

National Front: Right or Left?

By Judy Englander

In the last year or so a long overdue point has been made in various publications: namely, that the National Front is, by virtue of its social and economic policies, essentially a socialist, 'left wing' party. The slogan, 'National Front is a Nazi Front' has been countered by the rejoinder, 'National Front is a Socialist Front'. This insight has, predictably, stirred up a hornet's nest. The Front's semi-official organ, *Spearhead*, devoted two pages to a denial of allegations of socialism. And, of course, the Socialist Workers' Party has likewise expressed outrage at the prospect of being identified with its *bête noir*.

I welcome this clarification of issues which effectively demolishes once and for all the myth that the aims of the National Front and the various socialist movements are opposed, an obfuscation in which the latter have a vested interest because it detracts from the violent and (anti-middle class) discriminatory elements of their own ideology, and enables them to don the mantles of progressivism and humanism by virtue only of their opposition to the Front. However, I have strong reservations about the way in which the argument has been presented and the terms in which it has been couched. The National Front, we are told, is a socialist party; therefore it is 'left wing'. A left spectrum is implied in which 'mainstream' socialists occupy most of the positions, while the Front appears as an aberration, a *variant* of the 'real thing'.

But this begs a million questions, among these the hoary old problem, what are 'left' and 'right'? What makes a policy 'left' or 'right' wing? If we look at the political alignments of the last two centuries we see, not two static identities persisting over the years, but a much more fluid situation in which the label 'left' or 'right' has fallen on a variety of positions according to the fashion and circumstances of the day.

The first left-wingers were the liberals of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, advocating the free market and the career open to talent against an interventionist and aristocratic establishment. But in time these clear-cut divisions on the basis of free trade versus state regulation, equality of opportunity versus institutionalised privilege, and personal liberty versus paternalism became blurred. The party of the establishment took over many of the tenets of the free trade position without consistently applying the libertarian premise to all areas of life. With regard to the individual's private, non-economic life, conservatives have always maintained an ambiguous position inherited from their paternalist, Tory past.

On the other hand, the twentieth century has seen the rise of various socialist movements which, while militantly opposing free trade, have usually staunchly defended the individual's right - so crucial to the genuine Libertarian position - to freedom in his or her private life, limited only by the rights of others.

What has emerged, therefore, is an odd situation where the new so called 'left' has *returned* to the interventionist economic doctrines of the *ancien regime*, while retaining a selected few of the liberal 'old left' principles. It is quite wrong that socialists should present themselves as traditional socialists, essentially, a re-statement of the old mercantilist ideology sprinkled here and there with a dash of liberalism, such as their support for the emancipation of homosexuals from discriminatory legislation, a position derived from thoroughly classical liberal premises (but which, unfortunately, most classical liberals ignored). Socialism is, I contend, a fundamentally *right wing* ideology.

So where stands the National Front? From my perspective it cannot be considered a left-wing party because it is socialist. On the contrary, I believe that the Front is, in fact, right-wing - because it is socialist and because the liberal/Libertarian standpoint of

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an authentic 'left' precludes socialism: socialism is a sometimes more liberal variant of that old, mercantilist and morally authoritarian ideology which was held in the past by high Tories, and today by the National Front.

In the policies of the National Front we see a consistent return to all the anti-liberal policies of the past, without the concessions to Libertarianism made by some mainstream socialists. Like this mainstream, the Front advocates a planned economy. (And it really is irrelevant to the cause of freedom whether under such planning title to property is still vested in individuals as in the Front policies, or in the state or 'community' as advocated by mainstream socialists. Private ownership without control renders the concept meaningless, and simply permits profit making without the risks, responsibilities and costs of genuine independent ownership.) The National Front differs from mainstream socialists only in that it is more consistent and therefore more completely traditional and authoritarian. The National Front has returned to socialism's ideological homeland on the right by advocating not only 'strong government' and economic interventionism but also (racial) aristocracy and moral paternalism.

It follows that, far from being a variant of socialism, or its aberration, National Front policies represent the pure type of that doctrine. NF, is not only a socialist front, but also the only consistent socialist front.