

The Diary of an Apparatchik

THE NEW MACHIAVELLI

How to Wield Power

In the

Modern World

By Jonathan Powell

Note:

I wrote this very short comment (hardly a review) on Powell's book some time ago and it has been lurking on the *In Draft* page of my website ever since. The recent publication of **BLAIR INC** by Beckett, Hencke and Kochan features Jonathon Powell continuing his role as a Blair apparatchik. And now that Blair and company have seen fit to attempt to recapture the Labour Party after the 2015 General Election and the resignation of Ed Miliband I believe we need to be reminded that the Blairites have not gone away.

The shortness of my comment is probably because at the time I was hoping that Blairism was a fading force. I no longer think that.

So, yet another account of life on the sofa; except that Powell claims that Blair didn't do government like that. He makes this claim while writing 313 pages demonstrating that he did. Powell was Blair's Chief of Staff and I had hoped for better from the brother who at least pronounces his own name with an awareness of its etymological derivation. Unlike posh brother Charles who clearly felt while doing the same job for Margaret Thatcher that it was important to pretend to have an English name.

To borrow from Auden, this is a seriously bad book because the author purports to be a member of the Labour Party, a republican and an atheist. He maintains all of these positions, each one of which suggests a certain philosophical commitment, as though they have had their essence sucked from them. As a socialist smoker he chooses Silk Cut Extra Mild: no Capstain Full Strength for him; and he does not inhale.

Yes, it is a bad book but (Auden again) I like it because, despite several examples of the author's ignorance and inability to think past Blair's simple prejudices, the book is full of political minutiae and, even better, gossip.

And, and, and, at long last, I have discovered who came up with the slogan 'Education, education, education'. He did! Imagine that, thinking up a slogan that claimed to summarise the priorities of an entire government: a post Thatcher government (as we hoped in 1997): a slogan that has been and shall be quoted for years: a slogan that gave us lots and lots of activity but a fractured system of education.

Why Machiavelli? There are two reasons why he brings Machiavelli to the party. First, Mr. M is famous for having written *The Prince*, a handbook for people trying to acquire and hold on to power in Italy 500 years ago. Tony Blair is Powell's prince and he thinks that if he rehabilitates the reputation of Machiavelli, who has given his name to a rather cynical approach to government and politics, he just might do the same for Tony. Nice try but nul point this time. The second reason for using Machiavelli as a recurring set of reference points throughout the book is good old-fashioned pretentiousness. No real harm in it.

Overall, Jonathan Powell has given us both a good read and an insight into what it took to routinise the charisma of Tony Blair; but, alas, here is yet more evidence of New Labour's unwillingness to raise a discourse of equality and fairness. He does not even give us a socialist nicotine patch.

Cliff Jones, first written ages ago, slightly revised May 13th 2015