

Sunday, 12 December 2010

## In Praise of the Far Left



This article on Liberal Conspiracy really annoyed me. Emily Davis talks about the need for the left to unite and be nice to each other - which of course is a *good thing*: a bit more comradeship and genuine discussion beats zero-sum point scoring over entrenched positions any day. But where the plea for unity fails utterly is when she turns her thoughts to the far left. Out goes the warm glow of conviviality and in comes bilious animosity. She writes:

Communism never was a 'nice idea' – it always involved an advocacy of 'dictatorship' and violent suppression of dissent, and evidence shows that this brutal attitude has always borne itself out in practice.

They [the far left] obviously have the right to say what they think, and to protest where they choose, but social-democrats and democratic-socialists can and should tell them and others that we think their views are comparable to Fascism in their disregard of human rights.

At this current time of fightback against the new Coalition government, we need a centre- and moderate left- coalition of opposition. What we don't need and

shouldn't want are allies on the far-left who aren't progressive in the slightest – they remain stuck in the past. We need to think about what is best in the long-term for our future.

Hi Emily, that was Harry's Place on the phone. They'd like their smelling salts back.

I'm not going to get into a convoluted and long-winded argument about the Marxist theory of communism. To identify the regimes that used and abused Marx's theories to legitimate their actions and privileges with the stateless post-class society of associated producers, a society for which the seeds are present in really existing technological capacities and concrete relationships demonstrates a very superficial understanding of what Marxism's all about.

But what I will say is if it wasn't for the Trots, if it wasn't for current and former members of the likes of the Socialist Party, Socialist Workers Party, and the 57 varieties slogging their guts out in the trade unions, in the community campaigns, the social movement organisations, Emily's apologia for witch-hunting would be entirely academic.

It is a truth universally acknowledged that the desire for effective action is in want of effective organisation. Currently many comparisons are being made with the scenes of 20 years ago when quarter of a million people took to London's streets in protest against the Poll Tax. That required organisation, which was provided by the Anti-Poll Tax Federation. Whatever criticisms one can make of Militant's role within it, they provided dedicated activists and a leadership that helped get it off the ground. They worked as organisers of bailiff busts, did the unglamorous donkey work, organised demos, lobbies and public meetings, and acted as McKenzie's Friends.

Another argument doing the rounds is the militancy and radicalism of the protest and occupation movement can be partially explained by the failure of the anti-war mobilisations in 2003. The largest demonstration in British political history was peaceful and law-abiding, but didn't stop Blair and Bush from carrying out their assault on Iraq. Again, whatever criticisms can be made of the SWP, if they had not taken the initiative of forming Stop the War

Coalition after September 11th, not bothered with the invisible but necessary work around opposing the invasion of Afghanistan, the anti-war movement would have been much, much weaker.

This isn't a bad record for people who hold views "comparable to fascism in their disregard for human rights" and "aren't progressive in the slightest". One wonders where Emily's "centre- and moderate left-coalition of opposition" were during anti-fascist mobilisations, anti-deportation campaigns, campaigns against privatisation and closures, and industrial disputes of recent years. Would the Vestas Occupation have been a *cause celebre* if it wasn't for the advice and solidarity of Trotskyist organisations? Had it not been for the determined interventions of the Socialist Party, would the wildcat strike at Lindsey Oil Refinery been turned away from nationalist slogans and anti-foreigner sentiment?

Trade unions would definitely be all the poorer if it wasn't for the thankless work undertaken by thousands of Trotskyist shop stewards and lay activists over the last 20-30 years. I know our local trades council would be dead and buried if it wasn't for the persistence and patience of activists rooted in this tradition.

Luckily, because the far left are the ones who've done (and do) the necessary ground work for many contemporary social movements, Emily and other witch-hunters like Luke Akehurst and Harry's Place are unlikely ever to be in a position to exclude anyone. And it's just as well: the energy, organisation and radicalism of the far left are a feather in the anti-cuts movement cap.

If we didn't have them, it would be necessary to invent them.