

An Analysis of New Labour: Successes, Failures, Where the Tories Went Wrong, and What Can Be Learned By the Current Labour Party

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Abstract

The following article aims to provide an analysis of the United Kingdom's 'New Labour' period that took place from 1997 to 2010, its successes, failures, and legacy. It will also attempt to assess where the Conservative - and Liberal Democrat - party went wrong in their control from 2010 to 2024, how the Labour Party returned to the fore, and what they might be able to accomplish with their newly rediscovered power.

Keywords: Development, Growth, United Kingdom, Blair, Johnson, Starmer, Brexit

I. Analysing Development

Development is a highly complicated and hotly contested concept within the realm of international relations, with many different viewpoints, corresponding to the positions of various stakeholders, which tend to have conflicting interests on the matter. A more traditional, financially-centred view of the world would likely place economic growth at the forefront of development, using target metrics such as Gross Domestic Product (GDP) or Gross National Income (GNI) per capita and indicators like poverty and employment rates. As time has passed, however, the broad consensus surrounding the concept of development has shifted somewhat towards the idea of 'human development,' expanding to be more inclusive,

considering several other crucial factors. According to the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), development is the process of "enhancing people's capabilities, enlarging their range of choices, expanding their freedom and promoting human rights for all citizens" and "is about the freedoms people can enjoy: what they are free to choose and to be."¹ The concept of human development has been heavily promoted by economists like Amartya Sen, most famous for his idea of the 'capabilities approach,' which stresses the importance of the 'ends,' namely a decent overall standard of living, rather than the

¹ United Nations Development Programme. "What Is Human Development?" UNDP, 9 Feb. 2023, www.undp.org/sites/g/files/zskgke326/files/2023-02/CK_Slides_FINAL_ENG.pdf.

‘means,’ such as GDP or income per capita. The capabilities approach is perhaps best embodied by the United Nations’ Human Development Index (HDI), introduced in 1990 “*to emphasise that people and their capabilities should be the ultimate criteria for assessing the development of a country, not economic growth alone.*”² The database is centred around what many scholars consider the three most important ‘ends’ of development - access to health, education, and goods. Within the health section of the HDI, the index measures life expectancy at birth; within the education section, “*mean of years of schooling for adults aged 25 years and more and expected years of schooling for children of school entering age*”³ is taken into account; and the standard of living section measures gross national income per capita, aiming to ensure a holistic balance between a number of crucial aspects of life. While the HDI is far from perfect, and could still use some tweaks before it cements its status as a thoroughly reliable tool for measuring development, it is undoubtedly a marked improvement on those that have been used in the past, as well as an excellent starting point for those looking to analyse development in various sectors and countries.

II. Development in the United Kingdom

Within the field of development, it is widely accepted that different aspects of development - economic, health,

and social, tend to move in a linear - or even exponential - fashion, except for the occasional economic anomaly. Due to the increased globalisation in the modern world, countries’ GDPs - even among those ravaged by conflict - have seen long-term increases, with the current trend of global economic growth showing no signs of stopping. As this trend continues, however, there can be variations in and among countries, one example being the United Kingdom which, in the latter stages of the 20th and early stages of the 21st century, experienced various different ways in which development was pursued. In 1979, following 5 years of 2 separate Labour governments, the Conservative Party reclaimed power, instating Margaret Thatcher as Prime Minister. Known as the ‘Iron Lady’, Thatcher was a prolific ideologue, famously remarking that “*socialist governments (...) always run out of other people’s money.*”⁴ Thatcher’s government pursued radical neoliberal policies, with the fight against inflation taking priority over the rise against joblessness, and “*unemployment shot up under the Conservatives to levels not seen since the Great Depression.*”⁵ While the United Kingdom suffered a “*deep recession in the early 1980s,*”⁶ in the following years, Thatcher led a significant turnaround -

² United Nations. “Human Development Index.” Human Development Reports - United Nations, 16 Feb. 2024, hdr.undp.org/data-center/human-development-index#/indicies/HDI.

³ United Nations. “Human Development Index.” Human Development Reports - United Nations, 16 Feb. 2024, hdr.undp.org/data-center/human-development-index#/indicies/HDI.

⁴ Margaret Thatcher Foundation. “TV Interview for Thames TV This Week.” Margaret Thatcher Foundation, www.margaretthatcher.org/document/102953.

⁵ Rogers, Simon. “15 Ways That Britain Changed Under Margaret Thatcher.” *The Guardian*, 8 Apr. 2013, www.theguardian.com/politics/datablog/2013/apr/08/britain-changed-margaret-thatcher-charts.

⁶ “The Thatcher Years in Statistics.” *BBC News*, BBC, 9 Apr. 2013, www.bbc.com/news/uk-politics-22070491.

despite a nearly year-long miner's strike⁷ - with GDP growing by at least 2% in every full year of her rule afterward. Thatcher's Premiership was followed by that of Sir John Major, who did not fare as well economically. Major similarly oversaw a recession in the early years of his mandate, followed by Black Wednesday, an infamous day on which "*the British pound was ignominiously ejected from the exchange rate mechanism (ERM) of the European monetary system.*"⁸

Following 7 years of Major's Premiership, marking a total of nearly 2 decades of the Conservative Party in power, the British public was ready and eager for a change. The Labour Party, led by Tony Blair, "*was voted in by a landslide majority,*"⁹ winning 419 total seats for a majority of 179, the largest for a single party¹⁰ in the post-war era. While the margin of their vote alone was enough to give great confidence to Labour, they still sought to blaze a trail ahead, ensuring that they would not just remain an alternative to the Conservative Party, while simultaneously standing out from the far left. This is perhaps best exemplified in the 1995 amendment of Clause IV of the

Labour Party's constitution - an initiative spearheaded by Blair - removing the phrase "*upon the basis of the common ownership of the means of production, distribution, and exchange,*"¹¹ in an attempt to curry favour with more moderate voters.

In his victory speech, newly-elected Prime Minister Blair remarked that his government's election "*is a mandate for New Labour and I say to the people of this country — we ran for office as New Labour, we will govern as New Labour.*"¹²

Blair's declaration set the scene for his Premiership, in which the New Labour period was well and truly underway: within 14 months, Labour successfully passed a bill establishing a National Minimum Wage, a flagship policy throughout their campaign, which entered into force in April 1999. The year before that, Blair's government introduced their 'New Deal', billed as "*the first of 12 pilots of a new approach to welfare.*"¹³ The rollout of the New Deal was marked in part by the 1999 Working Families Tax Credit (WFTC), a transitional system "*aimed at improving incentives to work.*"¹⁴ These schemes were accompanied by speeches from the then-Chancellor of the

⁷ Morris, Georgina. "Miners' Strike 1984: Why UK Miners Walked out and How It Ended." BBC News, BBC, 2 Mar. 2024, www.bbc.com/news/uk-england-68244762.

⁸ Eichengreen, Barry. "Black Wednesday Cast a Shadow That Culminated in Brexit." The Guardian, Guardian News and Media, 13 Sept. 2022, www.theguardian.com/business/2022/sep/13/black-wednesday-brexite-sterling-crisis.

⁹ "BBC Politics 97." BBC News, BBC, 1997, www.bbc.co.uk/news/special/politics97/news/05/0505/stats.shtml.

¹⁰ Cracknell, Richard, et al. "1918- 2023, a Long Century of Elections." *House of Commons Library*, 9 Aug. 2023, researchbriefings.files.parliament.uk/documents/CBP-7529/CBP-7529.pdf.

¹¹ Rodrigues, Jason. "Twenty Years Ago Today: Tony Blair Won Clause Four Debate." The Guardian, Guardian News and Media, 29 Apr. 2015, www.theguardian.com/politics/from-the-archive-blog/2015/apr/29/clause-four-labour-party-tony-blair-20-1995.

¹² "General Election Victory Speech, 1997." British Political Speech | Speech Archive, 1997, www.britishpoliticalspeech.org/speech-archive.htm?speech=222.

¹³ "Transforming Britain's Labour Market - Ten Years of the New Deal." Department for Work and Pensions, 2009, dera.ioe.ac.uk/id/eprint/7487/7/PMNewDeal2-01-08_Redacted.pdf.

¹⁴ Dilnot, Andrew, and Julian McCrae. "Family Credit and the Working Families' Tax Credit." Institute for Financial Studies, Oct. 1999, ifs.org.uk/sites/default/files/output_url_files/bn3.pdf.

Exchequer, Gordon Brown, who in March 1999 declared that “*the fairer Britain is, the more open Britain is to the talents of all, from whatever class or background, the more enterprising and prosperous all of Britain will be.*”¹⁵ Blair also oversaw the creation of the Department for International Development in 1997, an offshoot of the Foreign Office responsible for managing British Foreign Aid.

Another general election victory in 2001 only strengthened Labour & Blair’s mandate, and the government was able to pass various economic & education-related measures, including the Education Maintenance Fund -which provided subsidies to non-university students between the ages of 16 & 19 in Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland, the Tax Credits Act-, which “*establishe[d] the administrative framework for the new tax credits*”¹⁶- and an expansion of the Sure Start program -with the government promising “*2,500 children’s centres by 2008 and 3,500 by 2010.*”¹⁷ Blair’s second term as Prime Minister, however, was marred by a debacle over the invasion of Iraq in 2003, and despite managing to convincingly hold on in the 2005 General Election, he announced his imminent resignation as party

¹⁵ “Budget 1999: The Chancellor’s Speech.” The Independent, Independent Digital News and Media, 10 Mar. 1999, www.independent.co.uk/news/business/budget-1999-the-chancellor-s-speech-the-fairer-britain-is-then-the-more-prosperous-we-will-all-be-1079582.html.

¹⁶ “Explanatory Notes to Tax Credits Act 2002.” Legislation.Gov.Uk, King’s Printer of Acts of Parliament, 2022, www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2002/21/notes/division/5.

¹⁷ Williams, Rachel. “The Evolution of Sure Start: The Challenges and the Successes.” The Guardian, Guardian News and Media, 19 Oct. 2011, www.theguardian.com/society/2011/oct/19/evolution-of-sure-start-success.

leader in 2006 and was succeeded by Gordon Brown in 2007. Brown’s Premiership was marred by the global financial crisis, and he lasted less than 3 years in office, replaced by a Conservative-Liberal Democrat coalition in 2010.

III. The Results of New Labour

Nearly 14 years on from the fall of the long-serving Labour Government in 2010, the ‘New Labour’ era has met mixed reactions from politicians, analysts, and the general public alike.

In terms of pure, hard statistics, it can reasonably be concluded that the period was a success: life expectancy, following small dips in the late 1980s and early 1990s, grew steadily under the 13 years of Labour,¹⁸ while yearly deaths decreased;¹⁹ GDP saw similar annual growth²⁰ in every year up until the global financial crisis in 2008; the United Kingdom’s HDI score rose from 0.770 in 1995 to 0.849 in 2010;²¹ health expenditure per capita nearly doubled, from

¹⁸ “Chapter 1: Population Change and Trends in Life Expectancy.” GOV.UK, 11 Sept. 2018, www.gov.uk/government/publications/health-profile-for-england-2018/chapter-1-population-change-and-trends-in-life-expectancy.

¹⁹ “Chapter 1: Population Change and Trends in Life Expectancy.” GOV.UK, 11 Sept. 2018, www.gov.uk/government/publications/health-profile-for-england-2018/chapter-1-population-change-and-trends-in-life-expectancy.

²⁰ Chu, Ben. “The Story of the UK’s Unprecedented GDP Collapse in Five Charts.” *The Independent*, Independent Digital News and Media, 12 June 2020, www.independent.co.uk/news/business/analysis-and-features/uk-gdp-collapse-charts-unprecedented-history-a9562326.html.

²¹ UNDP (United Nations Development Programme). 2010. Human Development Report 2010: The Real Wealth of Nations: Pathways to Human Development. New York.

\$1,532 in 1998²² to \$2,992 in 2008,²³ as did public education expenditure, increasing from 5.3% in 1997²⁴ to 9.3% from 2006-2009²⁵; both unemployment & long-term unemployment (as a % of total unemployment) dropped, from 6% in total, 34.8% for men and 21.6% for women in 1999²⁶ to 5.3%, 27.5% for men and 14.9% for women in 2006;²⁷ the country's Gini index decreased from 38.8 in 2000 to 33.7 in 2010;²⁸ and 'school life expectancy' - or expected years of schooling - increased from 15.4 in 1998 to 16.5 in 2010.²⁹ Upon his resignation in 2007, Blair remarked "*there is only one Government since 1945 that can say all of the following: more jobs; fewer unemployed; better health and education results; lower crime and economic growth in every quarter. This one.*"³⁰

²² Andrei Andries - Coordinator. 2001. Human Development Report 2001: Making New Technologies Work for Human Development. New York.

²³ UNDP (United Nations Development Programme). 2010. Human Development Report 2010: The Real Wealth of Nations: Pathways to Human Development. New York.

²⁴ Andrei Andries - Coordinator. 2001. Human Development Report 2001: Making New Technologies Work for Human Development. New York.

²⁵ UNDP (United Nations Development Programme). 2010. Human Development Report 2010: The Real Wealth of Nations: Pathways to Human Development. New York.

²⁶ Andrei Andries - Coordinator. 2001. Human Development Report 2001: Making New Technologies Work for Human Development. New York.

²⁷ UNDP (United Nations Development Programme). 2010. Human Development Report 2010: The Real Wealth of Nations: Pathways to Human Development. New York.

²⁸ "Gini Index - United Kingdom." *World Bank Open Data*, data.worldbank.org/indicator/SI.POV.GINI?locations=GB.

²⁹ "Expected Years of Schooling." World Bank Gender Data Portal, genderdata.worldbank.org/indicators/se-sch-life/?gender=total&year=2010.

³⁰ "Blair's Speech: Full Text." The Guardian, Guardian News and Media, 10 May 2007,

In Prime Minister Brown's speech to the Labour Conference the following year, he boasted the "*three million more people in work since 1997 (...) the one million small and medium-sized businesses set up in the last eleven years, (... the) one million people benefiting from New Labour's minimum wage (... and) the 240,000 lives that are saved by the progress Labour's NHS (National Health Service) has made in fighting cancer and heart disease.*"³¹ Indeed, the Labour Party's Shrewsbury chapter has kept on record a list - albeit unsourced - of New Labour's "*top 50 achievements*," including the reduction of "*overall crime by 32 per cent*," "*record levels of literacy and numeracy in schools*," as well as "*600,000 children lifted out of relative poverty.*"³² Throughout his Premiership, Blair was able to maintain a relatively strong approval rating, averaging out at 45% across his tenure, peaking at an annual average of 62.5% in 1997, but had dropped to only 26.7% in 2006,³³ the year he announced he would resign as party leader.

While this data is likely complicated by other matters - fuel shortages in 2000, 9/11 the following year, and the highly controversial invasion of Iraq less than 2 years after that - it can be seen that Blair held a strong public image throughout his time in office. These same caveats apply to

www.theguardian.com/politics/2007/may/10/labourleadership.labout2.

³¹ "Gordon Brown's Speech in Full." *The Guardian*, Guardian News and Media, 23 Sept. 2008, www.theguardian.com/politics/2008/sep/23/gordonbrown.labout1.

³² "Labour Governments' Achievements." Shrewsbury Labour, www.shrewsburylabour.org.uk/labours-top-50-achievements/.

³³ "Political Monitor: Satisfaction Ratings 1997-Present | Ipsos." Ipsos, www.ipsos.com/en-uk/political-monitor-satisfaction-ratings-1997-present.

the Premiership of Gordon Brown, who had to deal with the global financial crisis and the recession that followed, as well as the continuation of the wars in Iraq & Afghanistan. Despite these trials and tribulations, the fact still stands that the Labour Party was able to go undefeated in 4 consecutive general elections - 1997, 2001, 2005, and 2010, the latter of the four resulting in a 'hung parliament'³⁴ - following 18 years of Conservative governments. Through an analysis of the statistics, particularly the steps that Labour was able to make in terms of enhancing economic and social opportunities, it seems clear that the 'New Labour' period was, above all, a development success story, and one that does not get as much credit as it perhaps should have. However, statistics do not always line up with wider public opinion, and that seems to be the case with New Labour, as since they left office nearly 14 years ago there has seemed to be a period of political revisionism within the UK, during which the achievements of Labour from 1997-2010 have been pored over and heavily scrutinised for their long-term impact, or lack thereof.

IV. The Legacy of New Labour

In Blair's aforementioned 2007 resignation speech, he acknowledged that there were "*great expectations not fulfilled in every part, for sure*,"³⁵ a sentiment that seems to

be the consensus among many political commentators and analysts nowadays.

Jacobin, the famous American Socialist magazine proclaimed in 2021 that "*nobody should look to Tony Blair and New Labour as a model for anything*," given that the government "*left Thatcher's economic architecture in place and locked Britain into a free-market nightmare*."³⁶ This view is echoed by British Prospect magazine, which declared the following year that "*New Labour failed on its own terms of building a new Britain*," and that the government's "*method was to top skim the spoils of a financialised economy to invest in nominally social projects*," arguing that "*social security was turned effectively into workfare, as a strivers-versus-scroungers frame was actively embraced*."³⁷ Some critical analyses of the New Labour era are centred around the fact that they did not go far enough, with a report finding that "*the gap between rich and poor remained more or less the same during the Blair years*."³⁸ Another of the main criticisms of New Labour is that - while they had successes during their time in power - they were unable to establish a truly long-term vision of Britain, and that their effective removal from office in 2010 showed their weakness. This view was strongly voiced by

³⁴ "A Hung Parliament: Key Issues for the 2010 Parliament - UK Parliament." UK Parliament, 2010, www.parliament.uk/business/publications/research/key-issues-for-the-new-parliament/the-new-parliament/a-hung-parliament/.

³⁵ "Blair's Speech: Full Text." The Guardian, Guardian News and Media, 10 May 2007, www.theguardian.com/politics/2007/may/10/labourleadership.labout2.

³⁶ Tiratelli, Matteo. "Nobody Should Look to Tony Blair and New Labour as a Model for Anything." *Jacobin*, 11 Aug. 2021, jacobin.com/2021/11/new-labour-tony-blair-party-revolution-narrative.

³⁷ Lawson, Neal. "Twenty-Five Years on, It's Clearer than Ever That New Labour Failed." *Prospect Magazine - Britain's Leading Monthly Current Affairs Magazine*, 28 Apr. 2022, www.prospectmagazine.co.uk/politics/38588/twenty-five-years-on-its-clearer-than-ever-that-new-labour-failed.

³⁸ Wheeler, Brian. "Tony Blair's Legacy 20 Years On." BBC News, BBC, 30 Apr. 2017, www.bbc.com/news/uk-politics-39717751.

Prospect (2022), who lamented the fact that “*New Labour barely outlived Tony Blair, and proved unable to win an election even under his decade-long chancellor, Gordon Brown.*”³⁹ Even Tony Blair himself has supported this argument, declaring in 2011 that when the reins were handed over to Brown, “*we lost the driving rhythm that made us different and successful,*” and that “*it was not a government of continuity from 1997 to 2010 pursuing the same politics. It was 10 plus three.*”⁴⁰ Blair’s legacy as a whole has also been tarnished by post-facto investigations, such as the Chilcot Inquiry into the invasion of Iraq, which found that “*the UK chose to join the invasion before peaceful options had been exhausted*” and that “*Blair deliberately exaggerated the threat posed by Saddam Hussein.*”⁴¹

V. Conclusion on New Labour

Overall, while many of the criticisms of New Labour in the period that followed it are well-founded and logically reasonable, the revisionism that has taken place verges on a step too far. Politics and development are not - at least in many Western countries- about radical, revolutionary change, but rather about taking steps in the right direction,

³⁹ Adonis, Andrew. “What Did New Labour Achieve?” *Prospect Magazine - Britain’s Leading Monthly Current Affairs Magazine*, 4 May 2022, www.prospectmagazine.co.uk/politics/38600/what-did-new-labour-achieve.

⁴⁰ Curtis, Polly. “Tony Blair: New Labour Died When I Handed Over to Gordon Brown.” *The Guardian*, Guardian News and Media, 8 July 2011, www.theguardian.com/politics/2011/jul/08/tony-blair-new-labour-gordon-brown.

⁴¹ Guardian Staff. “Chilcot Report: Key Points from the Iraq Inquiry.” *The Guardian*, Guardian News and Media, 6 July 2016, www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2016/jul/06/iraq-inquiry-key-points-from-the-chilcot-report.

which is what New Labour was able to do in their years in office.

As mentioned earlier, during the years of Blair & Brown: life expectancy rose; GDP saw near-continuous growth; health and public education spending shot up; unemployment dropped, and expected years of schooling went up. In a country as politically volatile as the United Kingdom,⁴² these feats are all to be considered great achievements, as it can be hard to implement lasting, structural change due to the constant threat of replacement, either within one’s party or by the opposition. While it is an undoubted fact that Labour could - and perhaps should - have utilised their power more effectively, working to implement gradual change to the system itself, rather than purely working in their constraints, they were still able to accomplish a great deal in the years from 1997 to 2010, despite some significant roadblocks along the way.

5.1 Where the Tories - and Liberal Democrats - Went Wrong

On April 6th, 2010, Prime Minister Gordon Brown - facing the 5-year Parliamentary limit⁴³ - met with Queen Elizabeth II to request permission for the dissolution of Parliament, with a General Election to be held a month later. Two weeks later, the first of 3 debates was held

⁴² “British Electorate ‘Most Volatile in Modern Times’, New Study Finds.” *University of Manchester*, 8 Oct. 2019, www.manchester.ac.uk/discover/news/british-electorate-most-volatile/.

⁴³ “General Elections.” UK Parliament, UK Government, 2024, www.parliament.uk/about/how/elections-and-voting/general/. Accessed 3 Nov. 2024.

between Brown, David Cameron, then-leader of the Conservative Party, and Nick Clegg, then-leader of the Liberal Democrats. Post-debate polls put the Conservatives on top with 33%, the Liberal Democrats in a close second with 30%, and Labour just behind in third with 28%. These results, however, would likely have still left Labour with the most Parliamentary seats, due to the UK's first-past-the-post voting system,⁴⁴ which means that parties can win an outsized share of seats relative to their total vote percentage.⁴⁵ Just 8 days before the General Election, though, Brown's relatively strong campaign took a turn for the worse - following a mild confrontation regarding immigration with a constituent in Rochdale, Brown was caught on a hot mic calling her a "*bigoted woman*," adding "*that was a disaster - they should never have put me with that woman. Whose idea was that? Ridiculous.*"⁴⁶ These comments, made to a constituent who was a Labour supporter, and was already planning to vote for Brown the following week⁴⁷ plunged the campaign into turmoil, and made their electoral position largely untenable from there on out. In the end, the Conservative Party won 307 seats, a colossal gain of +97 but still 19 short

of the necessary majority, the Labour Party won 258, a catastrophic 91-seat decrease, and the Liberal Democrats won 57, a slight swing of -5. The Conservative Party's lack of an outright mandate resulted in a hung parliament,⁴⁸ meaning that they alone could not govern the country.

The Cameron-Clegg Coalition

Following Brown's official resignation on May 11th, the Conservative Party - hereinafter referred to as 'the Tories' - negotiated with the Liberal Democrats to form a coalition government,⁴⁹ which became known as the 'Cameron-Clegg coalition.' With a combined total of 364 seats, the coalition had more than enough required for a majority, and thus began the Tories' reign in power, which would go on to last for over 14 years. In this power-sharing agreement, David Cameron served as Prime Minister, with Nick Clegg working as his Deputy. At the start of the coalition, an overwhelming majority - 17 out of 20⁵⁰ - were members of the Conservative Party, with the Liberal Democrat exceptions being Vince Cable, Secretary of State for Business, Chris Huhne, Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change, and Danny Alexander, who served as Secretary of State for Scotland. On the back of over 13 years of Labour government which was marked by a revival

⁴⁴ "First Past the Post." Electoral Reform Society, 2024, www.electoral-reform.org.uk/voting-systems/types-of-voting-system/first-past-the-post/. Accessed 3 Nov. 2024.

⁴⁵ In the most recent 2024 General Election, for example, the Labour Party won 63% of Parliamentary Seats with just 33% of the total votes.

⁴⁶ "Gordon Brown calls Labour supporter a 'bigoted woman.'" YouTube, 28 Apr. 2010, youtu.be/yEReCN9gO14?feature=shared. Accessed 3 Nov. 2024.

⁴⁷ Curtis, Polly. "Gordon Brown calls Labour supporter a 'bigoted woman.'" The Guardian, 28 Apr. 2010, www.theguardian.com/politics/2010/apr/28/gordon-brown-bigoted-woman. Accessed 3 Nov. 2024.

⁴⁸ "Hung Parliament." UK Parliament, UK Government, 2024, www.parliament.uk/about/how/elections-and-voting/general/hung-parliament/. Accessed 4 Nov. 2024.

⁴⁹ "Coalition Government." UK Parliament, UK Government, 2024, www.parliament.uk/site-information/glossary/coalition-government/. Accessed 4 Nov. 2024.

⁵⁰ "Ministers in the 2010-15 Coalition Government." UK Parliament - House of Commons Library, 15 Oct. 2015, commonslibrary.parliament.uk/research-briefings/sn06544/. Accessed 3 Nov. 2024.

of social programs and increased spending, both the Tories and the Liberal Democrats had campaigned on cuts to both the budget and taxes - some of the centrepieces of the 2010 Conservative 'manifesto' were an "(e)mergency budget within 50 days of election to include immediate £6bn cut in wasteful spending," a "scrapping of planned increase in national insurance for employers and workers earnings less than £35,000," and a "freeze (on) council tax for two years."⁵¹

On the Liberal Democrat side, they had run on promises of making "the first £10,000 people earn (...) tax-free," a pledge "to free 3.6 million low earners and pensioners from income tax," and "cut(ting) the deficit with £15bn of savings in government spending."⁵² On June 22nd, 2010 - 47 days after the electoral victory - George Osborne, Chancellor of the Exchequer delivered the June 2010 'emergency' budget, declaring it as one that would support a "strong enterprise-led recovery," and one that had "laid the foundations for a more prosperous future."⁵³ He gave a scathing criticism of the previous Labour government, arguing that "the coalition Government has inherited from its predecessor the largest budget deficit of any economy in Europe with the single exception of Ireland," and that "one

pound in every four we spend is being borrowed."⁵⁴ While Osborne stopped far short of labelling it an austerity budget, he did describe it as "unavoidable,"⁵⁵ conceding that it contained some undoubtedly less-than-popular measures, but ones that were necessary to get the country back on track.

Less than 3 years into the coalition, an announcement was made that would fundamentally alter the course of British politics for good - on January 23rd, 2013, David Cameron delivered the now-infamous 'Bloomberg Speech', in which he proclaimed his support⁵⁶ for an in-out referendum on the United Kingdom's status as an EU Member State, which he promised to deliver should the Conservative Party triumph in the next General Election, which at that point was tentatively scheduled for 2015. The Tories did indeed triumph in this election, picking up 24 seats for a total of 330, breaking them free from the shackles of coalition governance, meaning that they had an outright mandate. In the European Union - or 'Brexit' - referendum, which took place exactly 41 months after Cameron's 'Bloomberg Speech', the British populace narrowly voted to leave the bloc, with 51.9% voting in

⁵¹ "The Conservative manifesto at a glance." The Guardian, 13 Apr. 2010, www.theguardian.com/politics/2010/apr/13/conservative-manifesto-at-a-glance. Accessed 4 Nov. 2024.

⁵² "General Election 2010: Liberal Democrat manifesto at a glance." The Guardian, 13 Apr. 2010, www.theguardian.com/politics/2010/apr/14/liberal-democrat-manifesto-at-a-glance. Accessed 3 Nov. 2024.

⁵³ Onanuga, Tola. "Emergency budget: George Osborne's speech in full." The Guardian, 22 June 2010, www.theguardian.com/uk/2010/jun/22/emergency-budget-full-speech-text. Accessed 3 Nov. 2024.

⁵⁴ Onanuga, Tola. "Emergency budget: George Osborne's speech in full." The Guardian, 22 June 2010, www.theguardian.com/uk/2010/jun/22/emergency-budget-full-speech-text. Accessed 3 Nov. 2024.

⁵⁵ Elliott, Larry, and Patrick Wintour. "Budget 2010: Pain now, more pain later in austerity plan." The Guardian, 22 June 2010, www.theguardian.com/uk/2010/jun/22/budget-2010-vat-austerity-plan. Accessed 4 Nov. 2024.

⁵⁶ "EU speech at Bloomberg." GOV.UK, 23 Jan. 2013, www.gov.uk/government/speeches/eu-speech-at-bloomberg. Accessed 4 Nov. 2024.

favour, and 48.1% voting against.⁵⁷ The formal secession process that followed was incredibly long and drawn out, and it was not until January 31st, 2020 that the UK had officially withdrawn from the European Union. At that time, as Brexit was firmly in the country's rear-view mirror, another major problem came to the fore, namely the COVID-19 pandemic.

Late-Stage Tories

On March 23rd, 2020, then-Prime Minister Boris Johnson declared a state of emergency and the start of a national lockdown, which continued on-and-off until summer of the following year. The illness and death caused by the pandemic, as well as the lockdowns imposed to stop it unsurprisingly caused economic downturns not just in the United Kingdom, but across the globe. GDP fell by nearly 20% across the first 3 months of the pandemic when the country's economy slammed to a halt, and while it rebounded throughout the summer of 2020, the economic consequences were felt for years to come.

At the back end of the Covid pandemic, it was revealed that then-Prime Minister Boris Johnson had been holding parties⁵⁸ during the pandemic in violation of his own lockdown rules, two of which took place on the eve of the

funeral⁵⁹ of Prince Philip, Queen Elizabeth II's husband. Largely due to this scandal, Johnson announced his resignation as Prime Minister in July 2022, and was replaced by Liz Truss two months later.

Truss' short-lived time in power was marked by the death of Queen Elizabeth II on just the second day of her Premiership, with things arguably only getting worse from there. A few weeks later, Truss, along with her Chancellor Kwasi Kwarteng, unveiled their 'mini-budget', which included, among other measures, £45 billion in unfunded tax-cuts.⁶⁰ The proposal promptly tanked the British economy - within days, the British Pound had plummeted to a record low against the U.S Dollar,⁶¹ while also spiking the cost of long-term borrowing.⁶² On October 14th 2022, Kwarteng, facing significant backlash against a failed budget, was fired and replaced by Jeremy Hunt - less than a week later, Truss resigned, making her the shortest-serving Prime Minister in modern British history, her reign lasting only 50 days.

She was replaced by Rishi Sunak, who was able to steady the ship to a certain extent, but was all the while staring

⁵⁷ "EU Referendum Results." BBC News, 24 June 2016, www.bbc.co.uk/news/politics/eu_referendum/results. Accessed 4 Nov. 2024.

⁵⁸ "A timeline of the Partygate scandal." The Week, 15 June 2023, theweek.com/news/politics/955416/timeline-downing-street-lockdown-party-scandal. Accessed 4 Nov. 2024.

⁵⁹ Walker, Peter, and Harry Taylor. "Two Downing Street parties held evening before Prince Philip's funeral - reports." The Guardian, 14 Jan. 2022, www.theguardian.com/politics/2022/jan/13/two-downing-street-parties-held-evening-before-prince-philips-funeral-reports. Accessed 4 Nov. 2024.

⁶⁰ Islam, Faisal. "The inside story of the mini-budget disaster." BBC News, 25 Sept. 2023, www.bbc.com/news/business-66897881. Accessed 4 Nov. 2024.

⁶¹ Edgington, Tom. "The pound: Why is it falling?" BBC News, 26 Sept. 2022, www.bbc.com/news/business-49179234. Accessed 4 Nov. 2024.

⁶² "How much market chaos did the mini-budget cause?" BBC News, 17 Oct. 2022, www.bbc.com/news/63229204. Accessed 4 Nov. 2024.

down the barrel of the 5-year Parliamentary Limit, much like Gordon Brown in 2010. On May 22nd, 2024, in the driving rain outside 10 Downing Street, a sopping wet Rishi Sunak declared that the 2024 General Election would take place on July 4th, thus beginning the official campaign.

5.2 Labour's Reclamation of Power and Lessons to Take

In the pursuant General Election, the expectations of a Labour walkover indeed came to fruition, with the party picking up 211 parliamentary seats for a total of 411, while the Liberal Democrats also saw unprecedented gains, surging 64 seats for a total of 72. Prominent Conservative figures such as longtime MP Jacob Rees-Mogg, then-Defence Secretary Grant Shapps, and even the aforementioned Liz Truss lost their seats, marking a truly catastrophic night for the Tories.

While it would not be unreasonable to attribute Labour's landslide largely to the sweeping unpopularity of the Tories - Rishi Sunak's favourability stood at a meagre 21%⁶³ the month before the election - the sweeping success can also be attributed in part to a solid Labour platform and the support that they were able to garner through it. Their sprawling, 136-page manifesto published in the weeks leading up to the election covered almost all policy bases, with a platform sufficiently moderate to attract those who had become disaffected with the Tories in the

4-and-a-half years since the previous General Election, particularly throughout COVID and the ensuing mess that took place. Labour's manifesto was centred around "*five national missions to (...) end the chaos, turn the page and meet the long-term challenges the country faces,*" which included "*kickstart(ing) economic growth,*" "*mak(ing) Britain a clean energy superpower,*" and "*break(ing) down barriers to opportunity.*"⁶⁴ Among the specific policy proposals were £23.7 in Green measures, the assurance of 40,000 new NHS operations and appointments, as well as a new Border and Security Command force, aimed at tackling illegal migration, one of the biggest campaign issues.

While Sir Keir Starmer himself was not the most popular figure individually - his favorability stood at only 34%⁶⁵ the day after the election was called - many within the British electorate saw him as a suitable alternative to the Tories, and after nearly a decade and a half of rule by the Conservative Party, it would not be unfair to suggest that some were simply looking for an alternative in whatever form it came. This widespread dissatisfaction of the Tories is highly visible in the split from the traditional Labour-Conservative dichotomy, represented by surges in the Liberal Democrats, as well as Reform UK, led by the infamous Nigel Farage. While the Liberal Democrats were able to run on their traditional platform of sensible

⁶³ Smith, Matthew. "General election 2024: Rishi Sunak's 'unfavourable' rating at highest ever." YouGov, 13 June 2024, yougov.co.uk/politics/articles/49733-general-election-2024-rishi-sunaks-unfavourable-rating-at-highest-ever. Accessed 4 Nov. 2024.

⁶⁴ "My plan for change." The Labour Party, 13 June 2024, labour.org.uk/change/. Accessed 4 Nov. 2024.

⁶⁵ Smith, Matthew. "General election 2024: Rishi Sunak's 'unfavourable' rating at highest ever." YouGov, 13 June 2024, yougov.co.uk/politics/articles/49733-general-election-2024-rishi-sunaks-unfavourable-rating-at-highest-ever. Accessed 4 Nov. 2024.

governance and a break from the aforementioned two-party split, Reform UK took a far more radical, hardline approach, railing against multiculturalism and “divisive ‘woke’ ideology,” pledging to “freeze immigration and stop the boats,” and “restore law and order.”⁶⁶ The strategy, however controversial, was only a slight success in the end - while Reform UK picked up 14.3% of the aggregate votes, nearly 1 in 6 - they were only able to translate this into 5 parliamentary seats, far less than they would have been expecting or hoping for. Nevertheless, their newfound place in the British political paradigm will be closely watched in the years to come, particularly should the Tories continue on the downward spiral that has been occurring in recent years.

The Starmer Administration

Since taking power on July 5th, Sir Keir Starmer and the Labour Party have imposed a number of sensible and practical measures in the spirit of policies outlined in their manifesto, despite simultaneously grappling with in-fighting⁶⁷ and scandals.⁶⁸ These measures have included the announcement of a plan to build 1.5 million affordable

homes⁶⁹ over the next 5 years, the introduction of a rail nationalisation bill⁷⁰ that would bring control of the country’s rail networks back to the government, the oversight of the closure of the country’s last remaining coal power plant,⁷¹ and the presentation of a workers’ rights bill⁷² that would protect employees against unjust dismissals and exploitative contracts. While a relatively young Labour administration spearheaded by Sir Keir Starmer has been able to accomplish a good deal by modern standards in their time thus far, it remains clear that there is work yet to be done.

After over 4 months in power, many promises within Labour’s campaign manifesto remain neglected, and many of the party’s wins as of recent have been more symbolic than material. However, as referenced by Chancellor Rachel Reeves’ introduction of the Autumn Budget - which included tax hikes of £40 billion to fund the NHS and other public services⁷³ - Labour is committed to

⁶⁶ “Reform UK Manifesto.” Reform UK, June 2024, www.reformparty.uk/policies. Accessed 4 Nov. 2024.

⁶⁷ Walker, Peter. “Up to 50 Labour MPs could rebel over cut to winter fuel allowance.” *The Guardian*, 8 Sept. 2024, www.theguardian.com/politics/article/2024/sep/08/up-to-50-labour-mps-could-rebel-over-cut-to-winter-fuel-allowance. Accessed 4 Nov. 2024.

⁶⁸ Cornock, David, and Joshua Nevett. “Keir Starmer received more clothes worth £16,000.” *BBC News*, 27 Sept. 2024, www.bbc.com/news/articles/cdd4z9vzdnno. Accessed 4 Nov. 2024.

⁶⁹ Labiak, Mitchell. “Labour’s plan to build 1.5m homes – can it be delivered?” *BBC News*, 26 Sept. 2024, www.bbc.com/news/articles/cvgw7x4y5rzo. Accessed 4 Nov. 2024.

⁷⁰ Pickard, Jim, et al. “Labour to begin rail nationalisations within months.” *Financial Times*, 18 July 2024, www.ft.com/content/368283c4-37fb-46af-96f6-4d6b5ea711bf. Accessed 4 Nov. 2024.

⁷¹ Poynting, Mark, and Esme Stallard. “UK to finish with coal power after 142 years.” *BBC News*, 30 Sept. 2024, www.bbc.com/news/articles/c5y35qz73n8o. Accessed 4 Nov. 2024.

⁷² Elgot, Jessica. “New enforcement agency will protect workers’ rights as part of ‘watershed’ bill.” *The Guardian*, 10 Oct. 2024, www.theguardian.com/politics/2024/oct/10/new-enforcement-agency-will-protect-workers-rights-as-part-of-watershed-bill. Accessed 4 Nov. 2024.

⁷³ Seddon, Paul. “Budget 2024: Key points at a glance.” *BBC News*, 30 Oct. 2024, www.bbc.com/news/articles/cdxl1zd0711o. Accessed 4 Nov. 2024.

delivering on its goals, and will relish the upcoming 4-and-a-half years that they are near-guaranteed to be in power for.

5.3 Starmer's (Next) Steps

Starmer, to his credit, has already taken bold steps in an attempt to revitalize the British economy, and help the United Kingdom recover from the threat of a second 'lost decade,' fears of which⁷⁴ were prompted by Tory austerity and consistent declines in standards of living under Conservative rule. As highlighted by the aforementioned Autumn Budget, the Labour government is committed to their promises of increases in public spending - to the tune of "an average of £69.5bn, or 2.2% of GDP, a year from 2025/26"⁷⁵ - which are to be funded by hikes of capital gains tax and levies on businesses. The budget also included significant pledges towards transport - with the government promising to expand high-speed rail, particularly in the north of England - and housing, with a £500m boost to the current affordable housing budget.

The budget, however, did not come without criticism, particularly regarding Labour's plan to reduce the exemption on tax when inheriting farmland, which will result in inheritors of large farms having to pay more than they currently do, potentially increasing the burden on

struggling family-owned farms. This proposal drew harsh and intense fightback, with thousands of the nation's farmers gathering en masse in London to protest the measure.⁷⁶ Just recently, Starmer introduced his government's 'Plan for Change', aimed at guiding the UK towards a 'decade of national renewal.' The five tenets of this plan echoed back to Labour's election manifesto, with the pledges reading: "Kickstart Economic Growth;" "Build an NHS Fit for the Future;" "Safer Streets;" "Break Down the Barriers to Opportunity;" and "Make Britain a Clean Energy Superpower."⁷⁷ In a nearly hour-long speech announcing the plan, Starmer laid out his 6 key points that his government intends to have completed by the next general election, which will likely be in 2029. These proposals were: "putting more money in the pockets of working people," "building 1.5m homes and fast-tracking planning decisions on at least 150 major infrastructure projects," "treating 92 percent of NHS patients within 18 weeks," "recruiting 13,000 more police officers, special constables and PCSOs (Police Community Support Officers) in neighbourhood roles," "making sure three-quarters of five year olds are school-ready," and achieving "95% clean power by 2030."⁷⁸

⁷⁴ Partington, Richard, et al. "Budget plans risk 'second lost decade' of living standards, Jeremy Hunt told." *The Guardian*, 4 Mar. 2024, www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2024/mar/04/budget-plans-risk-second-lost-decade-of-living-standards-jeremy-hunt-told.

⁷⁵ Beck, Martin. "Autumn budget 2024: Key announcements and analysis." UK Parliament - House of Lords Library, 5 Nov. 2024, lordslibrary.parliament.uk/autumn-budget-2024-key-announcements-and-analysis.

⁷⁶ Kumah, Jenny, et al. "Thousands of farmers protest against inheritance tax changes." *BBC News*, 19 Nov. 2024, www.bbc.com/news/articles/czj71zyy934o.

⁷⁷ "PM speech on Plan for Change: 5 December 2024." *GOV.UK*, 5 Dec. 2024, www.gov.uk/government/speeches/pm-speech-on-plan-for-change-5-december-2024.

⁷⁸ Bentley, Oscar, and Chas Geiger. "Six takeaways from Keir Starmer's 'plan for change.'" *BBC News*, 5 Dec. 2024, www.bbc.com/news/articles/cn9gxvppxqpo.

Starmer himself has acknowledged that these proposals are “*ambitious,*” describing the plan to build 1.5 new homes as “*a little too ambitious, perhaps*”, but argued the case that bold ideas and actions are going to be what gets the UK back on track, paraphrasing former U.S President John F. Kennedy and saying that “*you choose change, not because it’s easy... but because it’s hard.*”⁷⁹ While these intrepid steps are highly encouraging, Starmer’s job is far from over.

There are no official ‘term limits’ on the British Premiership, meaning if all goes to plan, Starmer - currently 62 years old - will remain in office until Labour loses a general election which, given the ongoing fracture of the right between the Conservative Party and Reform UK, may not be for a while, and likely beyond 2029, when the next general election is expected to take place. Labour’s ‘mandate’ from the 2024 General Election was a large one, giving them confidence that should propel them through these next few years in power, taking steps even bolder than those that have already been taken, and revitalizing the United Kingdom into the powerhouse that it once was.

VI. Conclusion

Overall, it can be seen that while the United Kingdom was able to pursue a robust strategy of both growth and development during Tony Blair & Gordon Brown’s ‘New Labour’ era, the conjunction of both these principles went awry during the reign of the Conservative Party from 2010

until 2024, largely exacerbated by major events such as Brexit and the Covid-19 pandemic, which were hallmarked by Tory blunders and mismanagement.

Upon Labour’s return to power, this time under the leadership of Sir Keir Starmer, it is clear that the party has a road map, and that they will do their utmost to execute, in the process, potentially forming an age of “New New Labour.” While Starmer and his government - through the Autumn Budget and the ‘Plan for Change’ - have already come out strong and on the front foot, it remains clear that there is tremendous work to be done, which will require the full dedication of the Labour government, along with unflinching commitment to their newly re-embraced principles of strong public spending and a dedication to the improving of living standards for all.

⁷⁹ “PM speech on Plan for Change: 5 December 2024.” GOV.UK, 5 Dec. 2024, www.gov.uk/government/speeches/pm-speech-on-plan-for-change-5-decembe-2024.

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