



The Labour Governments 1945-1951 - What economic and social policies were pursued and how were they put into action?

Claire Darquenne

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Seminar paper from the year 2006 in the subject English Language and Literature Studies - Culture and Applied Geography, grade: 1,0, University of Passau, course: Proseminar "Democracy in Britain", 22 entries in the bibliography, language: English, abstract: The Labour Party is a Socialist Party, and proud of it. Its ultimate purpose at home is the establishment of the Socialist Commonwealth of Great Britain - free, democratic, efficient, progressive, publicspirited, its material resources organised in the service of the British people. (The Labour Party electoral manifesto 1945, quoted in Adelman 1986: 124) These were the words of the 1945 Labour Party election manifesto Let us Face the Future. Consequently, in the ensuing five years, everyone felt caught up in a great national experiment, the creation of a new social democratic society (cf. Webb 1989). This experiment included an extensive programme of nationalization, planning, and the establishment of the welfare state. After the landslide victory of 1945, Clement Attlee's government wasted no time in launching a series of major policy initiatives. All of this left a profound mark on modern Britain by creating a new order (cf. Jefferys 1993: 8), an order that meant full employment, a freely accessible health service and a system of social security which improved the quality of life of the bulk of the population. At the same time, though, it was criticized. Left-wing critics attacked the government for introducing too little socialism whereas the political right claimed that the government introduced too much rather than too little socialism with its reforms. Yet in assessing Labour's policies, however, account must be taken not only of abstract principles, but also of what was possible in the circumstances (cf. Peden 1985: 153). It is the aim of this paper, therefore, to analyse the main economic and social policies of the British post-war period in order to shed light on achievements and failures of the first Labour majority government. Was the Prime Minister right to describe his record as constituting a `revolution without tears`, or was this a lost opportunity for a more fundamental transformation of British society? (cf. Jefferys 1993: 3) This will be discussed in the conclusion. But before arriving there it is first necessary to look at the history of the British Labour Party in order to get an idea of its character and ideology which highly influenced its post-war measures. Secondly, the circumstances mentioned above have to be taken into consideration by looking at the economic and social situation in Britain after the war. [...]

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