



Photo Stefano Cagnoni

## No, socialism is not dying!

**Labour gained ground slightly during the 1987 British general election campaign — the first time it had done so since 1959. But the Tories still won. The central lesson — Neil Kinnock said it, and he was right — is that you don't win an election in four weeks.**

The failure of the Labour leaders to campaign (except against Labour's own left wing) over the last four years, their terrible political timidity, and their efforts to pull Labour back from its leftism of the early 1980s to bourgeois respectability, meant that Labour started at a disadvantage and on the defensive.

But between 1945 and 1970 Labour always got at least 43% of the vote, even when it lost elections. This time we got only 30.8% — the lowest share, apart from 1983, since 1931. Since 1974 Labour has never scored above 39%. Obviously there are longer-term problems.

The vainglorious Tory press says that socialism is dying, and that Thatcher's third term will see it off. They are wrong. There is a political decay in the labour movement — but it is a decay not of working-class socialism, but of something else which has passed for socialism for too long.

In creating the Labour Party, the British working class went beyond pure and simple trade unionism; but not far beyond it. The Labour Party, in its fundamental politics, has always been no more than trade unionism extended to parliamentary politics. But the trade unions bargain within capitalism on the basis of market relations. They start from the existing relations of labour and capital, and do deals on that basis. They are bourgeois organisations. In periods of depression they may well collude in cuts in workers' living standards. Essentially the same is true of the Labour Party.

The 1945 Labour government was not a break from that capitalist framework: the fundamentals of the policy of nationalisations and the welfare state were part of a national consensus created under the wartime coalition government. The Labour government left capitalism healthier than it found it.

When Labour returned to office in 1964 it presented itself as the party that would modernise Britain. The big-business magazine 'The Economist', which today is Thatcherite, backed Labour. But Labour's modernisation effort failed — primarily because of the strength of the working class, which saw off Wilson's anti-union legislation. Labour turned against its own working-class base. This marked a basic point of decline in Labour's history.

## Prosperity for few

According to Tory minister Lord Young, "We've never had it so good for the 87% of us who are working".

Even on the left, some say that the Tories have successfully bought off the top layers of the working class, leaving Labour support increasingly confined to an 'underclass'.

Neither claim is true.

On average, the pay of those in work has risen faster than inflation. But averages can be misleading. The high-paid have done much better than the low-paid; and the low-paid pay higher taxes and national insurance now than in 1979, while the high-paid have had £3.6 billion a year in tax cuts.

Besides, only 60% of adults are in waged work. Young's figure of 87% counts out pensioners, students, YTS trainees, and married women at home. A very big proportion of working-class families has some member unemployed or dependent on the welfare state.

Adding up all these factors, the writer John Rentoul calculates that 42% of people are better off than in 1979, 45% are worse off, and 13% have seen no change.

The better-off 42% does include a lot of working-class people. Quite a few working-class people have bought their council homes, and some have gained a few hundred pounds from the Tories' cut-price selling-off of public enterprises. And — it's true — a high proportion of home-owners and shareholders vote Tory.

But that does not prove that home-buying makes people Tory. On the contrary: such evidence as there is indicates that council tenants who bought their homes were more likely to have been Tory in the first place.

Tory support has actually fallen among skilled manual workers since 1979. Labour did lose ground among skilled manual workers to the Tories between 1974 and 1979, but Labour's losses since 1979 among skilled workers have been to the Alliance; and opinion surveys indicate that mass opinion on social issues (welfare state, equality, women's rights, etc.) has moved slightly to the left in recent years.

Remember: the great example of workers who had been supposedly reconciled to capitalism by high wages, mortgages, and incentive schemes used to be the miners, Britain's highest-paid manual workers. But that was before 1984...

## Four black MPs

Britain now has black MPs, for the first time since the Communist Saklatvala sat as a Labour MP in the 1920s.

Four black MPs were elected for Labour. Bernie Grant in Tottenham, and Diane Abbott in Hackney North, in particular, had faced a vile racist campaign from the Tories, and lost votes.

But overall analysis of all the votes for black candidates showed no strong and consistent pattern of racist bias against them.

By the 1960s the long boom which had underpinned a relatively easy consensus in British politics was visibly decaying. Britain's growth was grievously lagging behind other big capitalist countries. British capitalism needed to reorganise itself, to adjust to the loss of its empire, to replace old and stagnant industries by more modern enterprise, and to deal with its special problem — a too-mighty trade union movement.

The history of the last quarter-century is one of repeated attempts by governments, Tory and Labour, to carry out that restructuring of British capitalism; great struggles by the working class which thwarted them; but — *and this is fundamental* — a failure by the working class to create its own *political* alternative; and thus, finally, the victory (to an extent, and for now) of a radical ruling-class alternative, Thatcherism.

## British capitalism's stalemate

The British ruling class has been forced by circumstances to grant a great deal to 'the political economy of the working class' (to use Karl Marx's phrase for the Factory Acts restricting child labour). Between 1945 and the 1960s, especially, the labour movement was strong and powerful — but not politically and ideologically strong enough to challenge the rule of the bourgeoisie.

The result was a 'historical compromise' — the consolidation of Labour reformism as a transitory historical stop-gap. That is what the Labour Party is historically — a stop-gap. But reformism is not an alternative to capitalism. It is an aspect of it. The reformist labour movement which builds its welfare state on the foundation of consent from capitalism is building on shifting sands. If the ruling class survives — and by definition it does — then it will strike back. It is striking back.

The historical stalemate — and the Labour Party in its great days was part of the historical stalemate, the *modus vivendi* — could not last. Capitalism is not benign. The profit mainspring is inhuman and merciless.

The compromise could not and did not remain stable indefinitely. Not only did the capitalists grudge the expenditure on the welfare state and the costs of trade

union power. The British working class did not just impose the welfare state in the 1940s and then lapse into silence. From the mid-'50s, the rank and file of the British labour movement were in revolt. There was a series of waves of self-asserting industrial militancy, through to the mid-'70s. After 1970-1 there was a rash of sit-in strikes, and a powerful revolt of the working class that made the Tory government of that day unable to rule.

After Labour returned to office in February 1974, many shop stewards wrote to Labour's Industry minister Tony Benn, asking him to take over their companies. Those workers wanted a basic change. The British workers' revolt of the early '70s was a long-drawn-out equivalent of the general strike by ten million French workers in 1968.

But just as the 1968 general strike, having failed to press forward to workers' power, was inevitably followed by a reflux and a landslide right-wing election victory, so also the workers' struggles in Britain were bound to end in the capitalists getting their own back — unless the labour movement was able to *replace* capitalism.

In this whole period British capitalism was in trouble. The ruling class could not do what it wanted because of the strength of the working class. But the working class did not have its own political alternative. Reformism had reached an impasse. Eventually the ruling class offered its own 'radical' alternative — Thatcherism.

The immense class struggles of the '60s and '70s ended in defeat, crucially because revolutionaries failed to take the chances to build a revolutionary party in the '60s, and the militant trade unionists had no *political* alternative to the Tories except a bourgeois Labour Party. Labour's decline represents the bill the working class has to pay for the historical crimes of Labourism.

## Why Labour couldn't solve the stalemate

The tragedy of modern British history is that the working class had great strength and power but was politically headless. Workers turned away from the Labour Party in the '60s and early '70s, and to in-

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dustrial action. But such action — short of general strike — couldn't even hope to provide an alternative to the system. Workers continued to think of trade unionism as the immediate answer to their problems. They still looked to the Labour Party for their political representation, only with decreasing conviction. By the February 1974 election — the point at which the Liberal and Scottish and Welsh nationalist middle ground swelled to seven million votes — working-class electoral support for Labour was increasingly grudging. Especially among striking workers, there was real hatred of the trade union leaders — a hatred Thatcher was to build on.

The tremendous wave of working-class

militancy of the early '70s led to a government of Harold Wilson and his cronies. Organised labour's greatest victory led to a Labour government which suppressed rank and file militancy, cut living standards, and under the direction of the IMF began the series of cuts and moves towards privatisation which became known after '79 as Thatcherism. Labour in power was not even seriously trying to reform capitalism. Industrial militancy declined after mid-1975, with workers perplexed and intimidated by the slump; and political disillusionment grew.

## Crisis of socialism

There is a political crisis of Labour

## Wallasey shows how

Labour won the national campaign, but lost the election.

On the ground Labour was not strong enough to follow through the TV lead, win arguments on the doorstep and create a local momentum to translate the good TV presence into votes and seats. In some constituencies that translation did happen — for instance in Wallasey.

Wallasey was the 104th marginal — Labour's 81st marginal. The candidate was Lol Duffy, a regular contributor to Socialist Organiser, who had been sent to jail for his part in the occupation of Cammell Lairds shipbuilders. The now "Right Honourable" Lynda Chalker was the Tory candidate — and had been since 1974. Wallasey has not had a Labour MP since 1911.

According to the national figures, Labour should not have had a chance of making up the 6,300 votes needed to unseat Chalker. But despite that, Labour were only 279 votes short of winning. And that was in spite of neighbouring Labour MP Frank Field's call on Labour voters not to vote for Duffy and the local press with its "Marxist to fight Chalker" headline.

Labour nearly won that seat by persuading working class people to vote; of the 6,000 or so votes that Labour made up, only 2,000 came from the SDP. The other 4,000 came from people who did not vote in the last election.

Wallasey Labour Party increased its vote by more than any other constituency in England without a sitting Labour MP.

And it was done not by importing a 'respectable', middle-of-the-road, family man but by running a campaign which set out from the start to involve people and to convince others.

Every day hordes of young people went out leafleting the dole, the shopping centres, health centres and the parents who collected their children from primary schools.

Each ward was able to do more than three canvasses and some committee rooms did six knock-ups on voting day. The constituency was well enough supplied with party workers that real canvassing was done — enough time was available to argue against the effects of the press and Frank Field.

There is no reason to think that

Wallasey, as a constituency, is unique, although the CLP was not as demoralised as some and there has not been the history of a local Labour council putting up the rates by huge amounts. Had other local parties been able to develop the same profile then more seats would have been won for Labour.

Building that profile needs to start now. A four-week dash to the polls, even with a good campaign run by the national leadership, is not adequate to win. Strength on the ground is the key. Immediately each constituency needs to organise an open meeting to recruit Labour voters to the Party and to plan future campaigns. There needs to be basic political work done — on the estates, around workplaces and around the Further Education Colleges, building support for the Party, raising its profile, arguing and convincing people not only that socialism is viable but also that they are needed to join the Party.

A simple stall at a shopping centre every Saturday morning would be an advance on the present situation — but raising the Party's profile need not be so limited.

A ward party should become a campaign centre, making itself relevant to working class people within its boundaries. Organising solidarity action with unions in dispute, organising housing campaigns and welfare rights stalls and running discos with the YS are all simple initiatives which will build the Party and re-establish the Labour Party in the lives of many people.

## Votes in Scotland

The Tories lost 11 seats in Scotland. Labour got 42% of the vote there, as against 24% for the Tories, 19% for the Alliance, and 14% for the Scottish Nationalists.

That means a 76-24 majority for parties supporting a Scottish Assembly. A referendum in Scotland under the last Labour government also produced a majority for an Assembly, but devolution was successfully blocked by maverick Labour MP George Cunningham (who is now in the SDP).

The democratic case for devolution seems strong, and socialists can have no opposition in principle. However, agitation for the Assembly is likely to be used to divert Scottish workers' struggles into a framework of Scotland versus England, rather than workers versus bosses.

## ideology — a crisis of post-1945 socialism.

After World War 2 there were millions of workers radicalised, with a vague perception that they wanted some sort of socialism. But the thread of working-class socialist politics, of Marxism, had been substantially broken by Stalinism and fascism in the '30s. The radicalised workers were channelled by social-democratic and Stalinist parties into a bureaucratic, statist, nationalist version of socialism.

This ideology decayed during the long capitalist boom and in today's changed capitalist world no longer has much grip even as a reform ideology. The reformist workers' parties appear aimless and ineffectual. Workers obviously seek an alternative; and in Britain and many other countries they have mostly sought alternatives to the right of '1945 socialism'.

This crisis of '1945 socialism' is in some ways like the crisis of democracy that followed the full working-out of the French Revolution's programme of 'Liberty, Equality and Fraternity' in the 19th century. Equality before the law was not equality. Unequal property gutted legal equality. Market equality did not lead to social equality when the formal equality of the wage labourer and the capitalist led the wage labourer to sell labour power to the capitalist, who then pocketed the surplus between the cost of maintaining the working class — wages — and the creative increment given to the process of production by the living labour of the worker.

In the socialist movement the assumption was that nationalised property would free the producers from exploitation. That has been shown to be untrue not only in the Stalinist states, where a bureaucracy 'owns' the state and therefore the means of production, but also with the insipid 'nationalisations' in Britain.

Wholesale statification has not liberated the working class from wage-slavery — not in Russia, not in the Third World, nor in post-1945 Britain.

Now the Marxist, working-class socialist tradition always said explicitly that nationalisation was not by itself socialism, or liberation from wage slavery.

"State ownership and control", wrote James Connolly, "is not necessarily socialist — if it were, then the army and the navy, the police, the judges, the gaolers, the informers and the hangmen would all be socialist functionaries as they are all state officials — but the ownership by the state of all the lands and material for labour, combined with the cooperative control by the workers of such land and materials, would be socialist... To the cry of the middle-class reformers, 'Make this or that the property of the government', we reply — 'yes, in proportion as the workers are ready to make the government their property'."

## A test for the left

The Left was broadly divided between those who did, and those who did not call for a Labour vote. But even amongst those who understood the importance of voting Labour, there were big differences.

Most of the Left tried to find some sugar with which to coat the 'vote Labour' pill.

The SWP ran around putting up posters saying, 'Vote Labour...but build a fighting socialist alternative', and insisting that although the election dominated their propaganda they didn't think it was really all that important. As Duncan Hallas had put it in 1979: 'This [the election] is an issue we shouldn't get very excited about. In terms of the national alternatives we have to say, 'grit your teeth and vote accordingly'.'

The SWP came up against the same problem they always face. Come an election they have nothing to say except 'vote Labour but join the SWP'. Despite their endless appeals to everyone to leave the Labour Party, they are forced to recognise that in reality there is no other alternative working class party. So all they can do about the domination of right-wing reformists is bemoan it.

Militant, as usual, inveighed 'Labour to power on a socialist programme' — the slogan emblazoned on their front page. Large banners bearing this slogan were even spotted hanging from windows in tower blocks. It is, of course, wildly out of this world. Labour wasn't standing on a 'socialist programme', or anything like it. So Militant's slogan either meant pretending that Labour's programme was socialist; or it meant nothing much. Certainly it did not help to orient anyone in the labour movement.

Militant supporters who stood as Labour candidates did well, though. Terry Fields in Liverpool, Broad Green, doubled his majority with a 12.4% swing from the Tories; Dave Nellist in Coventry South East almost trebled his majority, with a 5.3% swing. Pat Wall took Bradford North for Labour with a 9.9% swing from the SDP. And John Bryan in ill-fated Bermondsey cut the Liberal majority.

Briefing hit the election campaign with an 'alternative manifesto', saying, literally, 'wouldn't it be nice if...'

'How much better it would be', they declared almost flippantly, 'if Labour stood for the same class against class approach as the Tories'. This was saner than Militant, but rather inept propaganda — it was seized on by the Tory press to bash Labour with. Socialist Action complained that Labour had not sufficiently taken note of their editor's advice. This advice, incidentally, has included a long-standing insistence that the SDP is a permanent fixture in British politics — and that Labour should have faced up to the fact that it was going to lose long ago. The Communist Party managed to combine a call for a tactical vote with standing its own candidates. They stood some of them in marginals — like Bermondsey, where they got 108 votes.

By far the most incredibly stupid prank of all was the so-called Red Front of the Revolutionary Communist Party. More consistent than the SWP, they opposed a

Labour vote. They stood 14 candidates (which must have cost a lot of money), most of whom got around 200 votes — except in Knowsley North where they got 538.

When you bear in mind that the 'RABIES' joke lefty candidate in Norwood got 171, this doesn't suggest a budding alternative to Labour.

## Defeat for Alliance

The Alliance got 7.3 million votes (23%), as against 7.8 million (25%) in 1983.

Since 1979 the Alliance has taken a sizeable chunk of the Tory middle-class vote (it now leads the Tories among university graduates) and of the Labour working-class vote (the Liberals' profile of electoral support, though not the SDP's, is now almost as heavily working class as Labour's). Between 1983 and 1987 Labour has recouped a part of what it lost, at least among the worse-off sections of the working class.

The Alliance lost 8% of the semi-skilled/unskilled manual vote, and 9% of the unemployed vote.

The Alliance can certainly continue, though whether the SDP can avoid being eaten up by the much stronger Liberals is another question. The Alliance now have some 2500 councillors — two-thirds Liberal, one-third SDP — where in 1972 the Liberals had only 400 or so. The Liberal vote, down to 2.5% in 1951, was up to 19.3% by February 1974 and has stayed in that region since then.

Party	Votes (million)	%	+/-	MPs	+/-
Conservative	13.8	42	-	375	-17
Labour	10.0	31	+3	229	+21
Alliance	7.3	23	-3	22	-5
Other	1.4	4	-1	24	+1

## 'Tactics' flop

Tactical voting was a resounding flop.

In several constituencies where the 'tactical' experts recommended Labour supporters to vote Alliance, Labour ended up ahead of the Alliance — Birmingham Yardley, Calder Valley, Pendle, Stockport, Watford.

In Richmond and Barnes, where the Liberals hoped to topple a 74-vote Tory majority, the Labour vote went up; in the Isle of Wight, a Liberal seat which the Tories took this time, Labour's score increased 153%! The Alliance's hopes in Chelmsford, Crosby, Milton Keynes and Twickenham were dashed by increases in the Labour vote of 45%, 81%, 24% and 18%. In only one constituency does the Alliance seem to have made serious gains from tactical voting — in Bath, where Labour's vote went down 24%.

In 1983 there must have been a great deal of 'spontaneous' tactical voting, for Labour's vote in the South-East went down 40% from 1979. There was a danger of a domino effect — in constituency after constituency, Labour would go into third place and then collapse to a fringe vote. That hasn't happened.

Leon Trotsky wrote: "State property becomes the property of 'the whole people' only to the degree that social privilege and differentiation disappear, and therewith the necessity of the state. In other words: state property is converted into socialist property in proportion as it ceases to be state property". And in the 'Transitional Programme': "The difference between [our] demands and the muddle-headed reformist slogan of 'nationalisation' lies in the following: (1) we reject indemnification; (2) we warn the masses against demagogues of the People's Front who, giving lip-service to nationalisation, remain in reality agents of capital; (3) we call upon the masses to rely only upon their own revolutionary strength; (4) we link up the question of expropriation with that of the seizure of power by the workers and farmers".

Nevertheless, for a long time, socialism meant nationalisation. For socialists nationalisation should not be the end, but one means to an end. It came to embody socialism. What is worst — as we shall see — is that socialism was chopped down to a bureaucratic, statist, nationalist programme in this way not only for the reformists and the Stalinists, but also for many revolutionaries. They distinguished themselves from the mainstream labour leaders mostly by attacking them for not being hard or militant enough in their pursuit of '1945 socialism'.

## Crisis of Trotskyism

There were, after all, socialists who knew the ideas of Connolly and Trotsky. Why did they not enable the British labour movement to overcome the crisis? Why wasn't the bureaucratic, statist, nationalist '1945 socialism', replaced by genuine working-class socialism, rather than by cynicism, confusion, and numbers of workers shifting support from Labour to the Alliance?

Part of the problem is that many of the Trotskyists had let such ideas as Connolly's and Trotsky's grow dusty on the shelves, while in day-to-day politics they distinguished themselves merely as the most militant fighters for the goals of '1945 socialism'. Such an approach meant sectarianism in the form of rigid organisational self-demarcation (or even self-isolation) and a routine of denunciation, combined with lack of the necessary fundamental ideological self-demarcation.

One of the main ideas in the political lexicon of Trotskyism is that of the crisis of leadership — the corruption of the established mass Social Democratic and Stalinist parties as the key to the failure of the working class to make a revolution. For Trotsky this thesis was the alternative to concluding from the defeats of the working class in the 1920s and 1930s that

there was something fundamentally lacking in the working class as a revolutionary class. What was needed, he argued, was a truly revolutionary party to fight bourgeois ideas and help the working class establish its political independence as the prelude to the working-class conquest of power.

The arresting fact about modern British history is that the crisis of leadership in Britain has been essentially a crisis of the 'Trotskyist' movement.

The Stalinist movement was small and, after 1956, discredited. The social democracy was in power after 1964, and decaying. Trotskyism had been weak when the working class upsurge first got underway in the mid-'50s. Yet Britain offered Trotskyism immense opportunities once the Communist Party began to lose its verve and political certainty — better, perhaps, than in any other country.

The old forces of Trotskyism failed. In 1958 the main Trotskyist group — the SLL, led by Gerry Healy — could get 500 British workers, a majority of them shop stewards, to an 'assembly of labour'. The SLL was then, and until the mid-'60s, a serious and more or less rational movement. In the 1960s they could have built a militant Trotskyist leadership with substantial roots in the trade unions and the Labour Party. Combining the two fronts of the labour movement, they could have recruited the best and most serious shop stewards in the subsequent period and helped organise the left in the Labour Party.

Instead of the left in the Labour Party collapsing and fading away between 1966 and 1970, a serious fight could have been mounted against the Wilson government. At the very least, Harold Wilson in 1974 would have faced a big challenge from a substantial and respected left wing embedded in the labour movement. Instead of the disillusion and demoralisation that actually took place, the late '70s could have seen that left wing grow. The left revolt in the Labour Party from 1979 to 1981 could have taken place

at a vastly higher political level, and with much deeper roots in the trade unions and the working class.

It didn't happen. The 'Trotskyist' movement went off after 1964 to build a 'revolutionary party' in the wilderness, organisationally counterposed to the labour movement but with little real ideological independence from the mainstream. Other Trotskyists, like the SWP, later repeated the SLL's errors.

That failure shaped the starting point for Thatcherism. Combined with eight years of slump and many working-class defeats — especially the defeat of the miners' strike of 1984-5 — it set the background for the 1987 election.

## Labour's 1987 campaign

Against that background, what was the campaign like?

It is tempting for socialists to scoff at Labour's election campaign. And easy, too: John F. Kinnock runs for president of Britain Inc. Labour preaches moderation and reconciliation in the name of a working class living with the jackboot of the Tory class-warriors on its neck. Labour's leaders appear on TV — an election broadcast they felt proud enough of to put out twice — and beg for votes for Neil Kinnock by showing him bitterly denouncing the misdemeanours of... the Liverpool Labour Party.

All that is true; but it misses what was new in the month before 11 June, the vigorous and passionate anti-Toryism of Labour's campaign.

When was it last seen in an election that the leader of the Labour Party indicted the ruling class as Kinnock did? He used the language of 'One-Nation'-ism, but the message was a message of a fightback by the working class and the oppressed. He used the language of moderation, and for sure Labour's proposals and programme were moderate enough, but there was nothing 'moderate' about the bitter indictment of Toryism which Kinnock

## The Tories' plans

- Force all 16-18 year olds onto cheap labour YTS schemes, on pain of having their dole cut off.
- Do their best to stop council building any more council housing, encourage the selling-off of council estates to private developers, and cut back tenants' rights.
- Hive off favoured schools from the general state system.
- Replace rates — a property tax on occupiers, which does at least hit the rich more than the poor — by a flat-rate poll-tax. Even the unemployed will have to pay 20% of the poll-tax.
- Bring in new laws against trade unions, making postal ballots (rather than workplace ballots) compulsory for union election, and making it illegal for unions to penalise scabs even in a legal strike.
- Introduce censorship on TV.
- Continue to sell off public enterprises.

## Labour's vote up

Labour's vote increased by 19% over 1983 — from 8.5 million to 10 million.

Labour gained ground mainly where its support was already strongest — among worse-off workers and younger people. Among unemployed people Labour's share of the vote went up 6%; among semi-skilled and unskilled manual workers, also 6%. Among the 57% of voters classified by MORI as working class, Labour's share increased 8% while it increased only 3% over the whole electorate. Among council tenants, Labour's share went up 10%.

Labour got a good share of those who did not vote in 1983. According to MORI, Labour defeated the Tories among 18-24 year olds, though Gallup had the Tories ahead among first-time voters. Labour also seems to have done particularly well among young and working class women.

All these facts back up what the left has long argued, that Labour's priority should be to mobilise and inspire its working class vote with bold policies, rather than to try to win over the middle class with palid moderation. There is plenty of scope for further gains from such work: 45% of those who did not vote in 1983 abstained again this time, and 32% of young people eligible to vote for the first time did not bother.

## First 'out' gay MP

Chris Smith, who held Islington South and Finsbury for Labour, became the first openly gay person to be elected as an MP.

Chris had 'come out' as gay since he was elected last time. He got 16,511 votes, and increased his majority, despite the threat of a Green Party candidate who might have tipped the balance.

Chris's personal sexuality was not used in the campaign by his opponents, but accusations that the local Labour council 'spends all its money on gays' did feature especially in SDP campaigning.

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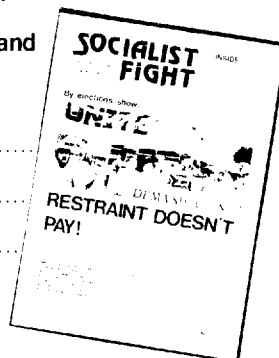
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delivered. Neil Kinnock spoke for every class-conscious worker and for all the victims of Thatcher's 'reinvigorated' capitalism.

Even the highly personalised first (and repeated) election broadcast — so easy to mock — in which Kinnock's relatives told us what a nice fellow he was, was more than just a chocolate-box advertisement for the leader of the Labour Party. It used the focus on Kinnock's personality to get across a radical message.

Kinnock was shown saying that he was the first Kinnock in a thousand years to go to college, and then asking 'Were the others all stupid, miners and poets as they were?' That was no empty 'beauty contest' broadcast. It was a recapitulation of the experience of the British working class.

Now the political content of Labour's campaign had nothing to do with socialism — the replacement of the present system of wage slavery and state oppression based on the private ownership of the means of production. The sort of message Kinnock put across (including his positive alternative) was delivered 100 years ago by Liberals and Radicals.

During the long decades when Labour and Tory parties alike subscribed to the post-1940 (or '45) consensus, the 'anti-Tory rhetoric' which the labour movement inherited from its Radical pre-history became increasingly hollowed out and devoid of content. It was, as *Workers' Action* (which was, of course, vehemently for a Labour victory) put in the 1979 election, the refuge alike of Labour's right wing and of sectarian socialists like the SWP.

But the Thatcher revolution in the Tory party has given a renewed meaning to the hollowed anti-Toryism of the labour movement. The Tories are now different in a way they were not for decades before 1979. The Labour Party's counter-

proposal to the Thatcher Tories was old-fashioned and inadequate. But in its own way Labour brought *class* into a British election more clearly — if not explicitly — than at any election for decades. It was a clear clash, if not between capitalism and socialism, at least between raw, harsh capitalism and capitalism tempered by 'the political economy of the working class'.

## Where now?

Marxists in the British labour movement need to rediscover and explain the programme of the self-liberation of the working class — of socialism as Marx, Engels, Luxemburg, Lenin and Trotsky understood it. At the same time we must recognise that the working class learns mainly in struggle, not through propaganda, and we must start from where we are.

We should fight for the labour movement to continue the anti-Tory crusade started in the election period — for local Labour Parties to go 'back to basics', campaigning on the streets and door-to-door against health cuts, education cuts, rent rises, housing cuts, and the selling-off of council estates. Trade unions should

develop direct action to resist the Tories and the bosses wherever possible.

Socialism is not dying. In Britain it has not been tried in a mass movement. The working class is changing, but it is not dead or dying. Thatcher's third term will not go through without resistance and struggles. And in those struggles workers can learn and make their way to working-class socialist politics.

The Thatcher years are a tragic time for millions of people — the homeless, the unemployed, the young, the old, the sick. Yet nobody with a realistic grasp of what capitalism is as a system could have expected the post-1945 settlement to continue indefinitely. Either the bourgeoisie or the working class must rule — and the working class cannot rule, and serve its own interests, by fiddling with the capitalist system. The savage and inhuman capitalist counter-attack was inevitable.

And the collapse of the social compromise of the 1950s and '60s under the onslaught of the Tories is forcing the working class to rethink politically. The labour and socialist movement is being reshaped. The outcome of the British general election of 1987 was a tragedy. But we can still turn it into the prelude to the triumph of the labour movement ●

## Labour councils

In the geographical pattern of the vote, the oddity was London.

Although London comes within the relatively prosperous South-East, its inner areas have as much working class poverty and unemployment as anywhere. Yet Labour did badly in London. So did the Alliance, and London was the Tories' best area.

Local Labour council policies seem to be the reason. In Ealing, Waltham Forest, and Hammersmith and Fulham, where Labour lost seats, Labour councils have recently imposed big rate rises. The candidate from the Ken Livingstone Career Promotion Tendency in Brent East won but saw the Labour vote go down 9%. In Battersea North, the other lost seat, selling off of council estates by the local Tory council and a subsequent influx of 'yuppies' were blamed.

The voters' revolt was not against 'loony left' councils as such. Labour did well in Islington and Liverpool.

As local Labour canvassers well know, working class voters in Islington and Liverpool have plenty of criticisms of those councils. But those voters were not put off by their local Labour Parties being supposedly 'Marxist' and left-wing, maybe because enough of their radicalism is directed towards real goals of class struggle. Both Liverpool and Islington have run major housing programmes, and have made some efforts, however inept, to campaign against the government.

But in Ealing, for example, voters have a Labour council which has led no campaign

against the government but has raised rates by 60% — with the new spending going mostly to pay people £20,000 or so a year to enlighten the local proletariat about sexism, racism, gay rights and so on. Such behaviour only damages the important causes the council sets out to promote.

Neil Kinnock, incidentally, responded to Ealing's budget not with the condemnation he has given Liverpool, or the cold silence directed to other left councils, but with a personal letter of approval.

In truth most of what has passed for the left-wing and socialist presence on Labour councils for the last five years is about as distant from working-class socialism as the positive programme Neil Kinnock advocated in the election. It too is old-fashioned radicalism.

If anything Kinnock was better, for his radicalism appealed to the working class and all the oppressed, whereas the liberal radicalism of the local government left appeals at best to a series of sectional interests — to women, blacks, gays, etc. treated as sectional interests.

## Votes and the dole

### REGIONS

In order of unemployment

1. North
2. Scotland
3. North-West
4. Wales
5. Yorkshire
6. West Midlands
7. East Midlands
8. South West
9. East Anglia
10. South East

In order of improvement in Labour vote

1. Wales
2. Scotland
3. North
4. Yorkshire
5. North-West
6. West Midlands
7. East Midlands
8. South West
9. East Anglia
10. South East

# Workers under Stalinism

A labour movement conference

Saturday 7 November, 10 to 5.30, at Central London Poly, New Cavendish St, London WC1.

Tube: Great Portland St or Oxford Circus. Creche provided. More details: 01-639 7967.