
The Case of Dennis Archer

Writing on the Wall For Gore Democrat

by Stuart Rosenblatt

On April 16, Detroit Mayor Dennis Archer stunned the political pundits in the Midwest metropolis, by announcing that he is not seeking reelection as Mayor of the nation's tenth-largest city. While "the experts" were startled, the denizens of Detroit politics were not.

Archer, a former Republican, had burned his bridges to the neighborhood community and the labor movement over the course of the last several years. As the poster boy of the New Democrats, and the prototypical "black urbane Harvard-trained" politician, Archer symbolized the worst transformation of Democratic politics, away from the FDR labor-based urban machine into the pro-privatization, anti-industry Democrats of the last decade.

Archer replaced the popular previous Mayor, Coleman Young, a traditional constituency-based politician who would not have tolerated the machinations of Archer. Unlike Young, Carl Stokes, or even Washington, D.C.'s former Mayor Marion Barry, Archer prides himself on destroying the interests of local neighborhoods. In place of industry and growing neighborhoods, Archer has overseen the transformation of Detroit into a haven for garish gambling casinos and Major League ball parks. The latest stadium is capped by a wild collection of oversized concrete "Detroit Tigers," leering hungrily at the incoming sports fans.

Archer's defeat was even bigger. He is the leading Democrat in Michigan, the co-chair of the Democratic National Committee (DNC), and the former national co-chair of Al Gore's disastrous Presidential campaign. As political insiders in Michigan have said, Archer's fortunes were sealed when Gore's campaign went down to its dismal defeat.

The loss of Archer has immediate implications for the likes of Washington, D.C. Mayor Anthony Williams and other New Democrats. Williams, like the equally disagreeable former Mayor of Baltimore, Kurt Schmoke, is a public follower of Archer. As in the Biblical warning, "*Mene Mene Tekel Upharsin*," the handwriting is on the wall.

Destroying Constituency Politics

Archer was the leading proponent of privatization and deregulation in the Midwest, although others, such as Cleveland Mayor Michael White, were in the same mold. Archer's most egregious act was the privatization of the Detroit public



Detroit's Mayor Dennis Archer, co-chairman of Gore's election campaign a year ago, now can't win re-election, as the Michigan state party shifts away from Gore's "Republicans in Democratic clothing" policy.

schools, carried out in conjunction with Bush clone, Gov. John Engler (R).

The schools takeover centered around the \$1.5 billion school bond issue that had been passed by citizens for the explicit purpose of renovating primarily inner-city schools, using mostly minority contractors. Engler and Archer seized control of the schools against the wishes of the citizenry and earned their growing ire, both for abrogating their right to vote and for stealing the money.

The state stole not only the bond issue money, but also grabbed the \$1 million annual operating budget, and the system was not even in the red! Additionally, instead of hiring minority contractors, the new superintendent (now called the CEO) handed out the contracts to his cronies from outside the city. All new, very highly paid school administrators were also hired from outside.

Popular anger has grown, not subsided.

Beyond that, Archer immediately abolished the principals' union in the city and began dismantling other unions, as part of the privatization frenzy. This was popular with Wall Street and the Republican state government, but it has thoroughly alienated the citizenry, and especially, the city unions.

Archer refused to sign a contract with the American Federation of State, County, and Municipal Employees, the largest union in the city, and has alienated the United Auto Workers, easily the most powerful union in Detroit. He had promised UAW International President Stephen Yokich that the school takeover would not have a negative impact on job

security, but when the opposite occurred, Yokich circulated a letter attacking the Mayor. This letter was made public a year ago by local Democratic Party officials, and served to crystallize the growing opposition to Archer.

The Gore Fiasco

Archer was a national leader in the disaster called the Gore campaign. He promoted Gore's entire "Southern Strategy," from privatization to free trade. He earned the enmity of many of the core constituencies as a result.

Archer had hitched his wagon to a Gore victory. He was promised the post of either Attorney General or Secretary of Commerce in an incoming Gore Administration. When that scenario evaporated on Nov. 7, 2000, Archer was hung out to dry.

The defections from his mayoral campaign began to snowball. The labor movement quickly began to distance itself from his effort. Teamsters who were adamantly opposed to his promotion of free trade did not support him, city unions opposed him, and the Detroit Teachers Union, which had initially signed onto the privatization of the schools, reversed its position, and publicly disavowed its support.

Yokich himself, Archer's fellow DNC member, refused to endorse Archer, and when the Mayor sent out a plea for

prominent Democrats to support his reelection, the silence was deafening. Few, if any, state representatives endorsed his campaign, and Archer had no options but to capitulate.

Ironically, he had amassed a \$1.3 million campaign war-chest and was far-and-away the leading candidate, in terms of money. That is now history. It just shows that even a nationally backed and promoted politician like Archer can't buy himself the votes necessary to win, not after thoroughly disgusting the city.

Resistance to Archer's thug tactics mounted over the past year. A large coalition, to restore the vote of citizens in the school elections, has emerged to vehemently oppose the Mayor. Citizens who were threatened and intimidated by Archer following a petition campaign last year, have been aggressively agitating for his removal, and prominent school officials and local politicians have been leading the charge for his ouster.

The only opinion poll that Archer scored well in, occurred two days after his announcement that he would not seek reelection. A *Detroit News* poll reported that 63% of the citizens in the city overwhelmingly supported his withdrawal. For increasingly despised "New Democrats," like D.C.'s Anthony Williams, let this be a warning: The handwriting is on the wall.

'New Democrats' Grow Stale in Wisconsin

In a move described as a "sea change" in state politics, the Democratic Party Caucus in the Wisconsin State Legislature went behind closed doors in early May and removed the party leadership. In the shake-up, Reps. Shirley Krug (Milwaukee) and Antonio Riley (Milwaukee) were replaced by Spencer Black (Madison) and Spencer Coggs (Milwaukee).

According to observers in Madison, the ouster of Krug represented a blow against the centrist New Democrats, who have taken the Democratic Party down the road to destruction over the last several years, engineering massive defeats of Democratic majorities in statehouses all across the nation.

The other major casualty of the change in leadership, Riley, a leader of the school privatization policy called Milwaukee's Parental School Choice Program, had been a likely candidate for Mayor of Milwaukee. Riley was replaced on the budget-writing Joint Finance Committee by Coggs.

Coggs is a well-known legislator who has been outspo-

ken nationally on issues that pertain to defense of the General Welfare, as enunciated in the U.S. Constitution. Coggs is a leader in the fight against privatization, especially prison privatization, and has also played a national role in the fight to save D.C. General Hospital in Washington, D.C. In March, Coggs initiated a letter from the leadership of the Wisconsin Legislative Black Caucus to U.S. Sen. Herb Kohl (D), demanding that D.C. General, as the District's only public hospital, remain open. Coggs's letter sparked similar letters from around the nation that catapulted the fight to save D.C. General into the national arena.

The shake-up also put in Black as Minority Leader in the House. Together with Senate Minority Leader Chuck Chvala (D-Madison), the State Democratic Party has new spokesmen.

The changes in Madison come amid the growing strength of an emergent "FDR" reflex in the party, in defense of the General Welfare, centered around 2004 Democrat Presidential pre-candidate Lyndon LaRouche.

As Riley told the *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*, "This is politics. This is a sea change. When your team is out of there, they have a right to put their own folks in who reflect their political philosophy. That's what's taken place, and that's why I was removed from the Joint Finance Committee." — *Stuart Rosenblatt*