

Blair is no Democrat

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Blair's profound anti-democratic tendencies are no secret, particularly given his increasingly open campaign to overturn centuries of our legal tradition and profoundly tilt the legal system against the accused. But a small exchange in the Scottish Parliament yesterday, between Alex Salmond, Scottish First Minister, and Annabel Goldie, leader of the Scottish Conservatives, illustrated just how undemocratic Blair's instincts are.

Since Alex Salmond became Scottish First Minister – over two weeks ago – Tony Blair has not been in touch with him to congratulate him on his victory or his appointment, or to discuss Scotland.

<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/main.jhtml?xml=/news/2007/06/01/nsalmond01.xml>

This shows a profound contempt, not just for the SNP, but for Scotland and the Scottish Parliament. More than this, it shows a profound contempt for democracy. Blair is only in favour of it when it gives the “right” result – ie the one he wants. That has been evident in Iran and Palestine. It is now evident in Scotland.

Blair and Brown are also showing just how unpleasant New Labour in Scotland have become. They still refuse to acknowledge that they lost Scotland after fifty years of dominance. Blair and Brown's failure to congratulate Alex Salmond on his victory is a denial of all the politenesses and decencies that are necessary to the smooth running of a democracy, and which are understood by democratic politicians everywhere. They are showing both their nastiness and their pettiness.

In contrast the Conservatives – including David Cameron and Annabel Goldie – have behaved well and graciously.

It should not be forgotten that key to the SNP's victory was their profound opposition to the War in Iraq and to Trident nuclear missiles, and their replacement. The SNP showed what happens when a genuine choice on these issues is given to voters. That is a huge threat to the conservative establishment in the UK, and explains Blair's arrogant hostility.

That can also be seen from the reaction of the other parties to the SNP's new ascendancy, both nationally and in local councils. One of the worst examples is in Dundee, where an unholy alliance of all the conservative parties – New Labour, Liberal and Conservative – has formed an administration to keep out the largest party, the SNP, and incidentally to keep in power the people who have run for years one of Scotland's most notoriously corrupt local administrations.

In the short term, it makes me puke. In the long term, this is not harmful. It will clarify that

Scotland has only two real choices – Independence, or the conservative establishment, whatever they call themselves.

The attitude of the Lib Dems in all this is particularly appalling. Under the uninspiring leadership of Nicol Stephen – a man with all the charisma of a tailor's dummy – they lost ground in the election. They then refused to enter into a coalition with the SNP.

The difficulty with this is that, if you believe in Proportional Representation, which I do, then that places a duty upon the middling parties to act responsibly in politics and help to form an administration. Otherwise the system just doesn't work. Stephen had been very happy indeed with his coalition with New Labour, with whom he got on famously, having the same attitude with them on – well, everything. Stephen looks and acts exactly like what he is, a middle level management consultant with Deloitte Touche. Nobody can doubt that, had New Labour been the largest party, the Lib Dems would have re-entered coalition with NuLab with alacrity.

Instead, Stephen said they could not work with the SNP because of the SNP insistence on a referendum on Independence. Not Independence itself, just a referendum on it. Something to which most democrats would feel the Scottish people are entitled (opinion polls show consistently that a large majority of Scots want a referendum on Independence, but would vote against Independence). To make Stephen's position still more ludicrous, the SNP were offering a three question referendum – the status quo, more powers for the Scottish Parliament or Independence. The middle option is the one which Stephen's party pretends to support, and which all opinion polls show would actually win the proposed referendum by a mile.

Nicol Stephen's real motive was simple; he is a deeply conservative supporter of the Establishment. He announced that "The Scottish Liberal Democrats are a Unionist Party, and the Scottish Parliament has a clear Unionist majority."

I was brought up in the British Liberal tradition. If you are not from that tradition, it is difficult to explain to you how astonishing that statement is. Ever since Gladstone's struggle for Irish Home Rule – which cost him two of his four premierships – there has been a profound antipathy between Liberalism and Unionism. Chamberlain led the Unionists out of the Liberal party and into the Conservative Party, which became the Conservative and Unionist Party. Gladstone's successor Rosebery in many ways kick-started modern political Scottish nationalism.

Official Lib Dem policy is for a highly devolved Federal United Kingdom and a very strong, arguably Federal Europe. In this scenario the devolution of powers down from Westminster and the remove of powers up to Brussels leaves Westminster largely to wither away. But there is no shortage of Scottish Liberal Democrats who would go further and would wish one day to see Scotland as an acknowledged nation with its own seat on the EU Council and in the UN.

The one thing the Lib Dem position cannot be described as is Unionist. Nicol Stephen's claim to be leading a Unionist Party is as shocking, to anyone with any feel for our political history, as if David Cameron claimed the Conservatives to be a Communist Party. Thatcher and Paisley are in the Unionist tradition, and proud to proclaim it. Liberals are not.

Sadly, of course, the Lib Dems at the UK level are also under deeply conservative

leadership. I am worried about the ageism that surrounds discussion of Menzies Campbell. There are plenty of highly dynamic and effective sixty year olds. Mogadon Ming was a boring second rater when he was forty. Age has nothing to do with it.

To return to Blair, as we talk of his legacy, the Scottish Parliament and Welsh Assembly are always high on the list of his achievements. This is ludicrous. They were key policies of John Smith which he inherited and could not ditch because of the powerful Celtic lobby in his party. Robin Cook and Donald Dewar held him to it. In fact he was always deeply hostile, and his real attitude was revealed in his attempt to impose a leader on the Welsh and keep out Rhoddri Morgan, and on his attitude to Alex Salmond now. Just as he stymied reform of the House of Lords by his profound belief it should be appointed (by him) and not elected.

Tony Blair is no democrat.

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