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Glory to the tales of Arthur

● MICHAEL JONES on the triumph of the miners' leader at Blackpool

THE Labour party conference will not recede easily in the memory. If the hard left does finally succeed in taking over the party's power centres, what happened at Blackpool last week will be seen as the turning point, never to be erased.

There, for all to witness, was a titular head seeking to camouflage his weakness by taking refuge in the vocabulary of violence. He was outflanked and outshone by a revolutionary leader exulting in his power and preaching an intoxicating gospel of intransigence, defiance, and revolt. It was, in short, Arthur Scargill's conference and not Neil Kinnock's.

Kinnock declared that there was "no messing" about what he had to say but it was Scargill who carried the greater conviction. His moment as a militant leader in a party desperate for a dynamic answer to Mrs Thatcher's long ascendancy had come. Arthur Scargill seized it.

His solutions were simple and unqualified. Total victory was attainable without conditions. Financial problems were removable at the stroke of an accountant's pen. The way to deal with opposition was to confront it with massed force. He told an enthralled audience that not only the entire British trade union movement was watching his miners struggle but the world.

The essential requirements were unyielding class loyalty, observance of the supreme law that a picket line must never be crossed, the conviction that slogans, however hackneyed, carry an undeniable inner force. With a lifetime's training, word-perfect delivery and the emotional weight of the embattled miners behind him, Scargill could hardly fail. Nor did he. He and Labour came

together at Blackpool with all the drama of a Wagnerian climax.

After last year's election disaster and a year of tentative Kinnock leadership, the party was more than ready for Scargill's stories of a real battle against the enemy. These were conveniently collectivised as the Tories, *their bosses, their police and their judges*. After the failure to seek power through the ballot box, here was the real smell of a fight for supremacy over the forces of the state machine.

Kinnock, whose Downing Street ambitions appear traditional by comparison, knows all this is dangerous stuff. It stores up trouble for a future Labour government and damages the electoral likelihood of there being one. Scargill, in contrast, never disguised his political intent in attacking Mrs Thatcher's government on the industrial front, and had every expectation fulfilled at Blackpool.

The fallout will take some time to settle but some moderates were in no doubt about the immediate consequences. They are resigned already to defeat at the next general election.

For the hard left in the constituency parties, Scargill's triumph points the way ahead. Some senior Labour MPs think Kinnock's own position is in jeopardy. The hard left has never forgiven him for opposing Benn's bid to become deputy leader.

In turn, Benn has been quick to signal the next stage of his drive to make the entire party leadership directly accountable to the activists outside parliament: to see the shadow cabinet directly elected each year by the party's electoral college of unions, constituency parties and MPs. Kinnock himself appeared to recognise the changed position he occupies as Labour's first leader to be elected by this system. His opening words on Tuesday were that this was his first speech to them as leader "but certainly not the last". He made a similar comment at a private reception for international visitors, as if to dispel any doubts.

It was a curious reflection, hinting at an inner anxiety. If that is the case, it is matched only by considerable annoyance among the centre-right. This concerns his failure to

ensure victory for the party executive's move to extend voting rights to individual party members in constituency parties reselecting Labour MPs.

As the hard left rejoiced at Kinnock's discomfiture, one shadow cabinet member commented: "They will go for him next." If so, Kinnock will need a better intelligence service and tactical sense than he showed over reselection. He was told by centre-right union leaders last Saturday that the executive move was doomed and disbelieved it. They had done their conference arithmetic and, unlike his advisers, got it right.

Reselection of Labour MPs is due to start in eight weeks. Some bitter fights are in prospect. Probably more important in the long-term, the hard left is preparing to move its nominees into seats vacated by retiring MPs and seats which can be won from the Tories on any kind of anti-Tory swing in 1987 or 1988. The key question at a selection conference will be: where do you stand on the rights of miners, local councils and other bodies in resistance to the government, even if it means breaking the law?

For Neil Kinnock, once the darling of the left, Blackpool has heralded a final parting of the ways and he will be increasingly dependent on the centre-right to beat off hard-left pressure.

Last week, Labour demonstrated that it yearns for strong leadership and simple strategies in the fight against a prime minister it regards with a mixture of admiration and loathing. Arthur Scargill provided a militant leader that the party found irresistible. Kinnock's titular leadership is now on trial. The winter months may be decisive in settling both their futures.