

Socialist Campaign for a Labour Victory

The 1978 local election results clearly reveal the important role which socialists have to play in securing a Labour victory in the forthcoming General Election.

Despite the cynicism which the policies of the Labour Government have fostered, the local elections make clear that to large groups of the electorate the Labour Party is not the Labour Government.

In Scotland the reactionary SNP tide was rolled back. In Tameside (Greater Manchester) the Tory backwoodsmen (and women) were removed. In many Labour areas polls were higher than they had been in 1974. In several key London boroughs, notably Haringey, Lambeth and Brent, the strenuous campaigning of the local parties' left wing played a major role in securing Labour victories. In the east and Inner London boroughs of Hackney, Tower Hamlets, Newham and Islington, the very real threat of seats being won by the National Front was crushed and Labour returned in the overwhelming majority. Not only did Labour retain control of these areas but it did so with an increased poll.

Party loyalists can take encouragement from the election results. Labour Party socialists will too. But for socialists the picture is more complicated.

THE GOVERNMENT'S RECORD

The record of this Labour government is a grim one, judged according to the interests of the working class (not to speak of any sort of advance towards socialism). In March 1974 the Labour Government was elected on a promise in its Manifesto of a major "shift in the balance of wealth and power in favour of working people and their families". In the last four years it has presided over a 10% cut in workers' wages; it has used troops to break strikes; it continues to implement racist immigration legislation; it continues a bloody war of aggression in Ireland to sustain the sectarian 6-County state; and it presides with astonishing complacency over a 1½ million unemployment queue.

It has allowed a continued build-up of the police specialist forces to fight picketing: should the Tories return with their policy of confrontation with the unions, they will take control of these forces intact.

NO FIGHT FROM LABOUR'S LEFT

The Labour Left has simply failed to offer an alternative to the right wing leadership of the Party. It has failed miserably to fight, throughout a period of four years — when there has been an urgent need for left wing, class struggle politics and for a fight against the right wing.

In the General Election campaign the official Labour Party campaign will justify and glorify the 4-year record of right wing policies, boasting the Government's 'achievement' — achievement for British capitalism paid for dearly by the working class.

Tory victory in the General Election will undoubtedly be a defeat for the working class movement. But every uncritical working class vote for Labour on the basis of support for its record and its election programme will be an ideological and political defeat for the working class and for socialism.

If socialists are not willing to understand this, to say it openly in the Labour Party and labour movement,

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and to draw the necessary conclusions from it, then there is no hope of advance for socialist politics in the election period. The right wing will peddle their policies wrapped up in 'anti-Toryism' — using the election campaign and their monopoly of official working class politics to build up support for their politics of simply administering capitalism according to its own social and economic laws — and running the capitalist system at the cost of the working class whenever they find that to be necessary.

FIGHT FOR SOCIALIST POLICIES

It follows from this that socialists must put forward, and campaign for within the Party and the labour movement, policies which really answer the needs of the working class in this period of acute crisis of British and world capitalism. We must prepare the labour movement and the working class for self defence in the period after the election — whichever party is the winner.

We must combine POLITICAL preparation for a fightback against right wing Labour leaders with a drive between now and the elections to keep the Tories out.

The lessons to be drawn from the Local Elections offer great encouragement to such a project.

Firstly, it seems clear that a whole section of 'traditional' Labour voters, despite their distaste for the policies of the Labour Government, are fully alerted to the dangers of a return to Toryism, either locally or nationally.

In addition there would seem to be an increased public recognition of the significance of the differences between the left and right of the Labour Party — if only on the level of distinguishing between the Party and its activists and Conference on the one hand, and the government on the other. If the Left were visible and fighting, this would be a major boost

GUT FEELING AGAINST THE TORIES

Even where this is not the case, the overall feeling among the traditional Labour voters would seem to be 'they have done their best ... now we must unite to keep out the Tory threat'. In other words, there is a feeling that a Labour government, even with a the record of this one, has to be defended from a Tory opposition which is intent on following the past years' scandalous cuts programme with its own savage attack on hard-won reforms such as the welfare state and council housing, with another Tory union-bashing campaign, and with a stirring up of the muddy waters of racism.

A second lesson to be noted is the role of immigrants, or women and of youth in helping to ensure a Labour victory. The council poll took place three days after the 80,000 strong Anti Nazi League carnival in East London; and one has only to live in this normally sensitive, racially conscious part of London to appreciate how it affected the political views of youth, immigrants and others over a whole range of issues.

Among these people there is now a widespread readiness to look at political and social problems in a new way. In many cases, attitudes on previously taboo issues like women's rights and homosexual equality have been placed under review. Previously firmly rooted prejudices are being challenged.

There is in these developments, many of them taking shape outside the Party itself, great scope for rejuvenating the Labour Party and the labour movement — if socialists can organise themselves to fight effectively to re-arm the movement with socialist politics, and to replace the reformist policies and leaders that have produced the last four years of counter-reformist Labour government and a largely passive

labour movement tied down by a lack of effective alternative policies to those of the Government.

Why should a left wing, specifically a **socialist**, call to vote Labour in the General Elections be able to unite such diverse groups as the traditional Labour voter, young people, women, immigrants, etc?

We believe such an appeal could not only bring out the vote, but bring new people into the Labour Party to fight for socialist politics and for the implementation of the progressive policies many parties have adopted; and to be involved in the numerous discussions and campaigns which our Party encompasses.

To the traditional Labour voter we offer evidence that the Labour Party stands far removed from the middle class supporters of big business and ruling class arrogance which the Tories represent. We will demonstrate that the traditions of struggle of the Labour movement — so often forgotten in office — are still defended and fought for in the party.

WHY WORKERS WILL BE VOTING LABOUR

The need for a militant defence of working class living standards, wages and jobs, of education and health services, is a reason for people to vote Labour instead of staying at home or voting Tory. The argument that these gains can best be defended with a Labour Government in office will find an echo on the council estates or at the factory gate, among public sector workers threatened with the Tory axe, and even outside the dole among all those who know it is not their interests the Tories have at heart.

The importance of voting Labour will be seen yet more clearly when socialists pledged to defend and extend working class gains speak out clearly in the forthcoming elections; and when those socialists

What we are

■ No more wage curbs! No more strike-breaking by Labour!

Wage rises should at the very least keep up with price increases. The same should go for state benefits, grants and pensions. Demand immediate wage increases backdated to make up for the drop in our living standards over the last two and a half years.

■ Start improving the social services rather than cutting them. Stop cutting jobs in the public sector.

■ End unemployment. Cut hours not jobs. Share the work with no loss of pay. Start now with a 35-hour week and an end to overtime.

■ All firms threatening closure should be nationalised under workers' control.

■ Make the bosses pay, not the working class. Millions for hospitals, not a penny for 'defence'! Nationalise the banks and financial institutions without compensation. End the interest burden on council housing and other public services.

■ Freeze rents and rates.

■ Scrap all immigration controls. Race is no problem; racism is. The labour movement must mobilise to drive the fascists off the streets.

Purge racists from positions in the labour movement. Organise full support for black self-defence.

■ The capitalist police are an enemy for the working class. Support all demands to weaken them as bosses' striking force: dissolution of special squads [SPG, Special Branch, MI5 etc], public accountability etc.

■ Free abortion and contraception on demand. Women's equal right to work, and full equality for women.

combine a fight to turn out the Labour voters with a campaign for fighting socialist policies — policies which are a preparation for working class struggle whoever wins the election.

To women the threat by the Tories of massive further cuts in education and welfare services are particularly important.

Labour's scandalous record here is a millstone round our neck. But socialists know and should say that struggle and mobilisation on a massive scale by the labour movement could have stopped the Labour cuts — and can still reverse them.

DEFEND ABORTION RIGHTS

The continuing threat to abortion rights and more general attacks on health care for women which could be expected from the Tories make a Labour victory important. The Equal Pay Act and the Sex Discrimination Act, however limited, are important gains for women which would not have come about under the Tories. The stand of women Labour MPs was instrumental in defeating the Benyon and James White abortion Bills; the Labour Abortion Rights Campaign carries on that struggle and at two successive conferences of the Party 'Free abortion on demand' has been passed as Party policy.

There can be no doubt that the struggle for women's right will suffer a setback under a Tory regime. But if the benefits of a Labour victory are to be realised, there must be a strong socialist current in the Party which makes the rights of women a major plank in its platform.

To immigrants and black people settled in Britain, the last few years have brought a frightening growth of the right, and the cynical adoption of racist policies

and demagogy, which have spread like a foul stain from the crank edges of politics to the point where they are the stock-in-trade of the 'middle ground' of British politics.

Thatcher's TV pronouncements, the Speed Report and the refusal of the new Tory-controlled Hillingdon council to house homeless immigrant families are indications of the attitude of a future Tory Government to Britain's black population. So are their proposals to the Select Committee — which, shamefully, were agreed to also by the five Labour Members.

Whilst the PLP as a whole has been little better on this issue than the Tories, there is still a strong anti-racist current in the Party. It can be a basis for a serious campaign to drive the racists out of the labour movement.

In 1976, Conference adopted a policy for the repeal of the '68 and '71 immigration Acts, the banning by the labour movement and local councils of the National Front from meeting in public buildings, and support for black self defence. The **Socialist Campaign for a Labour Victory** will fight for a Labour vote on the basis of that policy, and of a fight within the labour movement and Constituency Parties to make that policy a reality: to transfer party policy from paper resolutions into a living struggle against racism.

Joe Ashton's recent anti-National Front broadcast brought in a record number of applications for Party membership. We are convinced that an anti-racist, anti-fascist campaign for a Labour victory will play a major role in defending and improving the position of immigrants and their families in Britain and dealing a blow at the fascist National Front.

GAY RIGHTS

Another section of the population under attack in recent years has been homosexuals. Gays have been attacked by police and fascists, lesbian mothers witch-hunted in the press, and **Gay News** prosecuted. The Tory emphasis on law and order would doubtless mean further attacks.

The Gay Labour Group organises freely inside the Party; support for its demands and activities would be part of the work of the **Socialist Campaign for a Labour Victory**.

These demands are of vital importance for the struggle for socialism; and that struggle can be taken forward by a militant fight for a Labour victory.

But a socialist campaign for a Labour victory cannot restrict its attentions to this country. The Labour Party should take an international stand against the interests of NATO and the IMF, and side with the struggles of the oppressed throughout the world.

Last year's Conference voted support for the liberation movements in Southern Africa — this must be implemented. We should also organise support for those fighting the repressive military regimes in South America, in Iran and elsewhere, and take up the case of the working class and democratic opposition in those countries which call themselves socialist. Democratic rights are too important for us to leave to the right wing.

Finally, we must call for and work for the withdrawal of the 15000 British troops in the Six Counties of the north of Ireland, and support the right of the Irish people to national unity and self determination.

SOCIALISTS FOR LABOUR

In launching this Campaign we intend, too, to be the best fighters for the implementation of all those pledges in any Labour manifesto which are in the interests of the working class. We put forward our demands and proposals in the belief that they are

fighting for

■ The Irish people — as a whole — should have the right to determine their own future. Get the British troops out now! Repeal the Prevention of Terrorism Act now. Political status for Irish republican prisoners as a matter of urgency.

■ The black working people of South Africa and Zimbabwe should get full support from the British labour movement for their strikes, struggles, and armed combat against the white supremacist regimes. South African goods and services should be blacked.

■ It is essential to achieve the fullest democracy in the labour movement. Automatic re-selection of MPs during each parliament, and the election by annual conference of party leaders. Annual election of all trade union officials, who should be paid the average for the trade. These measures are essential if we are to have a leadership of the labour movement which is responsive and loyal to the interests of the working class.

Fight for democracy in the labour movement.

■ The chaos, waste, human suffering and misery of capitalism now — in Britain and throughout the world — show the urgent need to establish rational, democratic, human control over the economy, to make the decisive sectors of industry social property, under workers' control.

The strength of the labour movement lies in the rank and file. Our perspective must be working class action to raze the capitalist system down to its foundations, and to put a working class socialist system in its place — rather than having our representatives run the system and waiting for the crumbs from the table of the bankers and bosses.

necessary to serve the interests of the working class.

We believe the policies in our platform can allow us to draw into a campaign for a Labour victory many forces which will make a major contribution to the party's election campaign. We hope that in drawing in such new supporters behind Labour on the programme we have outlined we will begin to move beyond the narrow limits of purely electoral activity and to build a lasting movement to fight for socialist solutions in the party.

We are saying to old and new Labour Party supporters that a debate about the way forward is taking place in our party — our views are an important part of that debate. If you want to play a part in that debate, if you want to see action to take forward the struggle for the implementation of the progressive resolutions passed at successive conferences of the party, **join us in the fight for a Labour victory.**

What will our **Socialist Campaign for a Labour Victory** look like?

It will be the most enthusiastic, energetic call for a Labour vote that our movement can produce, combined with a drive within our movement for socialist action to take us beyond the politics of state monopoly capitalism.

We would not aim to substitute ourselves for the existing party bodies, the local parties and the innumerable campaigning bodies on the left of the party. Rather, as far as possible we would aim to supplement their work, providing leaflets, speakers on specific topics, platforms for speakers from other bodies, and so on.

We would hope to be able to work alongside local

agents, councillors, trade union delegates, as well as such campaigns as the Campaign for Labour Party Democracy, Labour Abortion Rights Campaign, Socialist Environmental and Resources Association, Socialist Educational Association, Socialist Medical Association, British Peace Committee, Working Women's Charter, Gay Labour Group, Labour anti-racist and anti-fascist groups (such as the Labour Party Race Relations Action Group), the LPYS, Liberation, Chile Solidarity Campaign, Anti-Apartheid and other organisations supporting a labour victory on which some points of agreement exist.

We will also explore the possibilities of using theatre groups, Music for Socialism and Rock Against Racism to build support for a Labour victory.

In short, we wish to use all means available to us as socialists and as Labour Party members to ensure a Labour victory at the next election, despite and in opposition to Labour's governmental record. We believe that it is the left wing of the party which can provide the greatest reserves of energy and enthusiasm.

It is the activity of the left of the party, which wants to settle accounts with capitalism, which is the best guarantee for a Labour victory. We would seek to work in an undogmatic and non-sectarian way — to debate our differences openly with other party members while working together in the common cause. We will attempt to draw new forces into the party to strengthen its work and help break down the barriers between voters and those they elect, between representatives and represented, between politics and daily life.