Tony Blair has talked much about 'the project'. But what precisely is it? Stripped of the hyperbole, the continuities with Thatcherism are all too obvious. Stuart Hall examines a great missed opportunity.

The Great Moving Nowhere Show

What is the political character of the Blair regime? Is New Labour a radically new response to the core political issues of our time? Is its perspective as broad in sweep, modern in outlook and coherent as Thatcherism's neo-liberal project, only different - because it is breaking decisively with the legacy and logic of the Thatcher years? Or is it a series of pragmatic adjustments and adaptive moves to essentially Thatcherite terrain? Since taking office, New Labour has certainly been hyperactive, setting policy reviews in place here, legislating and innovating there. A careful audit of the achievements and failures of these early years remains to be made. But that is for a different occasion. Here, we want to stay with 'the big picture'. Where is New Labour really going? Does Mr Blair have a political project?

Thatcherism, from which Mr Blair has learned so much, certainly did have a project. Its aim was to transform the political landscape, irrevocably: to make us think in and speak its language as if there were no other. It had a strategy - an idea of where it was attempting to put in place and the criteria by which the electorate is impressed with 'what we stand for'. Where is New Labour's latest bid to give its project a rationalisation - that is why Martin Jacques of Marxism Today first began to discuss Thatcherism as a project, smart-arsed journalists and Labour analysts joined forces to pour scorn on the idea - a thought altogether too concerted and 'continental' for the empiricist temper of British political culture. Geoff Mulgan - Director of Demos, former MT contributor and now in the Number 10 Policy Unit - advances a similar view elsewhere in this issue. 'Moral political' questions, he says, are irrelevant - a sign that the left intellectuals who ask them are hopelessly isolated from the 'real' business of government. They would be better employed, like Demos, thinking up concrete proposals which New Labour could put into effect.

Guilt British academics on the left are particularly vulnerable to this kind of gross anti-intellectualism. However, Mulgan's position seems disingenuous. Of course, policy innovation is essential to any political strategy - that is why Martin Jacques dreamed up the idea of Demos in the first place. There is lots of room for lateral thinking. But - Mr Blair's Rendezvous With Destiny notwithstanding - May 1997 was not the start of 'Year Zero'. All questions of perspective and strategy have not been 'solved'. As Decca Aitkenhead put it recently, the Blairites sometimes behave as if 'Number 10 is sorted for nuts and bolts; it's just not sure what sort of machine they add up to'. In fact, it's impossible to know how radical and innovative a concrete proposal is until you know which strategy it is attempting to put in place and the criteria against which its 'radicalism' is being assessed. Without a strategic framework, the 'concrete proposals' could be brilliant; or they could just be off-the-wall - completely batty. In recent months, Demos has offered us plenty of both kinds.

In fact, seen in the context of New Labour's sustained hype and vaunting ambition over the past 18 months, Mulgan's idea that nothing requires serious attention apart from pragmatic effectiveness is not only wrong but curiously off-message and wholly out of synch with his Master's Voice. It was clear that Mr Blair saw himself in the Thatcherite mould and he has worked hard to model himself on her style of leadership. And with some success! Recent polls suggest the electorate is impressed with 'what they regard as the strong Thatcherite style', though they also seem unsure whether this is more than 'better gloss, more PR and spin' and, more worryingly, they doubt that New Labour 'will make a real difference and force a clean policy break with the Tory years'! (The Guardian, September 28 1998).

Mr Blair has also modelled his ambitions to make everything in Britain 'New' on Thatcherism's project of national self-renewal. Consequently, these days, no New Labour spokesperson opens his/her mouth, nor journalist reports the event, without reference to 'the Blair project'. It is New Labour, not the intellectuals, who put this 'meta-political' question on the agenda. It is Blair who talks of New Labour in apocalyptic terms - 'one of the great, radical, reforming governments of our history', 'to be nothing less than the model twenty-first century nation, a beacon to the world', 'becoming the natural party of government'. ('Natural parties of government' are those whose ideas lead on all fronts, carrying authority in every domain of life; whose philosophy of change has become the common sense of the age. In the old days we used to call them 'hegemonic'.) Mr Blair is definitely into 'the vision thing'.
'The Third Way speaks as if there are no longer any conflicting interests which cannot be reconciled'

Blair: 'The reason we have been out of power for fifteen years is simple - that society changed
Trying to disinter from its practice its underlying political logic, philosophy and strategic direction.

In the global context, New Labour has brought a sweeping interpretation of globalisation, which it regards as the single most important factor which has transformed our world, setting an impassable threshold between New Labour and Old, now and everything that went before. This is crucial because, in our view, it is its commitment to a certain definition of globalisation which provides the outer horizon as well as the dubious legitimacy to Mr Blair’s whole political project.

New Labour understands globalisation in very simplistic terms - as a single, uncodified, unidirectional phenomenon, exhibiting the same features and producing the same inevitable outcomes everywhere. Despite Giddens’s strictures, New Labour does deal with globalisation as if it is a self-regulating and implacable Force of Nature. It treats the global economy as being, in effect, like the weather. In his speech to the Labour Party conference, Mr Blair portrayed the global economy as moving so fast, its financial flows so的巨大 and so speedy, the pace at which it has plunged a third of the world economy into crisis so rapid, that its operations are now effectively beyond the control of nation states and probably of regional and international agencies as well. He calls this, with a weary finality, ‘the way of the world’.

His response is to ‘manage change’. But it seems that what he really means is that we must ‘manage ourselves to adapt to changes which we cannot otherwise control’ - a familiar sounding but substantively very different kettle of fish.

This accounts for the passivity of the Blair government, despite its pivotal role in Europe and leading position in the G7 etc., in the face of the current crisis in Asia, Russia and elsewhere. It continued until very late to reiterate the false reassurances that the Asian crisis would have little noticeable effect on Britain. It has shown a surprising lack of flexibility in the face of mounting evidence to the contrary. It seems content to reiterate the mantra: ‘The goal of macro-economic forces alone, bring the economy’.

New Labour is not for turning,’ which sounds increasingly like a desperate struggle to win, not the present, but the last war.

It has signally failed to seize the advantage of the rapidly changing terms of macro-economic debate to offer early, effective or radical leadership to the international community, as one country after another deserts the neo-liberal ship and moves towards thinking the unthinkable - that the unregulated movement of currency and capital, aided and abetted by deregulated corporate power and new technology, will, if left to the ‘hidden hand’ of macro-economic forces alone, bring the whole edifice crashing to the ground. His belated proposals for the reform of the IMF are far from radical. Paradoxically, it is the high priests of global neo-liberalism - Jeffrey Sachs, Paul Krugman and George Soros - not Blair and Brown, who have led the retreat towards regulation.

New Labour appears to have been seduced by the neo-liberal gospel that the ‘global market’ is an automatic and self-instituting principle, requiring no particular social, cultural, political or institutional framework. It can be ‘applied’ under any conditions, anywhere. New Labour therefore, was bewitched as every neo-liberal hot-gospeller that Japanese bankers just don’t actually behave like Wall Street bankers, and that if you dump ‘the market’ into a state-socialist society like Russia without transforming its political institutions or its culture - a much slower and more institutional operation - is likely to produce, not Adam Smith’s natural barterers and truckers, but a capitalist mafia. As Andrew Marr shrewdly observed, ‘It’s the politics, stupid!’

Since globalisation is a fact of life to which There Is No Alternative, and national governments cannot hope to regulate or impose any order on its processes or effects, New Labour has accordingly largely withdrawn from the active management of the economy (in the long run, Keynes is dead’). What it has done, instead, is to set about vigorously adapting society to the global economy's needs, tutoring its citizens to be self-sufficient and self-reliant in the face of mounting evidence that the Asian crisis would have little noticeable effect on Britain. It has shown a surprising lack of flexibility in the face of mounting evidence to the contrary. It seems content to reiterate the mantra: ‘The goal of macro-economic forces alone, bring the economy’.

New Labour deals with globalisation as if it is a self-regulating, implacable Force of Nature, like the weather.

Eric Hobsbawm, Marxism Today Seminar, 4-6 September 1998

Response: ‘We are not spending our time saying this is a terrible government. It is a much better government than the one before. It is a government that has done a fairly substantial amount of things and we shall all go on voting for it supposing there is an election tomorrow. What we are trying to find out is what it is trying to do in line with the old traditions of the Left.

First, I don’t think this government is a single bloc. There are different languages coming out. If you listen to Blair or Brown or Mandelson or Field, you hear different views.

Second I think it is simply not so that New Labour carries on with the traditional centre-left. Geoff Mulgan is quite wrong about the great wave of centre-left governments being the same sort of thing and happening in the same sort of way. There is a basic difference. The Blair idea, and I am talking about Blair not other people, is of a centre-left which is between the Democratic Party in the US and New Labour. He believes that is the model for the centre-left. But the alternative is New Labour or the traditional European centre-left, marxist, social-democratic and social-christian. And there is a great difference between the two. The American tradition is fundamentally not that of the European social state. It may be that as between Republicans and Democrats, the Democrats are, in terms of class composition and topographical position, the Left. But they are not the same as the European tradition. If you look at the reaction, for instance, from Blair and others to the election of the Left in France, and Clinton in the US, it is very different. Whatever it is, New Labour is not a centre-left government in any traditional sense in which we in Europe perceive it and that includes not only socialists but demos-christians, the whole of the social state which is the central tradition of the 19th and 20th centuries on the continent’.

Labour has been quietly seduced by the neo-liberal view that, as far as possible, the economy must be treated like a machine, obeying economic ‘laws’ without human intervention. In practice, what is gained in credibility by being able to say - ‘The Government is not involved! Rising interest rates, an over-valued currency, falling order books and rising regional unemployment have nothing to do with us. They are unfortunate ‘facts of life’ which folks must simply get up with. You can’t buck global trends’ - is lost in terms of strategic control. Whether New Labour acknowledges
Training and Education' are driven, in and about time too. New Labour will not, seek employment - very commendable, nursery places for lone parents willing to The New Deal subsidises training and Mr restoration of that discredited and obscene remoralisation of the work ethic, and the blow in from the global marketplace. produce new kinds of subjects, kitted out energy seeking to change 'the culture' and defined society, and more in terms of supplying the last analysis, less by the commitment to social-democratic interventions. But its key tion. There have been many commendable children's misdemeanours while Welfare - parents exclusively responsible for their Since it must depend on the private sector to provide them, it can only morally exhort. the state to make a 'choice' to live homeless on benefit in per- decently on the level of benefits they are offered and that many are thereby driven to crime, there is for the proposition that millions of people are making a 'lifestyle choice' to live homeless on benefit in perpetuity. He promises the poor not social justice (that is a bridge too far) but 'social fairness'. But his actual image of the citizen is of the lonely individual, 'set free' of the state to face the hazards of the global welfare alone, in their alone and against incalculable risk, privately insured up to the hilt against every eventuality - birth, unemployment, disability, illness, retirement and death - like those lean urban 'survivors' on their mountain bikes who haunt our streets, their chocky bar, Evis water-bottle and change-of-trainers some of their body. Man, as 'poor, bare, for'kid's sake', isolated and at bay before the elements.

Mr Blair represents his welfare reforms as a continuation of the spirit of Beveridge, but this is simply not the case. For Beveridge understood that welfare systems reflect and have profound effects on the wider social framework. He knew that the principle of 'social insurance' was not only efficient but a way of underwriting citizenship; that 'universalism', despite its costs, was essential to binding the richer sections of society into collective forms of welfare. He anticipated Galbraith's argument that the whole system would be in danger as soon as the rich could willingly exclude themselves from private provision. Man, as 'poor, bare, for'kid's sake', isolated and at bay before the elements.

This 'law' is already manifest in education - though New Labour system will have indulged as lightheartedly as any other ordinary, unreflective, Thatchercite, possessive individual. 'Targeting', 'selectivity' and 'means testing', which Mr Blair has surreptitiously slid into place as his great principles of reform, are destined, as surely as night follows day, to deepen already existing inequalities, to increase marginalisation and social exclusion, to divide society into two irremediable tiers and further fragment social integration and reciprocity. Hence the muffled confusion surrounding the Harriet Harman/Frank Field fiasco. Mr Field bats with the best of New Labour in terms of self-righteous moralism about poverty and the desire to do to people things which are good for their souls. His Methodist spirit is riveted by the fantasy of the great Demo Fraud and the Feckless Work-shy. But he understood that the principles of contributory social insurance and 'universalism' had to be preserved, however
we won a bigger battle today: the battle of values. (Blackpool, 29.9.1998)

Since the election, we have heard less of ‘Middle England’ and more of ‘The People’. This is the great body of unknowns, the Essex Lads, the ‘Babes’, *hommes el filles moyen sensuelles*. ‘The People’, Jonathan Freedland argues, are the imagined subject of phrases like the ‘People’s priorities’, the Lottery as the ‘People’s money’, the ‘People’s Princess’. The People are definitely not the ‘working classes’ or the ‘under-classes’ or the ‘chatting classes’ or manual workers or lone parents or black families or trade unionists or public sector workers, or Labour Party rank-and-file members, come to that. Their desires must be flattered: ‘wooed’ rather than ‘represented’. They are spoken to rather than speaking. When not watching GMTV or Sky Sport, they are to be found in focus groups. The People, Nick Sparrow remarks, are those who matter once every five years. Their voice is *The Sun*.

Then there are The Businessmen. The longer New Labour governs, the more it cosies up to Business, reinventing itself in full-dress corporate disguise. Mr Blair is constantly to be seen in their company. Visually, he is exclusively associated with Success, a dedicated follower of celebrity, which is the modern form of the success story. He looks decidedly uncomfortable in the company of the poor. No doubt a Labour government needs support from the business community. But New Labour’s relentless wooing of the new business nouveaux riches is nothing short of abject. Businessmen can do no wrong. Their logo adorns every Labour Party conference delegate’s name-tag and ‘Serving the community nationwide’ - courtesy of Somerfield supermarket - their ads will soon be beamed nationwide’ - courtesy of Somerfield supermarket.

There is also a genuine humanity which has forgotten the music. •

There are the ‘wealth creators’, whose salaries are beyond control, dictated by some extraterrestrially defined ‘rate for the job’: the big spenders, the off-shore investing ‘patriots’, the Mercedes-Benz and *Don Giovanni* crowd, with a finger in every share-option deal and a luxury pad in every global city. The fact that, comparatively speaking, they are set fair to also being the most poorly educated, philistine, anti-intellectual, short-temrist and venal ‘business class’ in the western world does not seem to matter.

In an ill-advised attempt to appropriate the spirit of the new British cultural revival, there was, briefly, ‘Cool Britannia’. But it was short-lived. The energy levels here proved too high, the swing too wild and unmanageable, the rhythms too loud, the fashion too see-through, the culture too ‘multi-cultural’, too full of clever creative folk, too subversive, too ‘Black British’ or ‘Asian cross-over’ or ‘British hybrid’ for New Labour’s more sober, corporate-managerialist English style. This was definitive- ly not the ‘modernity’ towards which Britain required to be ‘modernised’.

Finally, in recent weeks, an ‘enemy’ has surfaced on New Labour’s social stage. Critics and whingers to the backbone, this lot ‘pocket everything that they do like and then moan about the 10 things they don’t like’. He clearly found it difficult to keep the tone of exasperation out of his voice. The ‘sneer squad’, as he dubbed them, occupy the forbidden zone of Radio 4, *The Guardian*, *The Observer*, *Newsnight*, Channel 4 News. They are outside the circle of influence, ‘below the radar’. There is little doubt that the readers are those who matter once every five years. Their voice is *The Sun*. What we knew after Thatcher-
er was that the New Right could respond to the new historical conditions, though the results of its attempt to do so were an unmistakable disaster. But could the Left? The Left has been a good shape when New Labour took office. However, the fact is that Mr Blair does not seem to have any deep political roots in its hopes and traditions. He is in some ways a modern man, at ease with some of the changes which now characterise our world. But, politically, he is essentially a post-Thatcherite figure, in the sense that the experience of Thatcherism was, its shaping and formative political experience.

So, try as he may to find an alternative ground on which to stand, he finds the imperatives of a soft Christian humanism more compelling: its cadences come to him more naturally than those of the centre-left. He is an able and clever politician and has become a clever, even to some a charismati-ic, leader. Just now he is basking in the power a landslide majority has conferred on him. And, far from betraying his princi-"les, he seems totally and honestly per-suaded that what he is doing is right. He has and will continue to make many impor-tant adjustments to the legacy he inherited. There is also a genuine humanity which one would have been wise to put any money on in Mrs Thatcher. They are simi- lar figures, but they are not the same.

However, the difficult truth seems to be that the Blair project, in its overall analysis and key assumptions, is still essentially framed by and moving on terrain defined by Thatcherism. Mrs Thatcher had a pro-ject. Blair’s historic project is adjusting Us to It. That touches half- the modernising part - of the task, as Marxism Today argued it.

But the other, more difficult, half- that of the Left reinventing a genuinely modern reponse to the crisis of our times - has been largely abandoned. At the global and domestic levels, the broad parameters of the ‘turn’ which Thatcherism made have not been radically modified or reversed. The project of renewal thus remains rough-ly where it did when Marxism Today published its final issue. Mr Blair seems to have learned some of the words. But, sadly, he has forgotten the music. •
"Stuart Hall was one of the great political intellectuals of our time—learned, perspicacious, provocative, and wise. He was also a master essayist. This splendid selection, spanning more than fifty years, is a feast." The great moving nowhere show (1998) 283 20. New Labour's double-shuffle (2003) 301 21. The neoliberal revolution (2011) 317 Afterword / Michael Rustin 336 Notes on historical figures 354 Index 361. The Great Moving Nowhere Show', Marxism Today, special issue. Nov 1998. 65. S Hall. Hall S (1998) 'The Great Moving Nowhere Show', Marxism Today, special issue (November-December 1998) 65. Framing statement: After neoliberalism: Analysing the present. Chapter. [Show full abstract] unsteady wall layer model gives a better representation of the data; for this and theoretical reasons, it is suggested that the extended Van Driest model be abandoned. The unsteady wall layer model is then coupled with two outer region models, namely the 'law of the wake' and an outer region similarity profile, to give two composite profiles for the entire boundary layer.