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David Blunkett's second resignation confirms anarchist theory of politics

The means shape the ends

Anarcho

November 4, 2005

David Blunkett has resigned, again. Sadly, like the last time, it was not provoked by a sudden awareness of how terrible his authoritarian neo-liberal policies were but due to personal indiscretion. So launching a war of aggression based on lies and spin is not considered worthy of resignation but financial ambiguities is. But what can you expect from New Labour?

There is a lesson to be learned from Blunkett's rise and fall. It is a striking confirmation of anarchist theory. Faced with arguments that the labour movement should stand in elections and win political power (a tactic labelled as "political action" by Marx), anarchists reply in three ways. Firstly, we argue that winning elections would replace socialism as the movement's goal and, consequently, socialist principles will quickly be jettisoned. Secondly, it is doubtful any genuinely socialist government would ever get elected as any socialist politicians would become reformist. Thirdly, that that capitalism will not

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allow itself be voted away. The state machine would undermine any socialist government, as would economic pressure from big business. If all else failed, a military coup would be organised.

In other words, rather than change the system, the system would change them. As Bakunin correctly predicted, when *“the workers ... send common workers ... to Legislative Assemblies ... The worker-deputies, transplanted into a bourgeois environment ... will in fact cease to be workers and, becoming Statesmen, they will become bourgeois ... For men do not make their situations; on the contrary, men are made by them.”* In this, history has proven him, not Marx, correct.

The descent of Marxist social-democracy into reformism and opportunism confirmed our worse fears. The recent failures of Lula’s government in Brazil can be added to the list, as can the fate of David Blunkett. For those with long memories, Blunkett came into politics as a left-winger, a socialist. In the 1980s he attacked Thatcherite policies as head of what he proudly called the “Socialist Republic of South Yorkshire.” By the 1990s, he was advocating them and, after 1997, implementing them. Like so many in the New Labour project, Blunkett started his career on the left only to reject his principles in the pursuit of office.

This is quite a turn around, but one which should come as no surprise to an anarchist. Of course, there are exceptions to this rule. Some socialist politicians remain true to their ideals. That these are rare can be quickly seen by the fact most people could name them!

Given this long and sorry history of betrayal, any sensible person may consider basing your political strategy on the handful of exceptions to the rule rather than the rule itself would be silly. This has not, of course, stopped Marxists from repeatedly pursuing Marx’s course. The SWP and its RESPECT front are just the latest in a long line of such attempts. Unsurprisingly, the SWP has lurched to the right and have consistently

betrayed their own ideas within RESPECT in order to gather votes.

Yet again, Marxists are proving anarchists to be correct. And what of the anarchist claim that being in parliament will produce a bourgeois mentality? SWP member, comedian and sometime *Independent* columnist Mark Steel has a possible solution. In *“Socialist brought down by a champagne lifestyle”* (**The Independent**, 3/11/05), Steel presents an argument similar to Bakunin’s to account for Blunkett’s evolution. For Steel, Blunkett *“has always been driven by his environment. As a young man, his working class surroundings created a dynamic socialist, and now a milieu of wealthy idiots has shaped an outlook to match.”* However, there is a twist. It is not the environment of Parliament and the cabinet (wealthy idiots, one and all) which caused this change. No, rather it is attending the parties of the rich which was his undoing, as they *“have become Blunkett’s circle.”* Nice to know that the SWP have finally worked out the real cause of the rise of reformism in parliamentary socialism — going to the wrong social occasions! Can we draw the conclusion that RESPECT’s MPs will remain radical because they will be required to nip down the pub once a week?

Ultimately, though, the means shape the ends. If your means are based on working in authoritarian and bourgeois institutions, can it be any surprise that the ends are the same? That David Blunkett went from socialist to neo-liberal should come as no surprise. What is surprising is that in this day and age so-called radicals are urging us to use the same means in the strange hope they will lead to different results.