

● **In the end
who will
defeat
Thatcher ?**

Communist Party of Britain (Marxist - Leninist)

FOR ALL the Labour Party leadership challengers' sound and fury about the future direction of the labour movement, they are merely generating a lot of heat without any light or forward impetus.

Tony Benn's contribution to the movement is unquestioned. But his challenge to Kinnock is damaging, not only for its short-term political effects, but for its encouragement of mistaken ideas about the role and nature of the Labour Party.

The Labour Party is not and never has been a socialist party. To rant about its "betrayal" of socialism is to rant about the betrayal of something that never existed. To go on about the need for the party to have socialist policies is to ask it to take on a job that it was not set up to do, and which it is unable to do.

Supporters of the leadership challenge - a curious mixture of the "good" (and pious), the bad, and the downright ugly - all claim to be of the "left", seeking to impose socialism on a non-socialist party.

Struggle for workers' rights

The pious see the struggle for equality as synonymous with socialism, which it is not. The struggle for equality once had a class content. It was the struggle for workers' rights and dignity against the capitalist class. But the pious see all the struggles for "equality" as equally valid and have turned it into its opposite: an abandonment of class politics in favour of a quest for equality within the working class on grounds of race, sex, disability, etc. Having lost all sense of perspective and turned inwards, it is natural that they attack the "reactionary" Kinnock, seeing him as a more immediate threat than Thatcher.

The bad go overboard with rhetoric about class struggle but abandon the reality of class politics, which has little to do with advancing the interests of our class. They attack the Labour Party for failing to lead the class struggle (it never has and never will), and for failing to be militant and socialist enough. In doing so they come full circle and join the enemy in attacking Labour, and spread confusion and dismay in the process. They are the sort who would berate a cripple for failing to run, rather than helping him to walk. And they deserve every bit of hostility they engender.

Then there are the downright ugly. These devious people seek to force a "socialist programme" on Labour in the full knowledge that it cannot deliver, but with intent of "exposing" its "betrayal" in the hope of self-substitution. They are malicious intruders in the party, with destructive intent, and the antagonism shown towards them by traditional Labour supporters, far from being "anti-socialist", simply shows they can smell a rat.

Labour's task is limited and modest. The Party was formed to be the voice of organised workers within a capitalist parliament, to press for legislative reform to ease and improve the lot of working people.

Defeat of Thatcher

Labour's current over-riding priority must be to fulfil that function once again. The longer we maintain the pretence that it can be something more or something different, the longer we blind ourselves to the importance of Labour's job today: to be the people's instrument to defeat Thatcher. That would be a grand and noble enough achievement in its own right. False wrappings of principle and socialist phraseology merely demean it by their falseness.

To go on about the ins and outs of Labour's policies misses the point. Workers have long used that party to put their own stamp on capitalist politics. Arguments for and against state industries and state provision of education, housing and health have long taken place within the parameters of capitalist economics and politics. But the labour movement has added its own voice and impetus to those policies which benefit it.

The struggle for peace

The same is true of defence. Both unilateralism and multilateralism are two sides of the same non-socialist political coin. Multilateralism, because it assumes that the Soviet Union is an aggressor to be bargained with; unilateralism because it asks the Soviet Union to throw away the one thing that has secured the peace - its nuclear weapons - and disarm in the face of US aggression.

When Thatcher and Reagan were publicly strutting about trying to whip up war, the Labour movement's unilateralist stance was one way of helping to put a spoke in their wheel. Now that they have been dragged kicking to the negotiating table (and are doing their best to scupper any meaningful talks), the labour movement's class stand for peace is to make sure the talks continue. But unilateralists, by definition, cannot demand talks, because they take unilateral stands.

The real principled choice is not between unilateralism or multilateralism but for the struggle for peace - and those who insist that the debate is about the former are now actually helping to obscure the latter.

And similarly, those who attack Kinnock in the name of socialism, merely serve to obscure the real enemy, Thatcher. As the Tory Lord Blake comments in his history of the Tory Party: "Division of the left suggests that it regards the right as at least tolerable."

Well, Thatcher is not tolerable. What we have to do is to unite over what we can achieve - defeating Thatcher - rather than squabble and bicker over what we cannot achieve - a futile attempt to turn the Labour Party into a socialist party.

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