

TONY IN WONDERLAND



There can't be too many occasions ahead when Tony Blair presents himself before the Parliamentary Liaison Committee. These are parliament's big hitters; the Chairs of all the major Select Committees. They are supposed to be the MPs who will rough-house the Prime Minister on behalf of everyone else. In practice, it usually turns out to be a lame affair.

So it was this week, when the PM was allowed a rose-tinted meander round the world as he would like it to be. Perhaps, sensing an immediate departure (should the police charge anyone in the 'cash for honours' investigation), MPs decided to allow Blair to have one of his 'senior moments' in peace. Anyone watching from outside will just have seen it as a land full of self-delusions.

Blair may now be the last remaining, true-believer in George W Bush left on the planet. He claims that Britain's influence on world affairs comes from our closeness to, and influence upon, US foreign policy. It is a claim that would produce guffaws from any other audience. Blair's unwavering faith in the occupation of Iraq, and a refusal to rule out a war on Iran, stand in stark contrast to the positions of the US Senate and Congress, who do not believe a word the lying old Presidential toad says.

The delusions run on; that the Middle East is a crusade for democracy rather than a de-stabilised mess; that Africa is now 'on the map', when its poorest nations only get debt-relief in exchange for allowing multinational corporations to take ownership of all their assets; where 'tackling climate change' amounts to no more than creating a speculative market in imaginary goods (carbon credits) that financial markets (and the World Bank) make shed loads of money out of. This is Blairsworld.

The latest, and most spurious, of his claims is that the forthcoming Climate Change Bill could not have annual CO2 reduction targets, simply because these were 'not practical'. Think about this for one moment and you will realise how absurd this is.

Britain is committed to a 60% reduction in carbon emissions by 2050. How do we get there? Blair's objection to legally binding, year-on-year targets is essentially this: What if there was a sudden drop in oil prices that made you miss your annual target? We would set ourselves up to fail. Plausible as this anxiety may seem, the real picture is quite different.

Britain's programme to eliminate fuel poverty has shown us that all the easy gains are in the early years. You can do the loft insulations. You can do the foam filled cavity walls. You can install double glazing. But what happens when you get to the difficult-to-heat, solid wall properties? The costs spiral and the rate of progress slows.

If you are going to hit (and exceed) targets, you will do so in the early years. In anything like this you expect to get off to a racing start with the easy targets, and hope to give yourself a breathing space for

later years. The only legitimate fear about falling behind at this stage would be if you knew, deep down, there was no plan.

As with so much that New Labour has come to represent, this is Blair's dilemma; scratch the surface and there's nothing there.

We live in a society that has marketised the soul; where citizens have been turned into mere consumers; where interdependency has been dumped in favour of individuality; where solidarity between generations has given way to 'me first and sod the rest' social fragmentation; and where everything once held in public and in common hands is merely the next candidate for privatisation. This is the export-model ideology of American neo-cons.

When challenged over his closeness to the Bush administration, Blair claimed it was the relationship that opened all doors. Looking at the beleaguered position of both men, the only obvious door that beckons is the one marked 'exit'.

Sadly, you know that once they dash for the door, both men will be handsomely rewarded for the way they have transferred wealth to the wealthy. Only then will society begin to understand the full cost of this decade of delusions.