

An open letter to Arthur Scargill

By Kate Ahrens, Pete
Firmin, Steve French and
Dorothy Macedo, officers
of the Socialist Campaign
Group Supporters Network

DEAR COMRADE Scargill,
It was agreed at the Annual Conference of the Socialist Campaign Group to write to you, giving our response to the idea of a new "Socialist Labour Party". Following the Hemsworth by-election result, it has become even more important that you consider the opinion of those on the left of the Labour Party who have fought alongside you for socialism over many years.

We consider it vital that, in a discussion about an issue this important, every voice on the left has an opportunity to be heard. It would be folly in the extreme to think that one section of the left could decide to launch a new party, and hope for it to succeed.

We believe the place for socialists in Britain today is inside the Labour Party, fighting for socialism against the Blairite anti-socialist project. We believe that this is still the case despite the removal of Clause Four, despite the refusal to endorse Liz Davies and despite the acceptance of Alan Howarth into the Parliamentary Labour Party.

It is clear that the mass of working people in the country are absolutely desperate to get rid of the Tory government. In the past seventeen years, we have seen brutal attacks on all sections of the working class and there is an overwhelming feeling of despair and defeat. It is crucial in this climate, that those who would be at the forefront of any struggle for socialism help the class as a whole take the first necessary step in regaining their strength. We must help in kicking the Tory government out of office. Without this first step, we can nothing.

In the document *Future Strategy for the Left* you say: "Labour is now almost indistinguishable from the Democratic Party in the United States, Germany's Social Democrats, or, nearer home, the Liberal Democrats. It has changed its policies on all the fundamental issues which have been determined by the Party Conference over many years."

Well, looking at the policies of all the parties mentioned, you would appear to be correct: indeed there is no longer much to choose between the Labour Party's poli-



cies and those of the Tory government. But by looking only a little further back in history, we can see that this is hardly a new situation. All the policies you mention in your document — 'Privatisation, National Minimum Wage, Unemployment, Pensions, Health, Education, Europe, Anti-trade Union Laws' — are all issues which have always been bitterly contested between right and left. The idea that they have been cast in stone since time immemorial and are only now being crushed by Blair is a nonsense.

The fundamental difference between the Labour Party, however right wing its policies are, and the Tories, or the Liberal Democrats, is its link with the working class. And that link was not forged by, nor is it dependent on, the party passing some good policies, or even having Clause Four in its constitution. It is true that the link with the trade unions has been under serious attack over recent years but it is not yet broken, and while that fact remains true, we would be conceding defeat before the battle is over if we left the Party.

In such a situation, the launching of a new party is both premature and a distraction. As was shown by the result in the Hemsworth by-election, such an approach will not reach out to the mass of working people. If a Socialist Labour candidate cannot gain more votes than the Tory or Liberal Democrat candidate even in a place like Hemsworth, surely you must see the folly of standing candidates against the Labour Party in less favourable places.

You say: "Today radical opposition in Britain is symbolised not by the labour and trade union movement but by the groupings such as those which defeated the poll tax, the anti-motorway and animal rights bodies, Greenpeace and other anti-nuclear campaigners and those fighting against opencast mining."

What about the dock dispute in Liverpool? The Scottish postal workers' strike? The JJ Food campaign? Trade union disputes may be at a low ebb, that is only to be expected given seventeen years of continual defeats, but it is not extinct. You also appear to forget the fact that large numbers of Labour Party members, and trade unionists, are involved in, and central to, the campaigns that you cite. You seem to be forgetting the history of struggle in this country when you imply that these campaigns are somehow separate from the

labour and trade union movement.

Ordinary trade unionists and Labour Party members have always been at the forefront of struggles, but other parts of the movement — the leadership — have always sought to hold back, and to check such struggles. The situation today is not different to that faced throughout the history of the labour movement. We face, not the end of struggle inside the Labour Party, but only another stage in the continuing battle between those of us who genuinely want to see socialism and those who mislead the working class through their bureaucratic manoeuvring.

If you truly wish to improve the lives of working class people, then you must agree that the first and most necessary steps to take right now are to get rid of the Tory government and to put concerted and united pressure on the incoming Labour government to implement real change.

In the first instance, that means uniting together people from all through the labour and trade union movement and fighting for those issues where we already have mass support: for a minimum wage — determined by the workers themselves; for renationalisation of the railways; for extra spending to rebuild the Welfare State. These are the areas where we can win, if only we can stick together in the fight for them.

Comrade Scargill, you say that the case for a Socialist Labour Party is overwhelming. But it is the case for socialism that is overwhelming. We are deluding ourselves if we think we can achieve it without the organised political activity of the working class themselves. That will come, and the next stages of it will come with the dispatching of the rotten and corrupt Tory government and their replacement with a Labour government, a government at least partially linked to our class. Please don't distance yourself from the tentative step forward, by pursuing a path away from the Labour Party and the fight which will continue inside it. It is not too late for you and your supporters in the Socialist Labour Party to pull back from this mistaken venture and join with us in our fight inside the Labour Party and the trade union movement. Oppose the Blairite project for the labour movement, of course, but don't oppose the labour movement itself.

Unfair to Bernie Grant

By Alan Thomas

I WAS interested to read your articles "Separate or equal" and "Segregate and repatriate?" in the January issue of *Workers' Liberty*. Of course it's true that black nationalism is a ludicrous and inadequate solution to racial ↓

problems in today's society. I would, of course, accept the vast majority of your arguments on this subject as, indeed, would most socialists.

However, your personal attacks on Bernie Grant were both childish and unnecessary. His ideas about repatriation are daft and totally unrealistic, as you state. But to equate him with those black leaders who have sought pacts with fascists is ridiculous. I know it can be hard at times to distinguish the two, but Michael Howard and the Klan are not quite the same thing! For one thing, Howard is the Home Secretary and therefore someone with whom an MP should argue points regarding social problems. For another, both the Klan and black nationalists would probably be willing to barbecue Howard, who is himself a Jew! Thus, Grant talking to Howard is not the same as Garvey meeting the Klan or Elijah Muhammed meeting the US Nazi Party.

Grant's message, erroneous though it is, is not "in effect... what the Powellite Tories, the National Front and the British National Party have been saying all along." A naive and unrealistic scheme for voluntary, free repatriation of black people to some mythical motherland is not the same as posting shit to them in order to force them out of neighbourhoods! The AWL should get this in perspective: Grant's politics are naive and misdirected, not racist or evil.

Finally, surely Grant's willingness to work on a regular basis with the white-dominated Parliamentary Labour Party, shows that he is far from being an "inverted racist." Someone who considered whites to be somehow evil or inferior would hardly have accepted a joint ticket with (white) Ken Livingstone in the post-1992 Labour leadership contest! Such insults just make your argument look shallow and juvenile.

Overall, you've got it right — unlike the matter of the AWL's sympathy for Billy Hutchinson's UVF front organisation, the PUP. However, childish insults and slurs against those who are merely misguided, are not the way to further an adult, socialist debate on such an important issue.

Against all immigration control?

By Brad Cleveland

THE REVOLUTIONARY left has always called for the abolition of all immigration controls; it was, for example, one of the issues which distinguished the far left from reformists and liberals in the Anti-Nazi League in the late 1970s. I'm not sure, however, that it is the right demand to raise.

Socialists are, of course, against nations and borders, and in favour of uniting people across the world. We are in favour of people's right to live and work wherever they wish. The problem with the political culture which the left has created around 'no to immigration controls' is that it has defined anything less than the complete abolition of such controls as reformist at best, and racist at worst.

"Abstract demands for open borders and a failure to address specific issues equally play into the hands of racists."

Thus the only real campaigns around immigration issues are either responses to specific new attacks (like the Asylum and Immigration Bill), or over specific deportations, or small campaigns involving just the revolutionary left (or, more accurately, whichever left group has set up the campaign in question). Campaigns to amend or reform the existing immigration legislation are treated with suspicion, or condemned as 'capitulating to racism.'

For example, the Stonewall Immigration Group has been campaigning for a couple of years or more for equality in the immigration rules' treatment of the partners of British

lesbians and gay men. Currently, the rules explicitly discriminate against 'same-sex' relationships. Of course, equality would leave the immigration laws as a whole intact, and some on the left have concluded either explicitly, or in unstated general attitudes, that the campaign is misguided, accepts the racist assumptions of the law, and so on. The trouble is that lesbian and gay couples threatened with forcible separation can't wait until the socialist revolution and the abolition of borders; their relationships are under immediate threat.

I think this 'maximalist' attitude applies to a wide range of issues. There are innumerable areas in the law which could be vigorously campaigned against. For example: improving people's rights of appeal; giving greater powers to tribunals (which currently can only make recommendations, unless the person has been in the UK legally for seven years, and whose recommendations are invariably then ignored by the Home Office); creating reciprocal agreements with specific countries (as apply to the EC); specifying countries which have an urgent 'refugee problem' and speeding up asylum processing in precisely the opposite sense to the government's current Bill, i.e. making it easier, not more difficult, to get asylum; improving people's rights to be joined by their families (and widening the definition of family); abolishing the visa system; ending the discriminatory nature of 'work permits' (at present you have to prove you are not taking a job for which a British citizen is equally qualified); and so on.

These would constitute important reforms, and would vastly improve the lives of thousands of people. (I am not dogmatic about these proposals in particular; I'm trying to make a general case for fighting around specific demands.) Yet the Left would tend to be deeply uncomfortable with a campaign around any or all of these demands, on the grounds that they appear to accept the legitimacy of immigration controls.

The central argument for putting opposition to all controls centre stage is that anything less, by capitulating to racist assumptions, will end up feeding racism, and by implication, fascism. This can be true, if the argument is presented as an alternative to 'unreasonable demands' for unlimited immigration. But it need not be; and it could also be that abstract demands for open borders and a failure to address specific issues — and therefore a failure to campaign, instead relying entirely on abstract propaganda — equally play into the hands of racists.

I am not advocating that socialists make propaganda in favour of immigration controls; and we should make propaganda for 'freedom of movement', the right of anyone to work in Britain regardless of nationality, the need to provide sanctuary for refugees — in other words, break the issue of immigration down into concrete areas, and campaign vigorously around them. 'End all immigration controls' seems to me too abstract, and carries too much emotional and political baggage, and so militates against a serious campaign.

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