

POLIS 21st April 2005

Getting out

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Summary

Taking its point of departure from some current dilemmas, the paper raises the question of the knowledge of political actors of the situation they are in, and of the consequences for their action. It suggests some tentative implications for political education.

Political and social movements engage support, and create symbols and mythologies which reinforce that support and interpret events as successes for the movement. Such movements tend to falter or fail, however, or at best be subsumed into a context where they are unrecognizable. The paper raises the question of whether such a process is inevitable, and argues that it is. The problem is particularly acute on the social democratic left because of the relative intellectualization of goals and institutional means. Thinking about actors' perception of the processes involved throws us back to lay versions of epistemologies. The paper argues that political education ought to aim to sensitize citizens – perhaps especially younger citizens – to the dialectics of action and reflection on its consequences. Disenchantment is to be expected, but this is no reason to focus exclusively on cultivating one's garden.