

pening and what has gone wrong. First, they acknowledge Labour will win the next election, but in a similar way to the Conservatives' ambiguous success in 1992: "The electorate may soon resent us and our fall in the next crisis could be sweeping. Unlike the Thatcherites we won't have transformed the political, economic and social landscape - despite the benefit of huge majorities, a pathetically weak opposition and a strong economy".

They argue that Blair has succeeded in marginalizing the Conservatives, but only by moving to the right and taking up much of their terrain: "Sure we have power, but are denied the means to do anything purposeful with it".

The authors are the latest in a growing group that have made the cathartic leap. Instead of deploying vacuous euphemisms such as the "radical centre" and the "third way" they place Blair on the right of the political spectrum, warning that social democracy cannot take root in the shadow cast by neo-liberalism. Rightly they see through the false dividing line promoted in Downing Street between consolidators (Brownites) versus reformers (Blairites), dismissing Blair's agenda as a "bogus radicalism". recently Lawson told me that they had finally given up fooling themselves that Blair was capable of being a radical Prime Minister. They could write no more editorials along the lines of "Come on Tony, the time has come..." They know the time will not come.

But they are also fairly critical of Brown. While recognizing that most of the social democratic successes of the government are down to the Chancellor, they are wary of his Euro-skepticism and question whether he has the will to shift the gravity to the left in Britain. Even so, they acknowledge that he has the potential to be a radical prime minister, a swing of sorts in the direction of Brown from previous devotees of Blair.

The authors of this editorial do not represent a vast pressure group. Their publication is not

bewildered party led by Michael Howard. They include the familiar group of Labour MPs on the left, the followers of Gordon Brown, some trade union leaders and the disillusioned Blairites.

There are no attempts to coordinate an insurrection and no overt leadership of the rebellious factions. All that can be said is that they are there, growing more frustrated and alarmed, ready to act when their ill-defined moment comes.

The looming general election largely explains their current paralysis. On one level it is an extraordinary position: "The leader should go and we plan to do nothing about it". But the prospect of an election tends to deaden political thought and activity. Loyalty to a leader becomes paramount. Just before the summer break I had a conversation with a Cabinet minister who I assumed would be an unequivocal Blair supporter. He said, "The election saves him."

Otherwise he would be in a lot of difficulty. No one would forgive anyone rocking the boat now". That is the dilemma for those who have come to recognize the limitations of a Blair leadership. They know that if he wants to carry on there is not a lot they can do about it.

Even so, these dissenting voices are an important corrective to the glowing assessments before Blair departed for his holidays. Suddenly he was walking on water. The Westminster-based verdict arose from the failure of Michael Howard to land a punch over the Butler report and the publication of various five-year plans. It ignored the broader context, that parts of the Butler report were damning, Iraq was still imploding, and that quite a lot of the five-year plans were over-hyped.

With the Conservatives in disarray Blair was not as vulnerable as some had suggested earlier in the year. But nor was he entirely safe when he strode off for his holidays. The mid-summer stirrings are a portent of more trouble to come this autumn.