

The reasons Emmet Stagg should resign

Their Morals and Ours!

Gregor Kerr

1994

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1

In February 1992, Emmet Stagg – a self-proclaimed “socialist” closely identified with the left wing of the Labour Party – resigned from Labour’s Parliamentary Party, claiming that Dick Spring was preparing to lead the party into coalition and proclaiming that he would “never vote for a right wing Taoiseach from Fianna Fail or Fine Gael.”

In January 1993 – less than eleven months later – this opponent of coalition stood up at Labour’s Special Conference to second the motion that they enter a “Partnership Government” with Fianna Fáil and duly trooped through the lobbies to vote for Albert Reynolds as Taoiseach.

On formation of the government he was rewarded for his change of heart by being appointed Junior Minister with responsibility for Housing.

2

In May 1993, in his capacity as minister for Housing, Stagg was criticised for failing to provide adequate funding for the maintenance of Dublin Corporation housing. His response was to blame the “restrictive union practices..” of Corporation maintenance workers and to threaten privatisation of the maintenance work. When it was put to him by a “Sunday Tribune” journalist that this statement was somewhat at variance with his previous supposedly “socialist” views, he responded – “maybe I wouldn’t have said something like that two years ago, but I wasn’t a Minister two years ago.”

3

Stagg’s appointment as the first ever Junior Minister with direct responsibility for housing was hailed by supporters of the Fianna Fail/Labour coalition as evidence that the new government marked a new departure and was placing the homeless crisis at the top of its’ agenda. However the number of people on housing waiting lists throughout the state has continued to climb and Eastern Health Board Social Workers have been in dispute since last year in an attempt to highlight the lack of crisis accomodation for homeless teenagers in Dublin. Stagg’s appointment has merely been a window-dressing exercise and the housing crisis continues unabated (See “Waiting on the Waiting List”, Workers Solidarity no.41)

4

Emmet Stagg’s sexuality is indeed a matter for himself. However a positive statement from him following the Phoenix Park controversy confirming his bi-sexuality could have done a great deal to challenge the homophobic nature of sections of our society. He clearly decided that his position in government was more important to him.

He is a member of a government which has introduced tax on certain social welfare payments, brought in the draconian Public Order Bill, stitched up workers yet again through the “Programme for Competitiveness and Work” and failed to tackle the twin crises of unemployment and poverty. Yet Stagg still claims to be a “socialist”. Who’s he trying to fool?

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