

Russell Brand performs volte face and urges Labour vote

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The comedian and activist Russell Brand has urged a vote for the Labour Party in today's general election in the UK.

Brand previously opposed support for any of Britain's political parties. In November 2013 he called for a "revolution" on BBC *"Newsnight"*, explaining that the UK's political system only serves the interests of big business and the super-rich.

For this, he was viciously attacked by representatives and defenders of the political parties he was denouncing. His fiercest detractors were found among the columnists at the pro-Labour *Guardian*. However, he gave voice to the revulsion felt by millions, alienated from a system that offers nothing but austerity, poverty and the horrors of perpetual war. And he found a particularly receptive audience among young people, who viewed his YouTube channel, "The Trews," in their hundreds of thousands.

Brand's endorsement of Labour was announced after Labour leader Ed Miliband paid a personal visit to his London apartment to record an interview. He broadcast most of his interview with Miliband on Sunday, but held a section back which he entitled, "Emergency: VOTE To Start Revolution." In it, Brand says to Miliband, "I think it's cool what you say. That the election's the beginning, not the end, and that it's not about euphoria, it's about stability and a dialogue with the British people, where they're heard over the interests of the powerful. Then we have something worth voting for."

Brand argues that voting Labour is necessary because working people face an emergency situation in which the Conservatives have to be ousted from power. Unlike the Tories, he claims, Labour will be amenable to pressure from below. "What I heard Ed Miliband say is that if we speak, he will listen," he now says, with

extraordinary naiveté.

Brand previously endorsed Scottish independence, and so made an exception regarding a Labour vote in Scotland, instead giving tacit support to the Scottish National Party. "If you're Scottish, you don't need an English person telling you what to do," he states. Of the Green Party, he said, "I think it'd be a travesty if we lost the voice of Caroline Lucas in Westminster. But anywhere else you've got to vote Labour."

Brand's volte face has solicited a mixed response in "The Trews" comments section, with over 11,000 responses from those either expressing disappointment or anger, questioning why he did not urge a Green Party vote, or supportive of his decision.

His followers have reason to be angry and disappointed. Brand after all won popular support for standing out against the very claims he is now making—that Labour represents a "lesser evil"—and for insisting that politics is ultimately determined by the power of big business, not by voting for which of its representatives holds office. But what is most important is to understand why it is that he has capitulated to the siren voice of the innumerable pseudo-left apologists for Labour.

Russell Brand may be a sincere, likable and funny man, but politics is not a joke. It is a deadly serious business that demands not only empathy with the plight of the oppressed and hostility towards the rich and powerful, but proper study and thought and the coherent political outlook provided only by Marxism.

Brand's own politics are of a generally reformist character: His calls for "revolution" are based on an appeal to develop an internal "spiritual awareness," rather than a movement for social change led by the working class. And when he speaks of an alternative to the existing parties, he raises, "An equivalent of Syriza

in Greece or Podemos in Spain,” or “an international confederation of new political alliances.”

These are the alternatives, pro-capitalist formations involving alliances of former Stalinists and pseudo-left groups, championed by those whom he calls his “mates”—the same people, he wrote yesterday, now “making practical pleas of varying import,” urging him to call for a vote for Labour.

Brand writes, in his own defence, of budget cuts and student loans, which, while having only a small place in the “grand scheme of Revolution,” are “problems that can be somewhat assuaged with the small solution of getting rid of the Tories.”

“People that know a lot more about this than me, and probably you,” he explains, “advised me that we’ll be better off rucking with a Labour government than a Conservative one—if that strikes you as a pitiful choice, more sympathetic I could not be—but some people are facing much worse dilemmas than reneging on a puritanical political stance.”

Who does Brand refer to as knowing more than you or I—at least when it comes to abandoning political principles?

One such figure is Owen Jones of the *Guardian*—who specialises in stressing the impossibility of building any left or revolutionary alternative to Miliband’s party.

In a comment published Monday, Jones writes, “Russell Brand has endorsed Labour—and the Tories should be worried.” Brand is “not advocating a vote for Labour because he’s become a born-again Milibandite,” he says, “but because he believes Labour are far more amenable to pressure than Tories who will happily shred the welfare state, the NHS, social housing and workers’ rights. When Ed Miliband met Brand, the comedian-cum-activist explained, he made it clear he ‘welcomes and wants pressure from below’.”

If Labour is elected, Jones continues, “we will keep Ed Miliband to his word and pile pressure on him over housing, low wages, workers’ rights, public services, and whatever else.”

Two days later, in his self-explanation, Brand himself writes, “What Ed Miliband said on The Trews that seemed positive is that his government will be responsive to activism and campaigning. That will be pretty easy to evaluate quickly. Are media monopolies being broken up? Are the urgently needed houses being

built? Is austerity continuing? Is the NHS still being privatised? Are we still blaming immigrants, the disabled and disadvantaged for massive economic problems that they can’t have created? Is domestic policy being dictated by unelected elites in the financial and corporate world?”

The answer to all these questions is in reality already determined. Labour is a political creature of the financial oligarchy. If it is elected, no monopolies will be broken up. Austerity will continue as before. The NHS will continue to be decimated. Labour will scapegoat immigrants and the poor. And it will carry through the agenda of militarism and war.

Commenting on Brand’s book *Revolution* last December, the *World Socialist Web Site* explained, “Searching for an alternative to the present social order, he has plunged, entirely uncritically, into the fetid swamp of petty bourgeois radicalism—including a veritable who’s who of the purveyors of religious flummery. Just as centrally, Brand has sought political enlightenment from every Green, anarchist, libertarian and neo-Keynesian pundit imaginable—all of whom offer up social and economic nostrums that are not levelled against capitalism, but at the supposed evils of a system that does not take ‘sustainability’ and ‘localised production’ as its premise.

“Brand has been clutched to the collective bosom of what is in fact a privileged upper middle class layer—not so very far removed from the social group he now seeks to break from. And it is they who are responsible for his political miseducation.”

None of this has equipped Brand to face off the campaign waged by many of these self-same forces to convince him of the error of his ways and go on the stump for Labour. And neither will the ideas and political conceptions he advocates arm young people and workers to meet the political challenges that lie ahead.



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