

Robert Kilroy-Silk writes...on Homelessness

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John Prescott is to blame for 100,810 households – including many vulnerable children – being homeless this Christmas. It is all Two Jags fault. He is responsible for the failure to ensure that sufficient affordable housing is available.

This was supposed to be his job. He said that he would make a success of it. Yet despite the fact that he has had seven long years to ensure that the problem of homelessness would be solved it has got worse.

John Prescott's damning legacy is to have more than doubled the number of homeless households under his stewardship. What a disaster the man has been. What a disgrace.

But this is not the end of the matter. The smug and often truculent deputy prime minister is also responsible for a further 380,000 lost souls, what a housing charity calls the "hidden homeless". These are the people, who thanks to well-fed Two Jags, will be living in hostels, in squats, or sleeping on the floor of their friends and family this Christmas.

This is indeed, as Adam Sampson, the director of Shelter, said, "a scandal". In the last seven years the deputy prime minister has grown rich and fat with his grace and favour government home, his trade union subsidised London flat, his Hull mansion, his two jaguars, and his lavish expenses, while the people he is paid to care for have got poorer and poorer.

But the shocking increase in the number of homeless in New Labour in shining new Britain is not the only "scandal". We are, as the Chancellor of the Exchequer keeps telling us, a rich country, a very rich country, We are an economic success story. We're the fourth largest economy in the world.

Tony Blair, Gordon Brown and New Labour take credit for this. They boast about their compassion. New Labour wears its bleeding heart on its faded socialist sleeve. It claims to be motivated by fairness. It says that it believes in social justice. It insists that it is concerned to help the vulnerable and the deprived.

Does it? No, not really, not a lot, not enough. Its words are fine alright, but its deeds are shoddy. During Tony Blair's premiership the gap between the rich and the poor as widened – with the poor being ever poorer and the rich much richer.

Tony Blair, as prime minister, dabbles in the property market and buys flats to rent in Bristol, he purchases a £3m home in London. He sucks up to the likes of Bernie Ecclestone and consorts only with the very wealthy at his Labour party dinners.

Meanwhile there are 2.6 million pensioners living in poverty, 3.6 million children below the poverty level and 3.9 million childless and adults in poverty. Only this week the Joseph Rowntree Foundation pointed out in graphic detail the grinding poverty and absence of opportunity experiences by children in places like Liverpool and Nottingham.

Is this what New Labour is, Tony Blair and Old Socialist John Prescott want to be remembered for? Is this the legacy they will pass on? Of course not. Tony Blair says that this is the country of opportunity. He's right. It's merely that he forgot to add, "for the rich, but not if you are poor".

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