

Dream a Little Dream

Letter by Mark Holt, November 2003

The Stop the War Coalition is at a historical juncture and decisions made now will not only affect the development of our movement but could open up extremely exciting opportunities for the left.

There has been criticism of the coalition by some on the left who question the wisdom of working with the Muslim Association of Britain (MAB). They say the coalition is a popular front rather than a united front and invoke Trotsky to tell us we are wrong. Let's be sensible here - when the issues were being discussed in the 1930s the Spanish working class was facing a direct threat to its very existence from a fascist coup led by General Franco.

We face no such direct threat, no historical parallel can be drawn. What we are building is the broadest possible peace movement we can - something larger and more effective rather than smaller and purer.

Is the coalition a popular front? Yes. Is it right to work with MAB? Absolutely! The Islamic community in this country are suffering daily racist attacks. The government's war on terror is whipping up Islamophobia. Muslims are against the war. They are a natural and vital constituency for us to work with. You do not get anywhere by criticising someone's religion.

The coalition is now facing a serious question. We have built a movement powerful enough to challenge government but we cannot furnish a viable alternative to replace it. In the spring George Galloway wrote of how unrepresentative parliament is, how firefighters, teachers, nurses, trade unionists, people fighting to defend asylum seekers and the peace movement have no voice in Westminster.

The Labour Party was set up originally to put workers and trade unionists into parliament, to give voice to their issues. Labour went

belly-up in the 1980s and New Labour, a Thatcherite conspiracy, took its place. Sadly, this process is irreversible. Old Labour is dead and working class people have been cruelly disenfranchised.

There are people on the left who are not interested in addressing this vital issue. They say they are revolutionaries and they are waiting for the revolution to happen. Well, I'm in my forties now, and I have hung round for 25 years awaiting this event. I've seen some historic battles such as the poll tax and the miners' strike but none have come close to revolution. Perhaps while we are awaiting this seismic event we could do something useful like address the need to put our people in parliament?

How dare we deny homeless people, unemployed people, people on low pay and pensioners a political party with real clout fighting for their interests both inside and outside parliament? How long must they wait?

Like many others I joined Arthur Scargill's Socialist Labour Party (SLP) when it was formed in 1996. Arthur offered us the dream of building a mass party capable of challenging New Labour for power. Unfortunately because of how the SLP was structured and its unwillingness to engage in a dialogue with other groups on the left that project sadly failed.

I believe that both the SLP and the Socialist Alliance have too small a social base to launch the kind of party that is necessary for this task. However, the coalition has a huge and representative base of support. We have shown we can mobilise hundreds of thousands and on occasions millions. We could build something much more than a peace movement.

I have a dream that one day the Stop the War Coalition, Lindsey German, John Rees and the SWP, Andrew Murray and the Communist Party, the Socialist Alliance, Arthur Scargill and his SLP, Tommy Sheridan and his Scottish Socialist Party, George Galloway and other MPs and new left trade unionists like Bob Crow and his RMT grasp this great opportunity to create that mass party.

It will require a lot of tolerance, pragmatism and compromise. Perhaps this is where the revolution lies, not waiting for some mythical armed insurrection of the working class, but a revolution within ourselves, to put aside our petty differences and work together in the interest of working people. Isn't this what we all came into politics for, to fight for our class? Isn't this why we built our own various parties? The truth is we can't do it on our own, but collectively we could.

Arthur Scargill said that socialists should always paint the vision of socialism splendid. So let's do a Martin Luther King and dream a little. Imagine what a wonderful government comprising the best people on the left could do for the people of this country? Imagine what a beacon of hope such a government would be for humanity, for the poor, the destitute and the hungry?

Such a government would at last put socialism back on the international agenda. Now wouldn't that be a real revolution!

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