



From Moscow to Muswell Hill: Stalinist chic for the apolitical.

What Will You Wear To The Revolution?

Designer socialism. Insult or compliment? The triumph of form over content or has, at last, the message found a medium? This one will run and run... What style commentators and pundits have ignored is that the Left and its myriad splinter groups have had their own distinctive 'style' for years.

The Left has not been lacking an image, it's just that it's not been up to scratch. Nowhere is this more evident than in the clothes and 'personal imagery' of our radical leaders. Radical chic is worn by hip, young apolitical dudes in Covent Garden, not those gathering at Blackpool and Brighton.

The Left does have clothes codes of its own. The consequent image is as much a clue to the political affiliation of the wearer as their newspaper. At the recent Left Unlimited event, *Marxism Today* was proud to parade these political clothing cliches in the form of a fashion show. So what does the Left have to offer the rag trade this year?

Still very popular is the labour movement suit. Its most attractive feature is its versatility. Our model's classic cut is at much at home in the conference centre as in the pub. 1987's colour? The same as last year's and the year before - grey. The seat of the trousers should sport a dull sheen. Note that the cut is loose and entirely shapeless. The trousers verge on the flared, the waist is low to fit snugly beneath the beer gut. The shirt to be *de rigueur* does have to be nylon, and to finish off - that vital accessory, the beer glass.

Careful fashion-watchers among you will have noticed a growing trend or should I say 'tendency'. Trendsetter Derek Hatton has had great influence as the Trot at the top'. Soft leather jacket, cotton shirt in pastels, thin tie and sharp Italian shoes. The hair is worn long in a neat Kevin Keegan perm. This is a 'casual' look, suitable for the terraces or the rally.

Smart and comfortable this may be, but not the clothes to sport if you want a career in the Labour Party. If you do, try the 'realigned' look, fresh from the GLC fashion house and its top model, Ken Livingstone. Check out the 60s influence here, the

flared trousers, the corduroy safari jacket and casual suede shoes. Fabrics are soft and crumple proof - this is the cuddly Left at its cuddliest.

What can the ultra-Left offer in the way of fashionable inspiration? Try the lumpen proletarian look, as seen outside many tube stations. The donkey jacket and shapeless jeans play a useful role in erasing any sense of sexuality and individualism. No deviationist enjoyment here. Essentially practical, it keeps the wearer warm on early morning picket lines. A vital accessory, a bag full of unsold *Socialist Workers*.

Ecologically aware? One really shouldn't be seen in ones 2CV without the green wellies, pastel dungarees and rainbow woolly hat. It's warm, sensible clothing for the countryside, so why do its wearers live in Islington? The only paper to handle with this outfit has to be recycled..

Perhaps you're more of a Spikey Sid rather than a cuddly Ken. Then try the 'anarchist punk'. Worn tatty leather jacket, torn jeans, enormous boots and T-shirt sporting the slogan 'Fuck off world leaders'. The whole image says 'I hate you and you can hate me'. Political and fashion sophistication is on the same level.

At Benetton *The Internationale* is playing over the muzak to welcome the Eurocommunists, eager to snap up Eurochic. With *Capital* in one hand and *The Face* in the other, these are the class warriors who will storm the barricades in Covent Garden (that is, if they've noted it in the filofax).

The irony is that Covent Garden is pushing 'political' clothing to the consumer hordes. Hammer and sickles on everything from boxer shorts to socks. Most of the wearers are unaware of the revolutionary origins of the designs. To them, Lenin was the bloke who sang with McCartney. Never mind, they'll look good at the show trial.

An over-indulgence in stereotypes? There is a more serious point. Clothes and the cultural and social mores they express have been thought important to past socialists. The emancipation of women meant not only the vote but also an end to the corset. Revolutionary Russia encouraged designers

CHANNEL 5 CHOICE



Pub or meeting: the labour movement suit.

to produce clothes that were both practical and attractive.

The fashion industry is a wonderful example of capitalism at work. Clothing is a constant physical necessity yet fashion is in a state of constant flux. It generates change to make money which involves not rejecting but recycling the past.

It is not enough for the Left to

ignore the demands and tastes that this has generated. It cannot be concerned simply with the provision of clothing as a necessity but also its quality and appeal. People have to be able to express their personality through their appearance. The Left should know that personal politics has wormed its way into its wardrobe.

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