

## SOMEWHERE BEYOND SOUNDBITES



My decision to leave parliament at the next election is driven by the same reasoning that took me into parliament 15 years ago. Then, as now, I had no particular interest in a career plan. All I wanted was to change the world. That is still the plan.

I've never had any particular illusions about how difficult this would be. Nor have I harboured any doubts that the New Labour mindset would be two steps backwards (for democratic socialism) for every one step forward in funding. Life in Parliament was only ever going to be the occupation of a principled opposition to the neo-liberal economics that have underpinned much of what the Blair/Brown years have come to represent.

I understood my place in this struggle. My granddad never conceded that the 1926 General Strike had actually been lost; arguing that it had "yet to be fully resolved". It was his way of saying that the struggle goes on as long as there are people willing to stand up and fight. Parliament has always been a platform for setting out the ideas base of how the struggle goes on.

Losses were always painful, but the role of dissenting voices on the Labour benches was (in part) to set out how wretchedly misguided and divisive policies could be reversed. Rail could be re-nationalised (at next to no costs) simply by not renewing franchises as they expired. Academies could just be brought back into a comprehensive education system, delivered through local education authorities. Bias in housing finance could be switched in favour of council housing. Means-tested benefits could be replaced by universal ones, at much lower delivery costs or social division. What changed the scenario for me was climate change. It was what moved me from scepticism to cynicism. When that happens it's time to move on.

I believe that we only have perhaps a decade to make profound changes in the way we live, work, think and shop, if we are to survive this century. As Brown and Cameron swap climate change sound bites all that gets confirmed is that Brown, in particular, is out to lunch on the issue. Virtually everything he represents would drive Labour policies into duplicitous claims, incomprehensible schemes and disastrous outcomes. It is hard to believe that Labour could be driven into more of a mess than that delivered by Blair, but Brown could possibly do it.

I know the Left argues that we have an alternative path that the Party could follow. It's true. But the prospect of getting a candidate to the starting line of the leadership contest is not going to be easy. I doubt that either John McDonnell or Michael Meacher will get sufficient nominations to do so. I also suspect that many of their supporters will be unwilling to switch nominations at the last minute, so as to ensure that a leadership contest actually happens. This is irritating, but not central to the decision I have made.

My reading is that the 'openness' Brown offers to bring to his leadership will only be an openness to

agree with him. Beyond this, it will be brutal. Blair just ignored the Party, Brown will want to dominate, manipulate and purge it. The more the public look at his qualities, the lower his ratings plummet. If he ends up leading the party into a minority government, it will be a parliament dominated by recriminations and trench warfare. Meanwhile the planet will spin from one aspect of climate crisis to another.

Over the last 10 years I have been lucky enough to work on a whole raft of ideas and issues that could (and will) radically change the face of how we live. The trouble is that the Treasury, under Brown, is fundamentally opposed to all of them. It is hostage to all that is short-term, all that is deregulatory, all that is 'light touch' and all that panders to the interests of finance capital. The changes needed are too profound for Brown to accept. Securing these changes will probably challenge government's right to govern... and this will not come from within a Parliamentary Labour Party that has long given up political principles in favour of career prospects.

Across the world, the most exciting ideas and initiatives are coming from cities and regions that are not waiting for a government lead. Across our own land, the greatest challenges to government are also coming from outside parliament, as are the most exciting ideas. I am pleased that there are good comrades who will continue to be part of the fight in parliament, but I no longer believe the climate change agenda will be driven from within a parliamentary machine that has become moribund and dysfunctional.

My own decision was based on how best to run with the radical and exciting ideas that still fill my head. I could not even pretend to find anything in a Brown agenda that was up to these challenges.

So, without a job or a sinecure position to go to, I thought I had to be brave enough to step out of the security of the parliamentary club, and into the world that my kids (and yours) will have to live in. That is where I feel I have to carry on the fight. If we lose, there will be no re-visiting the issues later on.

I have no intention of leaving the Party or standing for anyone else. I just want the right to argue that, where Brown leads only fools would follow, and that wiser minds must displace (and then replace) this agenda with a more sustainable one.