

Paul Marsden

67 Otter Street, Derby, DE1 3FD     Derby (0332) 380093

1 December 1994

Harry Butterton

Secretary

Darley Ward Labour Party

37 Windley Crescent

Darley Abbey

Derby

Dear Harry

It is with the profoundest sorrow that I write to tender my resignation from membership of the Labour Party. I can no longer support a party led by Tony Blair, who has today displayed a degree of cynicism and hypocrisy which leaves me feeling severely traumatised. I have never missed an opportunity to vote for a Labour candidate since 1964, and I have been a member of the Party for most of the time since 1974. I came within 26 votes of winning a District Council seat for Labour in the mid-1970s, and I have been a Labour Party Sponsor since the scheme began. I have tonight written to my bank cancelling the direct-debit mandates for both my membership subscription and my sponsorship (£60 a year), and I will be sending my 1994 and 1995 membership cards (ironically, the latter arrived this evening!), symbolically cut up, to Tony Blair, together with a copy of this letter.

To my shame, I voted for Blair in the leadership election. How I wish I could withdraw that vote now!

As a fellow-teacher, I probably don't need to explain my reasons to you. However, I would like this letter read to the next meeting of the Ward Labour Party and forwarded to the Secretary of the Derby North CLP, so some explanation is necessary.

About four weeks ago The Observer carried an article by Barry Hugill outlining the attitudes and policies of David Blunkett, the new shadow education spokesman. I was furious at the views ascribed to Mr Blunkett, but as Hugill did not identify his sources I did not send Mr Blunkett the letter which I wrote in order to let off steam. Nor did I write to Harriet Harman, who was said to have sent her children to a Grant-Maintained school, or to Tony Blair, who was 'rumoured' to be considering one for his children.

Tonight my worst fears were confirmed when I heard that Tony Blair had indeed decided to send his son to a GM school, and had defended himself by saying that he was more concerned for his children's future than for 'political correctness'. A moment later I had to listen to Gillian Shepherd gloating that Blair had passed over 50 other schools nearer to home before choosing.

I am not a left-winger. I consider myself a pragmatic Socialist, and I have worked hard to convince myself that recent changes in Labour policy are in keeping with a solid foundation of Socialist principle, and are necessary to enable the Party to cope with changing social and economic circumstances. I have condemned Dennis Skinner, Tony Benn and the rest for their destructiveness, justifying everything on the basis that the Party has a solemn duty to rid our poor bruised nation of the squalid gang of spivs who have hijacked the Conservative Party over the past 20 years.

Now I have to face reality. The Labour Party, too, has been hijacked - and by someone at least as unprincipled as Thatcher, Major and the rest.

The fact that Blair's grubby ambitions for his children override his political principles reveal him as a true-blue Conservative - not just the pale-pink copy portrayed by the gutter press. The fact that he actually believes that a GM school will give his children a better education than an LEA school shows him to be profoundly ignorant. There can be few genuinely principled teachers who will stay in a GM school any longer than they are forced to. Natural selection will ensure that the GMs gradually fill up with refugees from the LEA sector, more interested in empire-building than educating children.

The fact that he dismisses opposition to the GM initiative scornfully as 'political correctness' forces me to the conclusion that he is not just a squalid, ignorant opportunist who belongs in the Tory party (or back in our corrupt legal system) but that he suffers from a quite extraordinary combination of arrogance and stupidity. How could anyone - least of all the Leader of Her Majesty's Opposition - fail to realise that the GM initiative is the poisoned spearhead of this Tory Government's sustained attack on democracy at all levels. LEA schools are accountable through democratically elected councils and properly constituted governing bodies. GM schools are now managed by yet another QUANGO. Need I say more?

The state education service has been a political football since Thatcher came to power. We have gone on working for the good of the nation's children against the sustained opposition of a succession of ever-more-loony Secretaries of State. The new one seems to know a bit about education, and perhaps to be just a little embarrassed by the excesses of the recent past, so we have dropped our guard a little - only to be slapped violently in the face by someone who ought to be on our side.

Does Blair not realise that, by this single act of crass insensitivity, he will have alienated the vast majority of teachers in this county? For 15 years the Labour Party has been a dim light at the end of a long, dark, dank tunnel for teachers. Blunkett's views (according to Huggill) threatened to extinguish that light. Now Blair has blown it out.

I am not a religious man (as Blair professes to be), and the Labour Party has been the nearest thing I've had to a church for many years. So I feel bereaved as well as betrayed - and angrier than I've been for a very long time. I may calm down before the next General Election, but at the moment my inclination is to vote Conservative to hasten the inevitable collapse of the present political structure - and to help bring about another Labour defeat which will surely make Blair's leadership one of the shortest on record.

After years as a non-activist, I was about to get off my backside and respond to the CLP's request to members to help develop the use of computers. As an advisory

teacher for IT, I could have made a significant contribution to efficient local campaign management. As a non-member, I shall not be doing so.

Yours very sadly...