

Greasy Pole: Bloggers at loggerheads



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Advice for anyone who assess themselves as alluringly qualified to rescue the world from a deadly combination of economic disintegration and ecological catastrophe: pay heed to the example of Gordon Brown. Divesting himself of his rumoured persona of brooding neurosis occasionally relieved in volcanic tirades, the Prime Minister genially hosted the recent London G20 conference, promoted as a mechanism to flush out and eliminate every threat to the world's harmony and health. As the assembled world leaders, deaf to the clamouring protesters outside – and to the thwack of police batons on their bodies – steamrollered on, smilingly massaging each others' shoulders and self-esteem, Brown blossomed like an unusually poisonous nightshade. Around the world which the conference was supposed to have as its concern, banks and industries were choking almost to death and millions of workers were being ejected into poverty deep enough to be immediately life-threatening; meanwhile Brown went about the business of bolstering his appeal to remain as the occupant of Number Ten, strutting his fantastic stuff as the new Saviour of the World. Whether this act was effective to the extent of being sufficiently deceptive to the British electorate will be clear come the next election.

But meanwhile...

We were told that G20 would be a seminal gathering, in the sense that its terms of reference were to design a cleaner, safer world in control of its economy and its environment. As a side line its timing was clearly fortunate for Gordon Brown but his luck is not in for, whatever euphoria G20 may have encouraged among Labour supporters, it would have been immediately damaged by the emergence of real politics as represented by the murky strategies of governmental "advisers" Damian McBride and Derek Draper. These two set out to damage the Tory leadership through publicising some salacious allegations about them and their families. This is known as "briefing" against – another example of New Labour's distortion of the lexicon, which defines briefing as a process of summarising a clutch of complex facts into an easily assimilated and presentable form. Far from embarrassing the Tories this provoked a mass panic among the Labour benches, as one minister after another rushed to assure us that they had also been victims of such smears which, as every right-thinking person knows, should have no place in politics: "vile, horrible and despicable" raged Ed Balls – who once worked closely with McBride when they were at the Treasury with Brown as Chancellor – "we all need to work to raise standards and to stamp this out". This may have been unwelcome to McBride, who has been paid a lot of money over almost ten years to do just this kind of "work".

Draper

A similar confusion may be affecting Draper, who was abandoned to his fate by the very people in the Labour Party who until recently might have been seen as his stalwart friends. A "special adviser" to Peter Mandelson in the early days of the Blair government, Draper's naiveté and self-regard were to cost him dear when, in 2001, he boasted to an undercover reporter that, as an intimate of the "17 people who mattered" in the government he could be trusted to arrange rewarding meetings with them. This episode revealed him to be vulnerable as well as unusually conceited; a nervous

breakdown preceded him fleeing to America to train as a psychotherapist. He came back here in 2004 to set up in what is described as a “successful” psychotherapy practice (it is to be hoped that that is the opinion of his patients and not just another example of his tendency for over-positive self-assessment). Impressed, and perhaps not a little envious, of the progress up the greasy pole of some of the people – like David Miliband and Liam Byrne – he had once been on a level with, he scraped his way back into Labour politics. An invitation to lunch at Chequers last November must have convinced him that he was on his way back and earlier this year he set up the web site LabourList, with plans to open another, to be called Red Rag, to compete with the scandal aimed at Labour leaders by the Tory blog ConservativeHome. This progress – if that is what it was – came to an abrupt halt with the exposure of the e-mails between Draper and McBride.

Anger

The distasteful episode has raised a lot of anger among grass roots Labour supporters, some of whom responded to Draper’s apology on LabourList: “What you have done is outrageous and disgusting, and no apology is enough” and another “You complete half-wits. Yet another weekend spent with one’s head in one’s hands every time the news comes on”. But such people are of too humble a standing to be treated with anything other than contempt by the likes of Draper and McBride, who were more readily impressed when they were disowned by the party leaders insisting that LabourList had nothing to do with the party and that Draper was used as only a part-time volunteer – and then by Gordon Brown raging that “When I saw this first I was horrified. I was shocked and I was very angry indeed. The person who was responsible went immediately”.

Such emergencies need to be understood. Those who have been immunised by experience against the conceits and fantasies of political leaders recognise that the rulers of class society can have no effect on the system which, they deceive themselves, is open to their manipulation. That is the only useful assessment of their behaviour and of their relationship with us.

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