

New Statesman

The mentality of the whore

TONY Blair and his friends may not be very good at ideas, policies, principles and such like, but there is one thing they do know about: the media. Ever since seizing the leadership, Mr Blair and his chums have devoted an extraordinary amount of time and energy to cultivating their media image — whether by sucking up to the likes of Rupert Murdoch and Lord Rothermere, or by blackguarding any journalist who resists the Campbell/Mandelson 'spin' on a story.

The Blair clique is particularly touchy about those publications closest to it ideologically — the *Guardian*, *Observer* and *New Statesman*. Hostility to the *Guardian* for occasionally publishing an 'unhelpful' story or venturing a mild criticism has resulted in the spin doctors transferring their favours (exclusive briefings, privileged access to the Great Leader's innermost thoughts, etc.) to the laughably titled *Independent*.

But at the *New Statesman* the Blairites reckoned they were in a position to take more direct action against recalcitrant editor Steve Platt. Born-again Blairista Margaret Hodge was on the magazine's board and in September 1995 attempted a coup to remove Platt and bring the magazine into line with correct thinking. Unfortunately, Hodge's spaniel-like loyalty to her Leader was not matched by any corresponding intellect or competence. The attempt failed and the hitherto mildly dissident Platt became a confirmed anti-Blairite.

Less than a year later, however, the Blairites had the *Statesman* handed to them on a plate when millionaire Labour MP Geoffrey Robinson bought the magazine and promptly replaced Platt with former *Independent on Sunday* editor Ian Hargreaves. Out, too, went contributing editor and columnist Ian Aitkin (whose soft-Tribunite politics and *Guardian* connection presumably made him dangerously Old Labour) and assistant editor Nyta Mann (no surprise there: at the 1995 Labour Party conference Blair babe Derek Draper had called her a "fucking cunt" and promised "we're going to get you").

Perhaps the most significant person-

nel change was the return (as Associate Editor and regular columnist) of John Lloyd, who had edited the magazine in the late '80s. Lloyd is an able journalist whose pedigree includes a period as the *Financial Times*' chief industrial correspondent and one of the more interesting (and less pretentious) of the regulars at *Marxism Today*. But a socialist he is not. Indeed, one of Lloyd's recent columns opens with the question "What can we invent to fill the hole where socialism used to be?" There is, of course, nothing wrong with a socialist publication giving space to non-socialists with interesting things to say. The point about Lloyd, however, is that he isn't just an occasional contributor but an integral part of the *Statesman*'s editorial team who almost certainly carries more political clout than Hargreaves (whose appointment was due to his journalistic expertise rather than any political credentials).

"The New Statesman knows what it doesn't stand for: class struggle."

Lloyd — an ex-Maoist and one-time member of the British and Irish Communist Organisation — equates 'socialism' with Stalinism and considers that social democracy (in the sense of what a recent *Statesman* editorial described as "the post-war period of big, welfare-state government") has pretty well reached the end of the line. The best that Lloyd and the *Statesman* can come up with as an alternative is a search "for a way to tame capitalism" — but, by their own admission, they haven't found it yet.

Such intellectual vacuity has drawn the *Statesman* and New Labour into a warm embrace and it was no surprise, earlier this summer, to find that the Labour Party had rented out its national membership list to the magazine for a publicity mailing and cut-price membership offer — an arrangement that may well be in breach of the Data Protection Act. But Har-

greaves and Lloyd (not to mention their boss Geoffrey Robinson) are not complete fools: they know that an unrelenting diet of New Labour propaganda would spell certain death on the news stands. So, in an effort to emulate the *Spectator* under Dominic Lawson's editorship of a couple of years ago, the *Statesman* has gone in search of 'scoops' with which to publicise itself, and in doing so has caused the Labour leadership some embarrassment. Joy Johnson's attack on New Labour's "elaborate and obscure" use of language and Clare Short's strange ramblings about "the people who live in the dark" both made headlines in virtually every paper. Good publicity for the magazine, certainly. But scarcely substantial critiques of Blairism.

The *New Statesman* may not know what exactly it stands for these days, but it certainly knows what it *doesn't* stand for: class struggle in any shape or form. A recent editorial admonished striking postal workers thus: "It (the strike) offers valuable ammunition to those who would further restrict the rights of trade unions. It undermines attempts to create a new set of relationships based on a shared interest in the well-being of their enterprises rather than a presumption of class conflict. And a programme of industrial action that stretches into a critical political autumn is a gift to Labour's enemies."

Mind you, there is nothing new about such craven cowardice and hypocrisy at the *Statesman*. Back in 1937 the magazine's first editor, Kingsley Martin, refused to publish George Orwell's articles on the Spanish Civil War, not because he (Martin) denied that Orwell's facts were true, but because he believed that to publish them would damage the Stalinist Popular Front then so fashionable with British liberals and social-democrats. Orwell described Martin's subservience to the centre-left 'common sense' of the day as "the mentality of the whore." I hate to think what he'd have to say about today's *New Statesman*.

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