

support and promotes a dangerous complacency.

Benn's view that 'the greatest self deception to be found inside the labour movement is practised by those who pretend that the problem can be described in terms of Thatcher and Thatcherism. . . enables him to avoid analysing the actual political character and 'popular' nature of the government and reactionary movement. His argument that the only serious electoral reform needed is an annual Parliament is plain anti-democratic. Above all, the whole nature of a need for alliances is either misunderstood or ignored.

Benn thinks of alliances as 'electoral arrangements'. This narrow conception highlights an important strategic difference between those inspired by Marxist analysis and those imprisoned by Labourism. The Communist Party is the major, organised Marxist political force in Britain. It yields to no-one in terms of militant action and mass agitation on the great class issues of the day. Yet, its 1983 congress had no doubts about the necessity of alliances. The main resolution adopted at that congress said: 'Developing mass class and democratic struggles, uniting the labour movement and seeking out allies in the broad, anti-Tory front, is the way forward for the labour movement rather than taking a narrow, go-it-alone, sectarian approach to its activity.' Why?

Alliances are not to be reduced to electoral deals. Alliances between the labour movement and other social forces and movements help the development of the working class, strengthen progressive thinking, enable specific goals to be won and enrich all involved.

For example, the impact of the women's liberation movement on the labour movement has helped the labour movement to remedy some of its own bad practices and to change, in a limited way, some of its goals and activities to better reflect the needs and aspirations of women. This has enabled the labour movement to win new forces to its side and to attract new militants to its ranks. None of this would have been possible without feminists practising the politics of alliance while preserving their own organisation and autonomy. Similarly, as the labour movement campaigns for the national rights of the Scottish and Welsh peoples it broadens its support, enriches its culture and unifies the British working class.

It is through alliances around specific goals and campaigns that important conflicts and policy weaknesses can become widely recognised, constructively con-

fronted and overcome. The politics of broad, democratic alliance are essential to the isolation and defeat of the Tory government. They are also essential to the creation of the popular majority needed for a successful democratic and socialist revolution in Britain.

There is plenty of current experience illustrating the merits of broad alliance politics. The campaigning around the preservation of the GLC and ILEA in London, for instance, has won successes, isolated the Government and attracted new forces and adherents to the Left. Much to the surprise of some Labour politicians it was around democratic issues that Londoners really moved. Where alliances were achieved with Conservatives, Social Democrats and Liberals they helped not harmed the Left. But, there is still resistance, especially inside the Labour Party, to this type of successful campaigning politics in which the construction of alliances is an everyday occurrence.

This reflects another old divide in the British labour movement. It is not the increasingly irrelevant and diminishing division between Stalinism and Trotskyism to which Benn refers. It is the far more important divide between the politics of the popular front and what might be called the 'politics of pure socialism'. Benn's analysis is dangerously close to this 'pure' and, in practice, sectarian politics. This politics overemphasises the imminent collapse of capitalism, underestimates the strength of the capitalist class and its broad support and overstates the actual present power of the labour movement. It leads to the false equation: Struggle + socialist policy + incorruptible/accountable leadership = socialism. This is as false as Benn's 1984 lesson 'if you fight you win'. Militancy is essential but it is not enough as has been shown in so many struggles against hospital closures, job losses and other real issues recently.

Only a few years ago the Labour Left was on the ascendant, at least inside the Labour Party, with Tony Benn the spearhead. In this period many people left the Communist Party convinced that a Communist movement in Britain was no longer needed. They were deeply mistaken. Today, more than ever, the Left needs the inspiration of the Communist Party's programme and politics which combines socialist principle and mass action with a strategic policy for alliance and advance. The restoration of the Communist Party's lost thousands would help the whole movement retrieve our lost millions and go on to the offensive.

DAVE GREEN Who Dares Wins



Much of Tony Benn's argument (January *Marxism Today*) is spot on. I fully agree that struggle and action are essential for progress, that left policy must be clearly and coherently put, and that the state in Britain is not 'neutral'.

But Benn points us in the wrong direction when he dismisses the challenge of the SDP/Liberal alliance as 'half a dozen *Guardian* readers'. Once again, he underestimates the significance of Labour's lost