

A SOCIALIST LEAVES THE FIELD FOR THE LAST TIME

I was sitting one evening in the Punchbowl Inn, Sefton Village, when I walked virtually the entire Liverpool team. Brian Hall spotted me and came over. We had played against each other at Liverpool University. I say 'played' but though much slower than me it was more a case of standing on a bit of grass while he ran round me.

The lads had just heard that Shanks was retiring. It was, said Brian, a total shock for them. You could see and feel it. There were all these men in a pub with glasses in their hands unable to lift them to their lips. They had gathered for mutual support. Most of them had known no other manager. Like kids losing parents they just wanted to be together.

We were not in a time when a player might crash their Lamborghini on the way into work and go back home to get their Ferrari. By contrast not far from me is the house from where Matt Busby, as captain of Liverpool, had to go down a back entry to catch a bus into work. No, I am not suggesting a return to the days of exploitation. But I am celebrating a set of values.

You will recognise these words of Shankly but who quoted them at a Labour Party Conference?

'The socialism I believe in, is everybody working for the same goal and everybody having a share in the rewards. That's how I see football, that's how I see life.'

No, it was not Tony Blair.

For Bill Shankly, to be a socialist you had to be fit. When we were students Brian told me that after Geoff Strong joined the club all the players warned him about the toughness of Shankly's training. "Oh, I am fit", said Strong, as you might expect from a man of that name. After the first two training sessions he had to go off to be sick.

Matches were often won in the last twenty minutes when socialist Liverpool was still running hard and the opponents were, as we used to say, puffed. And I cannot imagine Bill Shankly tolerating for one second any group of players plotting against the club captain, hoping to lose so that he would be replaced. Many members of today's Labour Party would not get a game. Well, would you even have them on the bench for Labour FC?

This story about Joe Fagan has been told in a number of places with slightly different wording.

A new player asked Joe (a long term member of the Boot Room) how he should play.

Cliff Jones Critical Professional Learning

“Look lad, if you are in midfield with the ball kick it to someone in the same coloured shirt. If you are in front of the opponent’s goal with the ball kick it into the net. And if you can’t, kick it to someone who can.”

As with politics, so with footy: today listening to commentators on both my brain hurts. What are all these classifications, categories and terms, each with shades of meaning so subtle that I keep missing the point? My all time favourite Liverpool player was Billy Liddell who mostly played left wing. Was he hard left? If he drifted into the middle did he become moderate? Where would you play Clement Attlee? I see him as a Danny Blanchflower, keeping the team together and maximising their creativity.

Shanks provided purpose: a shared purpose: shared throughout the team: shared with the supporters. He created a collective. And, just so that you knew who to kick the ball to, it was Bill who put the team into all-red strip.

Cliff Jones 14th. May 2018