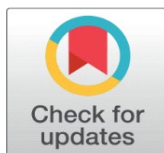


A CRITICAL EVALUATION OF TONY BLAIR'S LABOUR GOVERNMENT'S POLICIES TOWARDS EUROPEAN UNION

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ABSTRACT

This paper mainly explains the United Kingdom and European Union relations during Tony Blair's period. After UK's membership to the EU in 1973, it had not actively engaged in the European Union's policy initiatives and implementation process. From 1973 to 1996, the successive UK Prime Ministers followed a negative and sceptical attitude towards various EU policy initiatives and none of the UK Prime Ministers showed any special interest in improving its relations with the EU. At this juncture, Tony Blair's Labour government made a huge difference in the European Union and United Kingdom's relationship. In this context, the study of Tony Blair's New Labour government's policies and perspectives towards the European Union gives a better understanding of the United Kingdom and European Union's relations during that period.

Keywords: United Kingdom, European Union, 1998 EU Presidency, 2005 EU Presidency, European Monetary Union, Euro Currency

1. INTRODUCTION

Tony Blair's Labour government came to power in 1997 in the United Kingdom and it aimed to pursue a constructive European policy from that of previous John Major's conservative government. The Crux of the policy was to establish some kind of British 'Leadership' within the EU. The policy of the Labour government of Tony Blair towards EU modernization and change. It was making a break from the policies of the UK in the recent past, notably its 1983 manifesto of withdrawal from the European Communities, state intervention in the economy and nuclear disarmament. Tony Blair's government succeeded in placing a British imprint upon the EU but continued as a non-member of the Euro that in a way restricted its aspirations to play a leadership role in the EU.

RATIONALE OF THE STUDY

The proposed research will focus on Tony Blair's Labour government's policies towards European Union. The stress here is firstly on UK's policies towards the EU. Secondly, the study also aims to understand Tony Blair's foreign policy in the context of the EU and does not deal exclusively with its foreign policy.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

In the light of above, the proposed research aims to understand the following:

- To understand the reason behind Tony Blair's involvement in the EU.
- To analyze to what extent the UK differs from other EU member states in EU Politics.
- Internal debate in the EU regarding Tony Blair's role in various policies.
- Impact of Tony Blair's policies on the EU and its wider ramification.

HYPOTHESIS

- 1) Tony Blair sought to change the role of the UK in the EU. Distinct from his predecessor he brought about a pro-EU image of the UK.
- 2) Tony Blair also sought to maintain continuity in UK's policy towards the EU. In core areas, a distinct UK identity was maintained.
- 3) Tony Blair's policy represented an ambivalent attitude towards the EU supporting the EU where it suited national interest and deviating from the general EU member's position when it did not suit the perceived national interest.
- 4) Tony Blair's policy perspective had an imprint on the UK's policy towards the EU and has made it difficult for successors to deviate from it.

METHODOLOGY

This work on 'A Critical Evaluation of Tony Blair's Labour government's policies towards European Union' is basically an analytical work. The proposed study will largely rely on primary sources including official, Government documents and publications. The study will also critically examine the secondary sources available on the subject matter such as books, journals, periodicals magazines and tertiary sources such as newspapers.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The Review of literature is an important stage of research. In this background, there exist several works pertaining to the subject matter of the research that could be usefully employed in the research. This study mentioned a few.

Christian Schwinger, (2007), in his book on **Britain, Germany and the Future of the European Union (PALGRAVE MACMILLAN Publications, New York,)** has analyzed the role played by Britain in the European Union. And the author analyzed Britain and European integration, Britain under Tony Blair's premiership and also discussed Blair's European policies in different fields.

Alistair Jones, (2007), in his book **Britain and the European Union (Politics Study Guides), (Edinburgh University Press, Edinburgh,)** analyzed the history of the EU, its institutions and policies. The author also analyzed the British applications, the referendum on membership and Tony Blair's premiership.

3. ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

A CRITICAL EVALUATION OF TONY BLAIR'S LABOUR GOVERNMENT'S POLICIES TOWARD THE EUROPEAN UNION:

After the 1997 general election, the Labour Party under the leadership of Tony Blair came to power on May 1, 1997, with an absolute majority in the parliament. When it came to power, the biggest challenge before the party and the Prime Minister was to implement the manifesto promises into practice. In its election manifesto, the Labour government had made two pledges before the people: to hold a referendum on participation in the single currency; and to lead reform in the EU. During the New Labour Party's initial years of rule, the major promises made in the manifesto were fulfilled. About manifesto provisions to hold a referendum to continue the UK's EU membership and to join the EU's single currency, Euro the New Labour government followed a more practical approach.

After the New Labour government headed by Tony Blair took over the EU presidency in 1998, his government announced its policy objectives during its term as EU president. This includes, firstly, presiding over the key decisions to launch the Single currency. Secondly, to inaugurate the enlargement process and carried out the requisite internal EU policy reforms. Thirdly, to pursue an agenda of policy reform aiming at employability and competitiveness. Fourthly, to

strengthen EU efforts to combat crime and enhance environmental protection. Fifthly, to continue the process of establishing the UK as an influential and constructive partner in the EU. Finally, to involve the British people in the presidency.

From the above, it can be understood that Tony Blair's New Labour government followed a more constructive European policy under its 1998 EU presidency. The New Labour government also followed a positive and more practical approach towards EU policies and programmes during its EU presidency. However, the New Labour government failed to put up the UK at the Centre of the EU's policy decisions.

Tony Blair's first term (1997-2001) provided several important opportunities to put the manifesto commitments into practice. The first was in the EU's inter-governmental conference (IGC) on treaty reform which finally was approved in the form of the Amsterdam treaty. The broad impression of the British Presidency was positive. But the government was unable to occupy a central position in respect of the EU's policy agenda. Specifically, the launch of the final stage of the European Monetary Union (EMU), at a special European council on 1st May, was an important moment in the EU's history. During its second term of office (2001-2005), the government made some changes in the cabinet. Basically, these changes were made to develop a constructive goal-oriented EU policy initiative. The New Labour party in its 2001 UK general election manifesto made a promise of 25 'Steps to a Better Britain'. These policy objectives and goals play an important role in developing EU-UK relations. This manifesto objective was greatly highlighted in the 2001 UK general election.

During its third term of office (2005-2007) stressed four important issues. They are, firstly, to give approval to the EU constitutional treaty through a referendum. Secondly, to promote economic reforms in the European Union countries. This objective was highlighted in the party manifesto was basically for the 2005 UK presidency of the EU. Thirdly, it also assured to enhance leadership in the European defence co-operation programme. Finally, it also declared to continue a sound policy on Euro currency. This includes fulfilling the chancellor's five economic tests, parliament's approval and finally of holding a referendum to get people's approval.

The New Labour party government took over the EU Presidency from July to December 2005. During this period, the New Labour government put forwarded certain manifesto objectives in its EU Policies. These manifesto objectives had been considered very important for the New Labour government in implementing its Constructive European policy. This includes firstly, having an economic and social reform which includes the service directive and working time directive. Secondly, having an agreement with regard to EU financial perspectives from 2007-13. Thirdly, regarding Sugar market reforms, the New Labour government had the goal to take various policy measures to reform the Sugar industries. Fourthly, the Continuation of the enlargement process, and fifthly, to take the initiative to improve and develop the EU's role in world affairs. Finally, it had the goal to resolve the Luxembourg Budgetary deal. In comparison to the 1998 UK EU Presidency, the 2005 EU presidency was less successful in implementing the policy objectives.

4. CONCLUSION

Overall, the ten years of the Labour government's European policy goals were considered bipartisan, completion of the single market, enlargement, reform of the Common Agricultural policy and retention of the Veto over matters of national interest. Nevertheless, there has been a reasonable achievement of the Labour government's manifesto objectives in its European policy. The UK was less isolated in the EU. The Labour government's efforts to explain the situation to the domestic electorate have been very weak. The Labour government has failed to create a new consensus over European policy. The Labour government has delivered a more constructive European policy but built on weak domestic foundations. In other words, Tony Blair's constructive engagement with the EU did not alter the people's perception towards the EU. Officially the UK under Tony Blair became an important and considerate partner to other EU countries in the European Project. Despite its failure to link itself completely with the EU's economic and financial projects, in particular Euro.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST

None.

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