

After the General Election: Where is Britain going?

Socialist Equality Party (Britain)
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In its manifesto, the Socialist Equality Party characterised today's general election in Britain as a political fraud.

The SEP warned, "Whatever the make-up of the next government, its agenda has already been determined. The international financial institutions, the major corporations and all the official parties intend to make working people foot the bill for an economic crisis that is not of their making."

The manifesto stressed that the savage austerity measures being imposed in Greece were a harbinger of developments in Britain and throughout Europe. It insisted that what was posed before the working class was the necessity for a political break with the Labour Party, a "right wing party of big business no different than the Conservatives".

The past four weeks have more than confirmed this prognosis.

Our verdict on Labour is also shared by millions of working people, who rightly despise the party of Tony Blair and Gordon Brown. This is payback for its 13 years of office, during which Labour has presided over the greatest transfer of wealth from working people to the rich in history, participated in wars of aggression in Iraq and Afghanistan and severely curtailed democratic freedoms in the name of the "war on terror".

Whatever backing the Labour Party holds on to is due to the visceral hostility and fear amongst many workers at what a Conservative government would do, rather than any positive endorsement of its policies or political record. It is in fact Labour that bears direct responsibility for any possible return to power of the Tories and the spike in support for the Liberal Democrats.

Particularly in the aftermath of the £1 trillion bailout of the banks and super-rich, a poll by the *Financial*

Times found that Labour "is no longer seen as the party of equal rights and decency".

Just as significant, rising social inequality was deemed to be the most pressing concern for respondents, with more than eight out of ten agreeing "that the gap between rich and poor was widening," while three out of four "said the next government should make narrowing the divide a priority".

These findings speak to the development of a broad left-wing sentiment within the working class that finds no expression whatsoever in official politics.

Behind their message statements of "stability", "change" or "fairness", all three parties have maintained their silence on the fundamental issues concerning workers and young people. They are all firmly committed to continuing the occupation of Afghanistan and the militarist agenda pursued throughout Labour's term in office. They all intend to make cuts in jobs, pay and public spending, on a scale not seen since the Great Depression of the 1930s.

That is why any reference to the global recession and the cuts they intend to make was virtually expunged from the official debate during the election campaign. So much so that sections of the ruling elite have warned that any government formed on the basis of such obvious lies and disinformation will have no mandate to impose the dictates of big business and the banks.

The *Financial Times* has been amongst the most insistent in raising the dangers involved. Its April 30 editorial complained that no party had explained its fiscal plans, because the details would be "too gory." However, "whichever party wins this election will need to sack public sector staff, cut their wages, slash benefits, reduce pensions and axe services."

It warned that voters "are in for the shock of their lives—and will respond with fury when they learn the

truth. Their anger, moreover, will not be directed at bankers or bureaucrats. It will be aimed at the politicians who hid their plans from the public”.

The media focus on a possible role in government for the Liberal Democrats is aimed at legitimising that which will otherwise be regarded as entirely illegitimate. Declaring that an agreement to introduce proportional representation was not a precondition for working with the Conservatives, Liberal Democrat leader Nick Clegg cautioned Tory leader David Cameron that to go it alone would be “a recipe for profound political and social tensions.”

In truth, the Liberal Democrats are in an extraordinarily weak position to provide such a cover. They are being boosted by the media as a supposed restraining influence in a hung parliament only because they in reality agree entirely with the need to slash public spending. Whether they align themselves with the Conservatives or Labour, Clegg has prepared the Liberal Democrats for any coalition by his pledge to implement “savage cuts”.

Fundamental conclusions must be drawn regarding the situation that now confronts working people. A government by any combination of parties that emerges after the elections will function as a right-wing cabal, dedicated to waging economic and social warfare against the working class.

This represents only one pole of an explosive resurgence of the class struggle being unleashed as a result of the deepening crisis of world capitalism. Its antipode will take the form of a mass social and political movement of workers and youth in opposition to the drive by the bourgeoisie and its parties towards austerity, militarism and war. The mounting resistance of the Greek working class to the cuts being imposed by the PASOK government at the behest of the European Union, the IMF and the financial speculators is a precursor to similar developments throughout Europe.

This movement is emerging under conditions in which working people have come to the end of the road with their old parties and trade unions. Events have revealed the full extent of the decades-long degeneration and decay of all the organisations that once constituted the official workers’ movement and their transformation into naked instruments of the financial oligarchy.

The path has been cleared for the re-emergence of the working class as an independent actor in political life. The critical task is the construction of new organisations through which to wage a counter-offensive against capital—above all a new socialist and internationalist party.

The SEP is that party. Our campaign in the general elections was directed towards laying the foundations for such a turn, for what must become a politically conscious revolutionary movement of the working class. We urge all workers and youth who agree with our manifesto and have followed our campaign to make the decision to join the SEP.

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