

Then it was 1997. Now it is 2017.

What is the choice today?

and

were you up for Portillo?

A Rant

It was as if the humiliating defeat of Portilloⁱ on the First of May 1997 lanced the boil of Thatcherism. Since 1979 the body politic had suffered from a monetarist, neo-liberal experiment first trialed by Pinochet in Chileⁱⁱ. But let no one tell you that it was Tony Blair and New Labour that provided the indispensable winning ingredient bringing victory twenty years ago. The evidence is that had the party been led by John Smith, Gordon Brown or our cat the result would have been little differentⁱⁱⁱ. Tony Blair's reason for replacing Old Labour with New Labour had far more to do with his need for a personalised vehicle than it did for any wish to restore to us the values of a government such as Attlee's.

The significance of that Portillo moment was that it seemed to kill off the chance of any perpetuation of the Thatcher dynasty: the line had been broken: there would be no more offspring: Thatcherism had died out. By 1997 selfish capitalism and the rationalisation of greed and privilege had so clearly run their course. Gosh, it was exciting and such a relief to throw off the feeling that we were commodities in a market rigged in favour of the powerful.

But we got Blair and Mandelson and Campbell and an array of New Labour acolytes, altar boys, curates, priests and bishops. We acquired a new political liturgy. Words such as 'modernisation', 'reform', 'choice', 'progress' and more were given new meanings. The New Labour liturgy has so effectively captured political discourse that when, for example, Michael Gove deliberately set out to deform the school system in England he was able to deploy the word 'reform' without causing an eyebrow to be raised. That word used to call to mind school history lessons about changes such as the abolition of slavery, the factory acts and the extension of the franchise. Today if you bring in G4S to run a prison you can get away with calling it a 'reform'.

In *Not the Chilcot Report* (2016) Peter Osborne, emphasising Iraq, makes the point that at one time we felt able to trust governments, the civil service and even our spies to behave with some honour, probity and efficiency (my words). We did not expect to be lied to. Now we do and we are: three hundred and fifty million quid a week for the NHS anyone? That referendum demonstrated very clearly that we live in a SHAMOCRACY. We were

deceived into playing a game to decide who was going to be the next Head Prefect of the Tory Party.

Twenty years after we mistakenly felt that we were about to participate in a DEMOCRACY and create a more fair society we have the opportunity to vote for a party led by someone who holds to decent human values; who is not a sound bite philosopher; whose ego does not require an hourly massage; and whose default position is not falsehood.

I could argue with Jeremy Corbyn about Brexit and strongly wish he would confront more fiercely the promoters of the artificially constructed charge of anti-Semitism. But I recognise his job is not easy.

Politics is about the inclusive discussion of and arrival at public values. For too long we have been taught that it is about power.

To vote for Theresa May is to vote for the kind of power that promotes greed; that maintains privilege; that celebrates war; and that drives ever wider the gap between rich and poor.

To vote for Jeremy Corbyn is to vote for humanity at home and abroad. Thatcher told us that there was no alternative. There always was an alternative but we were given little opportunity to choose it. Now we can choose.

How many Portillo Moments would you like?

Cliff Jones 2nd May 2017

i

Michael Denzil Xavier Portillo whose surname is now pronounced as though English but actually it is Spanish. His father fled from the right wing dictatorship of Franco: his son embraced that of Thatcher.

ii

***Pinochet in Piccadilly* (2002) by Andy Beckett is really worth reading for this.**

iii

***The Rise of NEW LABOUR* (2001) by Heath, Jowell and Curtice is useful here. While hardly an enthusiastic endorsement of my view that in 1997 Thatcherism was being rejected by the electorate and unquestioning of the notion that the changes brought about by Kinnock and Blair signified a 'modernisation' of the Labour Party I believe that they show that the result of that election was a foregone conclusion that did not depend upon the popularity of specific policies.**