

What the Labour Party needs to do to win in 2015

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When I read my email brief the other week I have to admit my eyes did roll slightly:

"Clive, I'd like you to tell us in no more than 15 minutes what the Labour Party needs to do to win in 2015."

No pressure there then. But the reality is I've been asked here today to give my opinions. Clearly no one has a monopoly on wisdom. But it doesn't take too much wisdom to follow your own moral compass when it comes to advocating the kind of politics and policies you want to see your party pursue and ultimately win with.

Now I understand, politics isn't quite as simple as that...politics is after all the art of compromise. In many ways New Labour was the embodiment of compromise. Shedding clause IV, distancing ourselves from the trade unions, embracing big business, adopting the ideology of deregulation and the hegemony of markets.

Now those on the right of the party will claim that compromise won us three unprecedented terms of governance...where the New Labour project was able to make sweeping changes to public services and society at large.

The list of achievements is certainly impressive: Sure Start, The Future Jobs Fund, the Building Schools for the Future programme (even if it was funny money) as well as increasing foreign aid and NHS spending. Impressive yes, but legacy no.

The NHS was a legacy...millions of council homes were a legacy.... The Open University was a legacy. A legacy is something that is durable. New Labour's achievements, I'm afraid to say, were not.

In less than two and half years of Tory lead coalition many of those achievements have either been left in tatters or worse still used as a bridge-head for the Tories to rampage through what's left of our public services...the Health and Social Care Act a case in point.

So yes politics is about compromise.

But surely the lesson of the last 15 years is that the line between compromise and capitulation is a fine one. And I'm afraid New Labour crossed it, in my opinion. So that's the context, what about the present? Where has that Faustian pact with neo-liberalism left us?

Well...the unfettered dominance of the market and big business. Individuals little more than consumers, competing with one another for a share of dwindling resources in a global market place where regulation or meaningful co-operation is considered futile. Instead of facing risk collectively as we used to, now we face it as individuals on a turbulent sea of market economics.

It's an ethos that has also been replicated on the international stage.

With nation state vs nation state, each staking claims for a dwindling supply of planetary resources ...resources that are being used up at an ever-increasing rate for nothing more than consumptions sake.

In such a world is it any wonder that people actually buy into the creed that we need the threat of thermo-nuclear weapons to ensure our share of the planets resources - protecting our so called 'national interest'?

Because that is where this philosophy is increasingly taking us. So you'll forgive if I believe we have to approach the next election with a slightly amended plan as regards the kind of politics and policies we need for 2015 and beyond.

Clearly the biggest single election issue at the next election will be the economy. Many in the party are worried about this because according to most polling samples "Labour is still not trusted on the economy".

But the question asked is a loaded one. Implicit in it is the assumption that the economy in question is the same failed, deregulated model the Coalition are still trying to breathe life into. The question should actually be "what kind of economy would you like to see?" Answer that and then you can answer "who would be the best party to run that kind of economy."

Because believe you me, the vast majority of people in this country are ahead of the curve and the politicians when it comes to their hostility to this brand of free market economics.

Especially after the last 5 years of turmoil. Ask "who would run a fairer, more balanced economy and the answer would overwhelmingly be Labour."

But when you look at the party's approach to the economy I'm not sure whether we've quite grasped that fact yet. Ultimately New Labour and now the coalition were found tinkering with the engine of a car that was actually hurtling off of a cliff. The smart money is to leave Cameron and Clegg fighting over who controls the steering wheel, deploy the parachutes and get the hell out of Dodge.

It's so frustrating because time after time Ed Balls and the treasury front bench team have been proven right with their Keynesian centre-left approach to the economy. That being that you borrow to invest and you invest to grow. Austerity - as a policy - by any measure - has utterly failed.

But the front bench will only say 'we've cut too far and too deep' ie that in the short run you borrow to invest but in the long run you still need to cut, still need austerity. This is a profoundly weak argument, is bad economics and it's behind the curve of the public mood when it comes to the economy.

It's clear the public is sick of smoke and mirrors, of doublespeak, of politicians not saying what they mean.

Unfortunately it's this same political paralysis -that same ability to look at the arguments, the facts, the reality and still not be able to state the obvious - that could yet see the party sleep walk into Trident renewal.

That's why I'm here today. Because Labour and the SNP are instrumental in ensuring that doesn't happen. Instrumental in ensuring that our party and the public will get to hear the arguments that overwhelmingly make the case for non-renewal of Trident.

Because we know the moral, economic, military and strategic case for non-renewal is overwhelming. Because you've spent most of the day discussing these very issues, I won't go into all of them here.

But I will touch on a key argument I feel makes an overwhelming case for nuclear disarmament. It's a matter of principle.

And that is we have no right to intimidate other countries into not possessing nuclear weapons when we have them on such a large scale ourselves. It's this hypocrisy, that undermines the entire nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty.

It's morally unjustifiable, it demeans our international standing and it prevents us from ever taking the lead on reversing the spread of nuclear weapons.

That escalating spread is in my opinion, the single biggest danger modern civilisation faces. Research in 2006 demonstrated that even a limited exchange of nuclear weapons anywhere in the world could have catastrophic effects on global climate.

But it doesn't have to be this way. There are alternatives and it should be the Labour Party offering them.

Whether the economy, public services, trade union rights or nuclear disarmament - the Party has to start with a core belief and act on it if it's to ever win the country over.

We were once a party of internationalists. We should be again. Because a party based on internationalism doesn't need to use narrow, selfish language such as 'national self-interest. As internationalists we believe in what is good for the world not just Britain.

That's how you punch above your weight.

That's how you pedal international influence.

That's how you win in 2015.