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Political process passing — labor leader lectures

by Gil McGowan

Average citizens must begin to take a more active interest in the political process if the pressing problems of our modern era are to be met effectively, said Tony Benn, a prominent British Labour Party M.P.

He was in Edmonton this past weekend to address a conference on democratic socialism co-sponsored by the Department of Elementary Education and the Woodsworth-Irvine Socialist Fellowship.

Benn, who took time out from his campaign for the leadership of the Labour Party to attend the Edmonton conference, told a SUB Theatre audience of about three hundred that working people must quickly find their voices if they hope to counteract the growing political influence of multi-national corporations.

He charged that international business conglomerates have begun "to demand that political institutions change to suit their needs" and that this has resulted in the "dismantling of democratic safeguards."

According to Benn, this erosion of democracy has caused the gap between rich and poor to widen and has made it virtually impossible for trade unions and special interest groups to operate effectively in Britain.

He said that business leaders and the government officials who support them have justified their attacks on political freedom by saying that such measures are necessary to protect the state against outside aggression (i.e. the Soviet/Communist threat).

"Under capitalism there has always been repression," Benn says, adding that even left-leaning political parties like the British Labour Party have often taken little action to better the situation.

"The leadership of all the political parties are moving together," thereby narrowing the spectrum for political discussion, he says.

If socialist political parties hope to break big business' stranglehold on power, Benn says that they must begin to develop "close links to the daily struggle... to the people actually fighting for their rights."

He feels that instead of using our technological abilities to secure profits for an elite minority steps must be taken to ensure a more sensible and equitable distribution of resources.

"We are talking about using our technological ability to fulfill the needs of people," he says.

In conclusion, Benn stressed that political parties who are genuinely interested in the welfare of the people must be willing to "extend democracy," to allow all people to become involved in the process of political decision making.

"Socialism is about democracy... democracy is about taking power into our own hands," he said.

Grapevine

The deadline for registering a club with the Students' Union is September 15. Interested applicants and club members looking to re-register should see Florence Pastoor at the Clubs Commissioner office to pick up registration forms, as well as information on offices, phones, and office keys.

Edmonton feminists will take to the streets September 16 for their annual "Take-back-the-night" walk down Whyte ave. The march is to rally support to the causes of women, and draw attention to issues that they are faced with. The demonstration will form at the Students' Union theater at 11:15, immediately following the Heather Bishop concert. Interested participants should meet outside the north-east door of the Students' Union Building.

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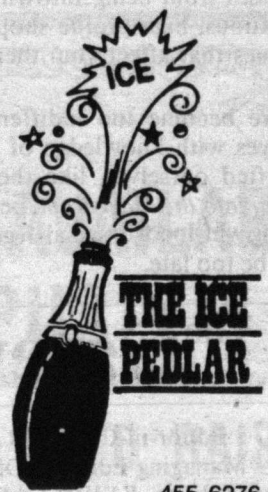
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