, a senior British intelligence source told *EIR* that it is clear that Blair is on the way out, adding drily, "It could not have happened to a nicer man."

One of the key issues in the crisis, the source said, is the failure of Blair's and "New Labor's" policy of privatization. The idea that the "private sector could deliver better public services" has failed miserably, and has hit the public hard. The problem is that no alternative policy has been put forward. Gordon Brown, Blair's would-be successor, is almost as "New Labor" as Blair himself. Furthermore, the party does not have the intellectual capacity to come up with a new policy, let alone a new leader who could win in the next elections. Blair will not change his own neo-liberal economic policy and neo-conservative foreign policy, thus allowing the Conservative Party to campaign on its own turf. Blair will lose the election rather than change his policy, the source said.

The Tories, under the leadership of David Cameron, have little to offer except the fact that they are not the Labor Party.

Will the British Dump Bush?

In a May 11 commentary entitled "MacBlair, a Walking Shadow," *The Times* columnist Anatole Kaletsky hints that the British elites now think it is time to distance themselves from the Bush Administration. "Everyone agrees that Mr. Blair's career will end in failure," Kaletsky says, and he predicts that Blair's end will come in the form of revenge from those whom he betrayed in his "disastrous cabinet reshuffle," especially former Foreign Secretary Jack Straw. Questioning whether Blair's wife, Cherie, was responsible for the disastrous cabinet reshuffle, Kaletsky writes, "was the Prime Minister driven to this murderous madness by the vaulting ambition and paranoid nocturnal ravings of Lady MacBlair?"

Pointing to the possibility that Straw could hold the key to Blair's

ultimate downfall, Kaletsky writes, "Mr. Straw is the only man who knows the full truth about the preparations for war in Iraq, about the contingency planning for striking Iran and, above all, about the Blair-Bush relationship. If he were to reveal what he knows, Mr. Blair's career would be over in a moment. I am not suggesting that Mr. Straw would do this as an act of petty personal vengeance, but rather as a principled service to the security of the nation. . . . The possible catalysts for such an outburst by Mr. Straw are easy to imagine; a hint of military action against Iran . . . maybe just a sabre rattling speech from the Pentagon or the White House, overzealously endorsed by Mr. Blair."

Offering advice to Blair's likely successor, Gordon Brown, Kaletsky writes that the best way to consolidate his power and avoid electoral defeat in the next general election would be to break with the policy of Blair that the British public hates the most, "Mr. Blair's relationship with the Bush administration and his policy in Iraq."

Another example of the British elites distancing themselves from the Bush Administration was an unprecedented speech by British Attorney General Lord Goldsmith, denouncing Dick Cheney's torture center at Guantanamo Bay. Speaking at an international conference sponsored by the Royal United Services Institute, Goldsmith said: "The existence of Guantanamo Bay remains unacceptable. It is time, in my view, that it should close. . . . I believe it would help to remove what has become a symbol to many—right or wrong—of injustice. The historic tradition of the United States as a beacon of freedom, liberty and of justice deserves the removal of this symbol."