

BROTHER BENN'S TAKEOVER BID

It is not usual to comment on other parties' conferences. But Labour Blackpool conference was not usual. It marked a parting of the ways in British political history. For the first time, a Marxist un-democratic group is within striking distance of seizing power of a majority party. They may succeed this time, they may fail and try again later, they may shock their party into awareness of the ugly dangers many preferred to close their eyes to and hope they would go away. But they are a real and present danger So it is not just an internal Labour matter, it affects us all.

It affects us doubly because many of the trade unions are part of the Labour Party, and led, controlled, or influenced by sympathisers of the Left, the Marxist left in many cases, who have made clear their intention of using their trade union industrial power for political purpose.

This intent is not confined to a small Marxist fringe. It is accepted TUC policy, enunciated by the TUC's 1978 President, David Basnett, ruler for life of the powerful GMWU, in his presidential address, and questioned by no one present.

Remember, too, it was Mr Basnett's union which proposed the extreme economic motion which Mr Benn leaned on so heavily in his programmatic speech promising the abolition of the Lords, exit from the EEC and total nationalisation within the first month of Labour's election with him as ruler. Mr Benn forgot to remind us of another view of his, that the life of a parliament might be lengthened if necessary - for how long, anyone may guess.

Mr Benn won his majorities at Blackpool thanks to union bloc votes. And we have to live with those unions. That is why I regard the Blackpool conference as doubly serious, a double threat to democracy and social peace.

In January, the Labour Party will be holding a special conference under the chairmanship of a man who believes the Soviet system to be superior to our own, Mr Kitson, to decide how to choose the party's next leader. Labour groups in constituencies which would never dream of returning a Labour MP will share the choice with the trade union hierarchy and Labour MP's.

Barring a marked change in the composition and mood of constituency Labour Parties—which could not happen in weeks or even months - mandatory re-selection will speed up the process by which the parliamentary party has already

been moving leftwards inexorably leftwards, as association after association was taken over. I am not questioning the right of constituencies to re-select their MP's - we laid that down a long time ago in the Chelmer rules. What I am noting is the different kind of MP which will result. You will have seen the constituency delegates on TV, their faces distorted with hatred, fanaticism. It was not only Mrs Shirley Williams who referred to "fascism of the Left". Many delegates, many MP's present expressed the same concern; not a few made comparisons with Hitler. After all, we only briefly watched the constituency delegates on TV; democratic Labour party members have to live with them week in week out. Some go in actual fear of them in some parts of Britain.

Bear in mind that the fanatics you saw on TV will share the choice of the Labour Party's next leader with union bosses, now in their positions of influence for life, some chosen by not more than one per cent of their members.

These self-perpetuation corporations of union magnates enjoy the right to speak on behalf of hundreds of thousands of members on political matters, and to interfere in the democratic process locally and nationally.

Many Labour delegates, Labour MP's trade union delegates present at Blackpool now share our concern. Some left it late, some scoffed at the dangers until now. Some might have done more to fight it. No matter, so long as they see it now, and so long as they have the courage to fight - inside or outside their party, that is their affair. I should like them to see us as allies, concerned to preserve democracy, constitutionality, social peace and progress.

I can tell you, several of them told friends of ours: it would be tragic for Britain if Benn or his nominee includes the pliant Mr Callaghan, who will never fight the Left who raised him to the top, were to come to power in the next election. If Benn or his friends take over the party and lose the next election badly so that the party learns a lesson, there is hope for us all. But if Benn and his friends were to be at the head of the Party, when things went badly for our party, then centuries of peaceful political and economic progress could come to an end. Many decent Labour people now fear the thought of this prospect. Should it concern us less?

I know that many who see this danger, have not yet drawn all the conclusions, do not understand what we must do to save the economy and win wider support. But

they sense that we must be brave and fulfill our promises, not fudge, not shirk battles, if we are to maintain and strengthen the voter's confidence in us. I promise them, as I promise you, that I shall not let them down, not let Britain down.

If, by the irony of history, we must win through to save the Labour Party's Soul as well as Britain's freedom, we shall do that too, and ask nothing in return except that a renewed Labour Party learns from experience and respects the rules.