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The British General Election of 2015: The Crisis of the Labour Party in Britain

By Laurence Humphries, RCIT Britain, 28.5.2015

The result of the 2015 General election in Britain resulted in the return of a Tory Government under David Cameron with an increased majority. The Labour Party was decimated and experienced one of the worst results since the 1980's. Reformism is in crisis and could offer nothing for the working class and the oppressed. In Scotland it was wiped out by the Scottish Nationalists, a bourgeois populist party that has promised anti-austerity measures and which won because many Scottish workers voted for them.

Scotland was important as Labour had the majority of Scottish MPs. The SNP now has 56 MPs out of 59 leaving Labour, the Tories, and the Liberal Democrats with one seat each. Many workers in Scotland were attracted by the SNP's anti austerity approach and their wish for more national autonomy.

The RCIT would argue that the Scottish masses have the right to decide their own democratic future. Although the referendum for an independent Scotland failed, the SNP itself was greatly strengthened during their campaign and on the average won around 25% more in wealthier parts of Scotland and gained even around 35% and more of the vote in working class areas. In addition their membership rose from 25,000 members at the end of 2012 to more than 100,000 members today. Both the election results and the size of the party's membership is a new historical mark for the SNP as well as for Labour in Scotland.

For an independent Scotland or against?

Again, we would argue that the Scottish masses have the right to decide their own democratic future. It is absurd that the referendum about the question of Scottish independence is limited to "once in a lifetime". The RCIT is not in favour of separation of the Scottish working class and the English working class. However we support the right of the Scottish workers to separate if they want to. Labour was punished by the Scottish workers during the elections because of their refusal to campaign for more democratic rights for Scotland. Revolutionary Communists in Britain have to support the right of the Scottish people to have as many referenda on at least every bigger democratic question as they want. In addition revolutionary communists, like every honest democrat, have to support the right for an independent Scotland if this is the wish of the Scottish working class. On this question the RCIT is on the side of the working class and masses. We

would support a programme calling for the expropriation of the means of production and capital by the working class. We would advocate joint action with the English working class so that workers can speak as a single class together with English in their demands to defend jobs and services. While we would prefer to and try to win the Scottish workers for the idea of a united British working class, we would also defend the right of the Scottish people to separate if it so decides. Therefore, we would campaign for joint action of the entire British working class even if the Scottish workers decide that they want an independent Scotland. More than this: We see the necessity to fight for more democratic rights and autonomy of the Scottish people today. This is the duty of every British worker, not to mention of every revolutionary communist.

Labour lost in working class areas of England

From 1997 to 2005 Labour lost 4 million voters, mainly from working class areas. This development continued over the last decade. The support for Labour shrunk in the so-called white working class areas. The Labour Party has been reduced to its heartlands. In cities like London where there is a concentration of workers, the Labour Party has retained its influence. "Labour has increased its control of London to take 45 of the capital's 73 Parliamentary seats despite heavy losses elsewhere in the UK". [1]. Labour's policy of constant adaption to the policy of the ruling class was a crucial factor in its defeat. The majority of workers and the oppressed were not prepared to elect a Labour Government with a pro-austerity and pro-capitalist agenda. Many stayed away from the polls and simply did not vote. The biggest responsibility in the election of another Tory Government for the next 5 years rests with the trade union bureaucracy which has not lifted a finger to defend jobs and services in the last 5 years. When the TUC Congress put forth a motion to consider the possibility of a General Strike, Frances O'Grady the General Secretary of the TUC and other bureaucrats worked night and day to remove it from the Agenda. These bureaucrats are spineless and cowardly and must be driven from office. Within hours of the election results, Ed Milliband resigned the leadership of the Labour Party. The party is now in tatters, unable to deal with the situation and facing yet again another leadership election between the Blairite wing of the party and the so called Left.

Massive attacks are planned for the coming months

The Tories will first increase the hated Bedroom Tax, hoping to rescind large amounts of housing benefits. From there it will begin the wholesale destruction of the welfare state. It will use benefit sanctions to reduce payments to the unemployed and less well off. People receiving disability payments will find their payments either abolished or reduced. Cuts in health services will continue. It is reported that Jeremy Hunt, the Health Secretary, has already signed the largest privatisation deal in history to the sum of £780 million. There are proposals to charge for GP appointments and the Tories will ultimately aim to dismantle the NHS and make sure that only the rich will be able to enjoy reasonable health care.

In Britain today two main classes face each other: the bourgeoisie with more billionaires than ever before and a working class which is ready to fight but which lacks leadership and perspective. The rich are hoping that the new ruling class government will continue to accrue wealth for them as the Tories begin to strip all public services to the bone, launching massive attacks on the working class and pauperising them ever further.

Britain is a major metropolitan capitalist country and the role of Imperialism for it is the decisive factor. The RCIT has always stated that *"It is the primary duty of British Socialists to oppose the Imperialist policy of its own ruling class. (...) The RCIT calls on the working class to organise independently to strive for Leadership in the anti-Imperialist movement and to connect the struggle against the Imperialist Monopolies and great powers with the International struggle to overthrow Capitalism"*. [2].

As such, we demand all imperialist and British troops out of Northern Ireland. The defeat of the Labour Party in Scotland was a result of their pro-imperialist approach which provided no alternative to the capitalist crisis. The Trade Union bureaucracy organised several one day strikes, but both they and the Labour party leadership restricted these strikes to simple protests. They displayed arrogance towards migrants and other ethnic workers from the semi-colonial countries, as well workers in Northern Ireland, Scotland and parts of Wales.

Immediate protest of the workers and the youth

The immediate aftermath of the elections on Saturday 9 May was explosive. Thousands of workers, youth, and students rioted and demonstrated in London and Cardiff over the prospect of another 5 years of this hated Tory Government. Many workers and young people marched towards Tory HQ, Westminster and 10 Downing Street.

"The day after the Conservatives was elected with a majority protesters hit the streets in London and other cities to rally against the Government (...) A large police presence met protesters outside conservative campaign HQ in Westminster". [3]. People marching through London were carrying banners and placards saying 'Cuts Kills', 'Get the Tories out', 'Down with this sort of thing' and 'Screw the cuts'. Police were in Riot gear and there were a number of arrests against these unplanned demonstrations. We in the RCIT say that a massive mobilisation of workers, the oppressed, and young must be organised with strikes, demonstrations, occupations to defend basic services like the NHS, and welfare provisions for the less well-off. The working class must rise up and strike at the heart of this hated capitalist government formed by the Tories. Every resource

must be used to resist the attacks that are now coming. The RCIT calls for mass protests and strikes and for the preparation of a General Strike against this arrogant and reactionary Tory capitalist government. It is only by the revolutionary transformation of society that a fairer, just and Socialist society can be built.

Examples of the incorrect centrist approach

A number of left reformist and centrist organisations ran candidates in the Election. The most prominent were *Left Unity* and the *Trade Union and Socialist Coalition* comprising the *Socialist Party* and *Socialist Workers Party*. In the end they polled 0.1%-0.5% of the vote. In voting terms their influence was negligible. As I stated in the Bulletin of the RCIT in Britain *"In past elections it polled in most constituencies only about 0.1%-0.5% of the total vote. Both TUSC and Left Unity spread a Left reformist programme and do not represent a significant minority of the Workers vanguard moving to the Left"*. [4].

Richard Brenner from Workers' Power, a small centrist organisation in Britain, commented on the result of the election writing: *"The stark fact is that the 2015 general Election reflected a working class movement that had already suffered a very significant defect"*. [5]. Further on he says *"... but also amongst the less class conscious section of unrecognised and desperate workers in depressed Northern towns"*. [6]. This statement reflects a pessimistic approach of Workers' Power.

However, the central problem is not the working class's unwillingness to fight but the role of the British labour bureaucracy which avoids any serious struggle against the austerity attacks. Leon Trotsky's observation in the Transitional Programme is more relevant than ever: *"The crisis of Humanity can be reduced to the crisis of Proletarian Leadership"*. [7]

Class consciousness is not always reflected by voting Labour. A significant part of the working class knows that the Labour Party is rotten yet is not voting for other parties because the Labour Party is a bourgeois workers' party but these other parties are not workers' parties. A significant sector of the working class vanguard shows its class consciousness by not voting for the Labour party as a protest against rotten reformism.

The crisis of revolutionary leadership still remains. Len McCluskey leader of Unite, the biggest trade union in Britain and architect of the election of Ed Miliband as leader of the Labour Party, failed miserably in his plans for a Labour Government. The labour bureaucracy has a long history in Britain, and its role has been to protect and defend the capitalist system in its attempt to earn privileges and rewards.

The bureaucracy emerged in the 19th Century when Imperialism developed. V.I. Lenin leader of the Russian Revolution described in his book *Imperialism the Highest stage of Capitalism* how this labor aristocracy emerged and how it had been bought off by the Bourgeoisie. Lenin and other Marxists advocated the expulsion of the bureaucracy from the workers movement.

Richard Brenner argues: *"Form a cross union rank and file movement to both pressure Union leaders to act and prepare to action without them if necessary"*. [8]. While we also support the formation of a rank and file movement and calls to force the union leaders to fight, it is equally necessary to warn against the antagonistic interests of the labor bureaucracy. The bureaucracy is always seeks to reach a compromise with the bosses in order to keep their own status and privileges. They want

to avoid any struggle and, if they are forced to call a strike under the pressure of the rank and file, they will betray it at the first opportunity. This is why revolutionary communists have to make clear that the real character of the bureaucracy in the labor movement is one of an agent of the bourgeoisie in the rows of our movement. By failing to warn against the antagonistic interests of the bureaucracy, Brenner is fostering illusions that these so called 'Union Leaders' might somehow not betray the rank and file.

The major centrist Organisations in Britain like the Socialist Workers Party and the Socialist Party of England and Wales have their own 'rank and file' organisations like Unite the Resistance (SWP) and the National Shop Stewards Movement (SPEW) which is a forum where Trade Union bureaucrats are welcomed with open arms. The SWP and SPEW were the major influences in the Trade Union and Socialist Coalition (TUSC).

The RCIT stands with Lenin' approach on the labour bureaucracy: "Modern 20th Century Imperialism created a privileged monopoly position for a few advanced countries, and this gave rise to a certain type of traitor, social chauvinist leaders who champion the interests of their own craft their own section of the Labour aristocracy". [9]. Further on Lenin has a solution for this Labour Bureaucracy "The victory of the Revolutionary proletariat is impossible unless this evil is combatted, unless the opportunist social traitor leaders are exposed, discredited and expelled". [10].

Rob Sewell, a leading member of *Socialist Appeal*, the British section of the centrist *International Marxist Tendency*, has written an article called 'Explosive situation developing-where is Britain Heading' on the results of the British General Election. *Socialist Appeal*, which has been for its entire existence inside the British Labour Party, was completely unprepared for the latest election results, and was expecting Labour to win. In his article, Sewell has for the first time in *Socialist Appeal* history has suggested a course of working outside the Labour Party. He even suggests that there might be the possibility of forming a new Workers Party. "There is obviously a massive political vacuum in Britain and we know that Nature abhors a vacuum. Under pressure some big Trade Unions may end up disaffiliating from Labour and helping to establish a new Party". [11] This reflects the depth of the shock which the defeat of the Labour Party has caused amongst the centrist left.

What Revolutionary Communists answer

By failing to seriously fight against the bureaucracy, centrists often act objectively – despite contrary intentions – as their foot soldiers. They show no intention of seriously combating their influence or discrediting them or driving them out of the workers' movement as recommended by Lenin.

The RCIT has written extensively on the role of this Labour aristocracy. Unfortunately there is no mention of the most oppressed and lower strata of the working class in the articles written by Brenner or other centrists. Many migrants, workers from ethnic backgrounds are ignored and forgotten. Most Trade unions are dominated by this labour aristocracy, there are a few exceptions, but this Aristocracy is mainly composed of white skilled workers. There are only a few from the lower strata (migrant workers and workers from ethnic backgrounds).

The RCIT has stated that the majority of the working class and the oppressed are now in the Global South (Latin America – Brazil, Argentina, Venezuela, Colombia) India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, the Middle East (Yemen, Egypt, Iraq,

Iran, Libya, Syria, Tunisia, Saudi Arabia and the Gulf states) or in the new imperialist powers China and Russia. There are many struggles of the oppressed in these countries against Imperialism and their local lackeys.

We in the RCIT say that it is to these forces that we should be looking and uniting these struggles with those of the broad, non-bureaucracy masses – the lower and middle strata – of the British working class. This is why it is the task of revolutionaries in Britain to form Communist fractions recruiting and organising the lower strata in the trade unions that will fight for a Revolutionary alternative on an Anti-Imperialist programme.

"The huge majority of the national and ethnic minorities are nationally oppressed and super-exploited as labour forces. This means that they are discriminated in the society because of their National and ethnic origins and they earn less than their white British class brothers and sisters. Black, Asian and migrant people are disproportionately over represented amongst the lower strata of society". [12].

The RCIT advocates a programme of struggle in the coming period. We call on all revolutionaries in Britain to read our programme and Manifesto, and to support us and join the RCIT as the first step in building a Pre Party Organisation in Britain.

- 1) Nationalise all key companies under workers control without paying compensation. Reinstate all public utilities that have been privatised!
- 2) Repeal the anti-union laws. For a General Strike to bring down the hated Tory Government.
- 3) For equality of black, Asian and immigrant peoples. For full citizenship rights. Oppose Racism and Islamophobia!
- 4) Cancel all debts!
- 5) British army out of Iraq and Northern Ireland! Victory to the resistance!
- 6) For a workers' government based upon councils of action and armed workers' militias!
- 7) For a workers' republic in Britain – For a Socialist United States of Europe!

Footnotes

- 1) 'London Election results' Labour dominates the capital as Liberal Democrats crumble' www.standard.co.uk/londonelectionresults Ramzy Alwaheel, Robin de Peyer. 7th May 2015.
- 2) See on this e.g. RKOB: The August Uprising in Britain. Report of the RKOB delegation on its visit in London in August 2011, <http://www.thecommunists.net/worldwide/europe/britain-report-from-uprising/>
- 3) Sam Rkaina: Anti-Tory protests: recap of day when hundreds march against new Conservative government, Daily Mirror, 10th May 2015. www.mirror.co.uk/news.uknews.politics
- 4) Laurence. Humphries. www.thecommunists.net/liberation/bulletin-in-britain/vol1/april2015
- 5) Richard Brenner. Tories plan 100 days offensive –working class needs to prepare defence. www.workerspower.org.uk/leagueofthefifthinternational/may10th2015
- 6) *ibid*
- 7) Leon Trotsky: The Transitional programme and the Tasks of the fourth International. New Park Publications
- 8) Richard Brenner Tories plan 100 days offensive-working class needs to prepare defence. www.workerspower.org.uk/leagueofthefifthinternational/may10th2015
- 9) V.I. Lenin: Left wing Communism an Infantile Disorder Pluto press .pg.47
- 10) *ibid*
- 11) Explosive situation developing-where is Britain heading? Written by Rob Sewell Editor of *Socialist Appeal*, 15th May 2015, <http://www.socialist.net/explosive-situation-developing-where-is-britain-heading-htm>
- 12) See on this e.g. RKOB: The August Uprising in Britain. Report of the RKOB delegation on its visit in London in August 2011, <http://www.thecommunists.net/worldwide/europe/britain-report-from-uprising/>

Reject Attacks by Press Columnists on Migrants and the Oppressed: Defend Migrants and Ethnic Minorities from Racist and Fascist Attacks!

By Laurence Humphries, RCIT Britain, 28.5.2015

Kate Hopkins, who is irregularly writing for the Sun Newspaper has made racist statements about the recent Tragedy of migrants who died in the Mediterranean. Her statements are even reminiscent of statements made by Goebbels during the Nazi regime of Hitler during the 1930's.

In quotes from the Sun and other media sources it was reported "She doesn't care if Immigrants die as she reveals her violent solution for Immigration". [1] She also referred to immigrants as "cockroaches" [2] also saying: "I don't care show me pictures of coffins, show me the bodies floating in water, play violins and show me skinny people looking sad." [3]

The Press regulator IPSO rejected hundreds of complaints from readers and others who were appalled at Hopkins's statement. [4] Even spokespersons of official bourgeois institutions like the United Nations Human Rights chief has also denounced the SUN Newspaper over Hopkins's statements. Without having any illusions in the real, imperialist motives of the UN and their inhuman policy it shows how difficult it is for the more clever parts of the ruling class not to complain about the open spoken words of Hopkins. [5]

The UN Human rights chief has attacked the Sun Newspaper for publishing an article by columnist Katie Hopkins branding her use of the word "Cockroaches to describe migrants as reminiscent of anti-Semitic Nazi propaganda". [6] The capitalist state fully supports the sentiments of Hopkins as the owner of the SUN, Rupert Murdoch, does. They are just not as honest and stupid as Hopkins is. The role of Imperialism and its race hatred is well documented. Britain has a Race Relation Act but no prosecution. The role of the Press Regulator shows that these organisations do not really defend migrant and Colonial peoples. Hopkins's column in the SUN Newspaper is very similar to statements by the Third Reich. This shows that the crisis of Imperialism reveals its most extreme pure hatred against Migrants and members from Ethnic Communities through verbal statements.

The RCIT rejects these racist statements by Hopkins and calls the Labour movement to build a concerted campaign against the racist and fascist attacks upon Migrants.

The RCIT calls for:

* For full citizenship rights and abolition of all special laws for all migrants!

* Fight against ISLAMPHOBIA. For the right to free exercise of Religion.

* Migrants are often under racist attacks, therefore we say: For the formation of joint self defence units of Workers, migrants and youth to defend migrants from such attacks.

* Join the RCIT! Get active in building a Pre Revolutionary Organisation in Britain as part of the Fifth International, an international, revolutionary workers party.

Footnotes:

(1) Fay Strang: Katie Hopkins says she doesn't care if Migrants die as she reveals her violent solution for immigration, Daily Mirror, 17.4.2015, <http://www.mirror.co.uk/3am/celebrity-news/katie-hopkins-says-doesnt-care-5534471>

(2) Katie Hopkins: Rescue Boats? I'd use gunships to stop illegal Migrants, Make no mistake these migrants are like Cockroaches, The Sun, 17.4.2015, <http://www.sunnation.co.uk/hopkins-rescue-boats-id-use-gunships-to-stop-illegal-migrants/>

(3) ibid

(4) Jasper Jackson: IPSO rejects complaints Katie Hopkins Migrant Column was discriminatory, The Guardian, 1.5.2015, <http://www.theguardian.com/media/2015/may/01/ipso-rejects-complaints-katie-hopkins-migrants-column-sun>

(5) Sam Jones: UN Human Rights Chief denounces Sun over Katie Hopkins 'Cockroach' column, 24.4.2015, <http://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2015/apr/24/katie-hopkins-cockroach-migrants-denounced-united-nations-human-rights-commissioner>

(6) ibid

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