

Scargill's Socialist Labour Party

Anarchist Communist Federation

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Arthur Scargill, President of the National Union of Mineworkers, is preparing to build a new Labour Party. He started the campaign to construct this party in the October issue of the Miner, the NUM's journal, where he called for a break with the 'new' Party. He followed this up shortly after at a meeting in London where he gathered together in London various trade unionists who were members of the Labour Party, the Communist Party of Great Britain, and various Trotskyist groupings. Here he unveiled plans to launch a Socialist Labour Party on May 1st 1996, and the reasons he was doing so. He followed this up with a similar meeting in Glasgow.

Scargill's strategy was summed up in a nine-page document, Future Strategy for the Left, where he addressed himself to the changes in the Labour Party that had resulted in the dropping of Clause 4 on common ownership, and the renunciation of any attempt at renationalisation, and at repealing the laws passed against industrial militancy under the guise of controlling the trade unions (which actually reinforced trade union bureaucrats' powers in sabotaging struggle).

He pointed to the concentration of power that was building up around Blair and his immediate circle, pointing to the vetoing of Liz Davis as candidate for Leeds North East as an example of this. He stated this was a sign of a qualitative change in Labour and that socialists could no longer stay in a party that "has been and is being 'politically cleansed'".

Scargill's latest move is just one of many that he has launched against the working class. Whilst no longer a member of the Communist Party, he remains firmly within the camp of Stalinism and has consistently been a defender of every move of the state capitalist bureaucracy and its satellites to crush the working class, from the suppression of the 1956 Hungarian revolution, via support for the invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968, to support for military rule in Poland up to continuing support for the ailing Castroist regime in Cuba.

Plan for Coal

As a leading bureaucrat within the NUM, he has also consistently sabotaged any struggles by the miners to develop their struggles and carry them beyond the clutches of the union bureaucrats. He and other leading NUM officials devised the Plan for Coal which was a deal to be reached with the then Labour Government in 1974. This allowed the Labour Government under first Wilson and then Callaghan to go ahead with pit closures, and to dampen opposition by the miners to them. Again during the Great Strike of 1984-5 Scargill and his fellow NUM officials used the Plan for Coal to keep the actions of the miners firmly under their control. The result was a very serious defeat for our class.

On an organisational level, Scargill is also a dab hand at sabotaging independent working class struggle. Towards the end of the miners strike he, in alliance with Tony Benn and the Campaign Group of so-called 'left' MPs, set up the Socialist Movement. This was able to call on a layer of Labour Party activists, many of whom had come into the Party after the 'left' turn orchestrated by Benn, mainly through the grouping organised around the document 'Beyond the Fragments' as well as a number of Trotskyists, quasi-Trotskyists and ex-Trotskyists who had joined the Labour party as entrists.

The Socialist Movement was an attempt by Scargill and 'left' social democrats to divert any efforts to break out of the straitjacket of Labourism/trade unionism. The rising anger among many in the mining communities and among other radicalised sections of the working class towards the trade union leaders and the Labour Party was to an extent diverted by the manoeuvres of this

grouping. They consistently acted as apologists for Labour and the unions, and they argued that a break with Labour was not possible, and that any activists should remain within Labour. Many of them had carved out niches for themselves in the structures of the unions and the Labour Party, within campaigns and in the structures of the local State. Indeed their allegiance to municipal socialism, both inside the GLC and within the 'left' Labour councils was a key plank in their platform. Their orientation to the local state gave them some common ground with the Greens(see separate article) and they consistently argued for a Red-Green Alliance. This attempt at an alliance has so far proved to be a failure, although both the Socialist Movement's and the Greens' failing health may yet make this come about. The shipwreck of municipal socialism with the changes in capitalism internationally helped through by the Conservative attacks of the last 15 years has disorientated them considerably, and made them swing to the right even more. Their insistence on no break with the Labour Party and their peddling of defeatism was a valuable aid to helping the Labour Party make the transformations that were necessary to adapt to the end of welfarism.

Sabotaging struggle

One of the Socialist Movement's (and Scargill's) greatest achievements in sabotaging struggle was the Save Our Pits campaign in 1992. With the threatened closure of 31 pits the NUM and its allies in the Socialist Movement looked to mobilising 'public opinion' and going through the courts. With the help of the TUC it drew in behind it Tory MPs like Winston Churchill, Paddy Ashdown, bishops, and the Confederation of British Industry. (see our analysis in Organise!29). Two massive demonstrations organised by Labour and the TUC took place, after which the matter was quietly dropped and the pit closures went ahead at a slightly slower pace. As we said at the time: 'The demonstrations and related activity were designed to divert and demoralise. People were meant to feel that they had done their bit, that after all, nothing could be changed, and that after a dreary walk through driving rain, they must go home and accept "Things as they are" .

Now however, differences are emerging between Scargill and other elements in the Socialist Movement. Benn and his followers have always argued strenuously against breaking with Labour. Others like, Hilary Wainwright, are opportunistically hedging their bets and saying 'not yet'. Scargill has seen that large numbers of people, especially among young people, have become disenchanted with Labourism and that new social movements have emerged and are about to emerge that are profoundly suspicious of social-democratic politics and are oriented towards direct action. He now needs to develop a new organisation that will sabotage and divert struggle, because of the depths to which Labour has been discredited. As he wrote in Future Strategy for the Left: 'The environmental and community activists are doing a good job, but inevitably, their aims are "single purpose" with no clear political perspective. It is a tragedy that the Labour Party is not at the centre of co-ordinating and organising such campaigns. A socialist Labour Party would be able to galvanise mass opposition to injustice, inequality and environmental destruction, and build the fight for a Socialist Britain".

Scargill has his eye on similar organisations that have been created on the Continent, above all in Italy, France and Spain, formed out of remnants of Stalinism, Trotskyism and the Greens as well as the fragments of the leftist groups of the 70s like Lotta Continua.

Labourism

Various Trotskyist groups have expressed their approval of the construction of a Socialist Labour party. Militant Labour welcomed the moves, indeed praising the models already set up on the Continent. Furthermore, they point to the Labour Representation Committee, which was the precursor of the Labour Party as an example- in other words they want a re-run of the Labour Party. Scargill, however, is skilled at bureaucratic manoeuvres and at early meetings has already put the freeze on Militant Labour. Since then, their enthusiasm has cooled somewhat. Other Trotskyist grouplets- Workers Power, the Workers Revolutionary Party(Workers Press) as well as the Communist Party of Great Britain(Weekly Worker) have also expressed approval, although again this has cooled for similar reasons. They welcome the creation of the Socialist Labour Party for many of the same reasons as Scargill, and because Leninism in general is in severe crisis. They need a new home.

Other groups poured scorn on the idea of setting up a Socialist Labour Party. With entrism groups like Socialist Outlook, wedded thoroughly to Labourism, this is hardly surprising, but the Socialist Workers Party, organised outside Labour for many years and pushing a selective anti-Labour rhetoric (but always calling for a Labour vote at election time) is more interesting. They have denounced the Scargill initiative. They 1) fear a challenge to their recruiting from disenchanted Labourites and from among their own members, many of whom have views very similar to “old” Labour 2) as we have said for a long time, they represent an external faction of Labour, and find painful any break with established Labourism. Scargill’s old mates in the Stalinist Communist Party of Britain and the daily Morning Star, have similarly given the thumbs down, again because they are so closely tied up with Labour and the trade union apparatuses.

It might be that Scargill’s initiative runs out of steam very quickly. On the other hand, bearing in mind the desperation of many leftists to create a new organisation to shelter them from the storm, and the Continental examples, the Socialist Labour Party may get off of the ground. As I said above, a new reformist party is needed to sabotage struggle. Anarchist Communists must argue strongly against the politics of this manoeuvre, through articles in our press, and through leaflets and spoken contributions at meetings to set up the Socialist Labour Party, as well as at public meetings organised by the ACF and by other revolutionaries.

Footnote: Since this article was written, Scargill has launched his Party, and made moves to exclude the Trotskyists, above all Militant Labour. Tommy Sheridan, leading light in Scottish Militant Labour, and two other leading members of Militant Labour walked out of the founding meeting. Militant Labour plan to go ahead with their own project of setting up a Scottish Socialist Alliance, in conjunction with the Stalinist Communist Party of Scotland and the Scottish Socialist Movement. This will fulfill the role that the Socialist Labour Party was meant to fill for Militant Labour, at least in Scotland. It will present candidates at elections, enlarging and amplifying the electoral work that Scottish militant Labour has already done.

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