

# Britain's Home Secretary David Blunkett resigns

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On December 15, Home Secretary David Blunkett resigned from government after acknowledging the discovery of an email confirming that a visa application for his former lovers' Filipina nanny had been fast-tracked.

Blunkett quit after a media campaign engineered by Kimberley Quinn in the aftermath of the breakdown of their three-year affair and in the midst of a bitter legal battle over access to hers and Blunkett's two-year old child and unborn baby.

Though Quinn clearly had her own reasons for going after Blunkett and leaking every embarrassing detail she could against him, this was a witch-hunt planned and executed within the editorial offices of top Tory publications and supported by Conservative head office.

The attempt of Shadow Home Secretary David Davies to claim that his party was initially reluctant to exploit Blunkett's difficulties will not wash. Though details of Blunkett's affair had been known for months, there was little of substance that could be used against him. He was, after all, unmarried and Quinn, the publisher of the right-wing *Spectator*, was no innocent abroad and would no doubt initially have used her extensive contacts within the media and the Tory Party to urge restraint while she sought to make a deal with Blunkett.

But it appears that when Blunkett made clear that he would not back down on his demands for access to the children he believes to be his, Quinn, Fleet Street and the Tories combined to claim the home secretary's political scalp—with details of the nanny's visa application, amongst other things, being leaked to the *Telegraph*, part of the same stable as the *Spectator* magazine.

The entire affair is remarkable for what it reveals of

the political character of New Labour.

It took just three weeks of hostile media coverage for Blunkett's position to become untenable. This is a government which felt able to stonewall mass political opposition to its support for war against Iraq, even when caught out in repeated lies. But when confronted by an attack from a small right-wing coterie—particularly over the issue of asylum—the whole thing was over in days. Blair's backing counted for nothing and the party and its supporters quickly fell into line.

Blunkett did himself no favours with the criticisms he made of his cabinet colleagues in a forthcoming biography. Originally due out in Spring 2005, Blunkett no doubt felt that his musings would only strengthen his authority in the right circles and even his ambition to one day become prime minister. Instead, its publication was moved forward to this week and leaked in advance in order to capitalise on his difficulties.

But this was only the last straw. Even before this final embarrassment there was little political will within the government to stand against the demands for Blunkett to go.

There is no small irony in the fact that he has been done down by the very forces he sought to win over to New Labour and whom he believed respected him for his authoritarianism and readiness to trample on democratic rights.

Writing in the *Guardian*, Polly Toynbee asks of Blunkett, "So everyone wonders what on earth this working-class minister, driven by a genuine passion for social justice for those who came from backgrounds like his, was doing with a *Spectator* society lady? Sleeping with the enemy, he fell among the most frivolous rightwing effete scoundrels of the Westminster political scene. That is part of the tragedy

in the downfall too—seduction of a simple man by someone from a world he rightly despised.

“Then, the final coup de grace. What was he doing slagging off his colleagues one by one to rightwing Stephen Pollard, who should never have been his official biographer anyway?”

Her suggestion that Blunkett had lost his marbles is no answer at all.

In truth, Blunkett did not think he was sleeping with the enemy but that he was amongst friends. Politically, Quinn and Blunkett are not an unlikely coupling and nor his choice of Stephen Pollard as biographer an accident. One might add that his biography has been serialised by the *Daily Mail* and still only touch on the extent to which Blunkett felt himself at home amongst Toynbee’s “rightwing effete scoundrels.”

It remains the case that Blunkett might have continued to mix in such circles without incident, had not the breakdown of his relationship presented such a golden opportunity for the Conservatives to embarrass the government in the run-up to the General Election expected in summer.

Blunkett, like Blair, may consider himself to be the defender of values close to the heart of every right thinking Tory. Nevertheless, there remain tribal loyalties that are not to be ignored when position and power are up for grabs.

Finally, why should not Blunkett have chosen Pollard as his biographer? After all, he is of the same ilk as the home secretary—a Labourite who has gone from a leading position in the Fabian Society to becoming an avowed supporter of Thatcherite economic nostrums.

At the outset of the war against Iraq, he declared cynically in the February 18 edition of the *Times*, “I am warmonger. I am bloodthirsty. I am rabid. My friends want only peace and harmony, but I want to wreak destruction and killing. I want to see British soldiers doing the Texan moron’s dirty work for him.”

What better credentials could Blunkett have asked of a potential biographer?

No one concerned with civil liberties will mourn Blunkett’s downfall. However, a warning must be sounded against all those seeking to sow the illusion that its result will be a rethink on the part of the government regarding its anti-democratic agenda.

Typical of such claims is the editorialising of the *Independent*, urging that “The government must use Mr

Blunkett’s departure as an opportunity for a new start. It ought to ditch the headline chasing tactics favoured by Mr Blunkett and embrace a more socially tolerant agenda. Mr Blunkett’s resignation is no doubt a personal tragedy for him, but it could mean a new lease of life for liberalism in this country.”

One is forced to grimace when reading such drivel. An entirely opposite scenario is already unfolding.

As soon as Blunkett had stepped down, Davies was on the television stating that the Tories would make law and order and asylum central to their election campaign against the government and they were already in the lead. Blair responded by moving Education Secretary Charles Clarke into the Home Office, who immediately pledged policy “continuity” with his predecessor, and ruled out any retreat on plans to introduce identity cards.

The vacant education portfolio was handed to Ruth Kelly, described as having a “strong moral” stance and being “well to the right” of traditional Labourites on education—and, one might add, on any other issue one could possibly name!

Even amidst the fallout from Blunkett’s resignation, a Labour source told the media that the party’s forthcoming election manifesto would be so New Labour that it would reduce the party’s traditionalist supporters to tears.



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