

To what extent has the Labour Party today abandoned its 'core values'?

Introduction

The rise of New Labour has been fraught with controversy, with regards to extensive policy change as well as ideological change. It is certain that Labour has shifted; hence this is not in question. What is in question however is how much Labour has changed and how far Labour has shifted, from its core Socialist roots. To answer this, one must initially take into account electability.

During Labour's extensive time in the political wilderness, when Thatcher reigned supreme, a new group of reformers began to emerge within the Labour Party. They realised that in order to gain electoral support, they would have to leave the core socialistic values of 'old' Labour behind. This is because left-wing ideals at this time were hugely unpopular with the electorate. To achieve this electability, New Labour was less dogmatic than the old, socialist core of the Party. Many policies were toned down, especially economic ones. This general shift to the centre ground gained voters back, who had previously been Labour, but had voted Conservative recently. These reformers, were not against socialism however and previously, many were socialists, yet they saw the need for electability, rather than ideology.

However, the account above is merely a brief outline, and hence, one must look specifically at major policy change. It would be long-winded, and fruitless however, to detail every single policy difference between the two factions. Hence, it is apt to look at two major policy groups, which have come under much change: Economic Policies and International Relations.

Changes in Economic Policies

New Labour was a lot less socialistic when it came to economic policy. In fact, New Labour adopted a Keynesian approach to the economy, much like the New Right. The Third Way (another name for the policies/ideology of New Labour) has been enthusiastic when it comes to capitalism. The remaining shards of socialism however, can be seen within New Labour slightly – for they are not afraid to intervene in the economy, should the economy face crisis. Put simply, under 'old Labour' capitalism was controlled by the state, whereas with New Labour, capitalism is allowed to flourish.

This economic view is similar to the differences with regards to economic management. Put frankly, typical socialists believe that the state should interfere in the economy extensively, to maintain its health. However, New Labour is similar to the New Right, as New Labour believes that state interference should be negligible.

However, New Labour – in contrast to the New Right – does condone public sector borrowing – if used to improve public services.

▲part from direct economic policy, New Labour's view on trade unions is also much changed from those of 'old Labour'. In typical socialist fashion, 'old Labour' supported trade unions, and allowed them almost infinite power. However, New Labour, much like Thatcherism, believes that the role of trade unions should be minimised. New Labour, unlike Thatcherism however, believes that there is a place for trade unions. Hence, New Labour has taken the middle ground – to the left of the New Right and to the right of Socialist policy.

Changes in International Relations

Traditional, 'old' Labour ideology has always been suspicious of the wider world. Therefore, their policies reflect this. With regards to foreign affairs, 'old' Labour supported British isolationism from international affairs. Of course, this won Britain few allies in the international arena. New Labour realised this, and so, under New Labour, Britain is to take a leading role in world affairs. ▲n ethical foreign policy is designed to help poor countries and help defend human rights. This policy change is monumental, for Labour has gone from being staunchly isolationist, to avidly internationalist in just over a decade (late 1980s 'old Labour' were running the show, whilst by the dawn of the millennium, New Labour held the reins).

This shift in outlook can be best reflected in attitudes towards the European Union. Traditional socialists are anti-European on the whole, and under a socialistic Labour government, Britain would probably relinquish its membership to the EU. The purpose of this, would be the fact that Britain would be free to protect domestic industries from foreign competition. New Labour however, with their internationalist avocations, could not afford to be anti-EU. Therefore, New Labour were quick to place Britain at the centre of the EU, whilst retaining sovereignty. New Labour even went as far as proclaiming their 'cautious' support for a single European currency.

Linking both Economic policy and International relations, 'old' Labour has always been very supportive of domestic industries, as mentioned above. However, New Labour has changed hugely in this respect, for New Labour (particularly under Blair) has proposed that the United Kingdom should be a major international player. Hence, it would be detrimental to relations if Great Britain was protectionist (with regards to industry) and if the country was imposing tariffs on foreign goods. ▲fter all, money is what makes the world go round, and so New Labour has been much more progressive in this respect, hence linking pro-Internationalist economic policies with enthusiasm for world organisations, New Labour have played a major part in Britain's involvement on the international stage.

Conclusion

Ultimately, New Labour has shed socialist ideology, in order to do better at the polls. Therefore, citing the differences above, one can easily see that New Labour is no longer socialist. One can say with concrete evidence, then, that New Labour has abandoned, its 'core' values, i.e. socialism almost fully. The shift from socialism to New Labour within the Labour Party is almost akin to the contemporary shift within the Conservative Party: the shift from the New Right to the Social Conservatives.

Quite simply, New Labour has left their 'core' values far behind, yet it would be wrong to suggest that the Labour Party is no longer a socialist party – for there are still many socialists within the Party. It is merely the whim of the leaders which have changed – albeit dramatically.