

# CLASS AGAINST CLASS

ORGAN OF THE MARXIST-LENINIST ORGANISATION OF BRITAIN : Special Election  
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## A SOCIALIST ELECTION POLICY

EIGHTEEN MONTHS BEFORE IT WAS CONSTITUTIONALLY REQUIRED, PRIME MINISTER EDWARD HEATH HAS REQUESTED THE DISSOLUTION OF PARLIAMENT, AND A GENERAL ELECTION IS TO BE HELD ON FEBRUARY 28TH.

### A BITTER ELECTION?

The political commentators of press, TV and radio are agreed on one point: that this election will be, in comparison with those of the past half-century, a bitter one.

The state in Britain, as in other developed capitalist countries, is essentially the machinery of force by which the biggest capitalist groups rule over the rest of

the people. Parliament is no more than a false facade to the state, designed to deceive the working people into believing that they live in a democracy.

In the system of "parliamentary democracy" which operates in Britain, therefore, an election involves genuine inter-party struggle only when it is contested by parties representing the interests of antagonistic social classes or by parties representing the interests of sections of the ruling class which stand, at least for the moment, for antagonistic policies.

The Communist Party, once a revolutionary party of the working class, has been transformed into a "left" social-democratic party by its revisionist leadership; in preaching the dangerous illusion of "a peaceful parliamentary road to socialism" it has become a mere instrument of political deception serving, like the major parties, the interests of monopoly capital. And since the Marxist-Leninist party of the working class which must and will be built exists as yet only in embryonic form, the working class will not be politically represented in the 1974 general election.

Both the major parties from which a government could be formed in 1974 represent the interests of monopoly capital, of the Big Business interests which dominate the economy and the state. That is why, both in elections and in parliament itself, the rivalry between these parties is normally mere shadow-boxing, involving no more bitterness than a gentlemanly cricket match at Lords.

In 1974, however, a significant difference of policy has arisen between two sections of the monopoly capitalist ruling class, and this difference is at the moment reflected in a genuine antagonism between the Conservative and Labour Parties.

What is the basis of this difference in policy?

#### THE NEW SITUATION OF BRITISH IMPERIALISM

The wages and working conditions of Britain's workers have long been determined by what is known as "collective bargaining" - ostensibly a process of negotiation between representatives of the workers and representatives of the employers.

In most cases, however, collective bargaining has actually been carried out between two sets of representatives of the employers. The trade union bureaucrats, with a standard of life corresponding to that of the director of a large company, have objectively served the interests of management by settling, at each round of negotiations, for the minimum possible gain that would enable them to damp down militant action on the part of their working class members for a further period.

Until the Second World War the British imperialists possessed the largest colonial empire in the world, and from the exploitation of the colonial working people vast super-profits flowed into the City of London. Some of these super-profits were used to "bribe" the labour aristocracy, the lieutenants of Big Business within the working class movement, and some to finance capital development, which slowly increased the productivity of labour and so permitted the price of labour power to rise gradually through the machinery of collective bargaining. This gradual increase in the price of labour power, i.e., in the real wages of the workers, enabled the trade union bureaucrats to maintain their domination - and that of the social-democratic philosophy which they preached - over the working class as a whole.

Britain's capital development was, however, very limited. Why, reasoned the British monopoly capitalists, plough back profits into technical modernisation of plant when the colonial empire provided huge markets which could be protected by political measures from the competition of their industrially more advanced rivals?

Since the end of World War II, however, the situation of British imperialism

has radically altered. The national liberation struggles of the colonial peoples have destroyed the British Empire in its old form. True, the British imperialists have succeeded in transforming many of their former colonies into neo-colonies, whose "independence" is purely nominal and which are still dependent upon British imperialism. But the necessity of damping down genuine national liberation struggle by maintaining the fiction of "independence" has greatly weakened the power of the British imperialists and their neo-colonial puppets to insulate these countries from foreign competition.

Thus, in the new post-war world, the British imperialists were faced with the crying need to modernize their largely obsolete means of production in order to compete successfully on world markets with their industrially more developed imperialist rivals - an extremely costly process - in a world where the extraction of super-profits from the colonial-type countries had become more difficult. It was clear to the British imperialists that they could bring their stagnating economy out of its rut, could change the image of capitalist Britain as "the sick man of Europe", only by increasing the intensity of exploitation of the British working class.

The experience of the 1926 General Strike, which followed the attempt to cut workers' wages outright, had taught Britain's monopoly capitalists the desirability of trying to achieve this end by more subtle means. The means they adopted was greatly to increase the money supply, so producing by the operation of the laws of capitalist economy a continuing inflationary rise in the prices of commodities. The demands of the workers for higher wages were then blamed as "the cause of the inflation", and it was announced that the state would attempt to "protect the workers from their folly and the inflation resulting from it" by imposing legal restraints on wage increases and on industrial action.

(A fuller analysis of these manoeuvres was given in the article "The Great Confidence Trick: Inflation" in CLASS AGAINST CLASS, No.1, 1973; p.6)

#### THE EFFORT TO DESTROY COLLECTIVE BARGAINING

The obvious vehicle to bring into operation the plan of the British imperialists to abolish the system of collective bargaining to "protect the workers from inflation" was the Labour Party. And it was indeed the Labour Government which attempted to undertake this task with its "Prices and Incomes" policy and the White Paper "In Place of Strife" of January 1969.

The trade union bureaucrats, however, declined to play their customary role in connection with the latter. Not only did they fear that the angry opposition of the working class to state-imposed fines for "industrial misconduct" might seriously undermine their positions, but they were concerned at the possible loss of their lucrative role as monopoly capital's special constables within the trade union movement to some state Industrial Commission. They therefore opposed the Labour Government's proposed Industrial Relations Bill and in May 1969 put forward as a rival to it the TUC's own policy document, "Industrial Relations: Programme for Action" under which the General Council of the TUC would be given disciplinary powers over the trade unions.

Never has the dependence of a social-democratic government upon the goodwill of Big Business been admitted more explicitly than when Wilson, on April 17th, 1969, told the Parliamentary Labour Party that the passage of the Industrial Relations Bill was "essential to the government's continuance in office".

But the pleas of Wilson and Castle were in vain. When, in June 1969, a special

congress of the TUC overwhelmingly rejected the Labour Government's Industrial Relations Bill, the proposed legislation was dropped and Wilson was compelled to admit to his monopoly capitalist masters his inability to carry out their instructions.

When the necessary new plans had been drawn up, therefore, the Wilson government was "dismissed", and at the General Election held in June 1970 a Conservative government, headed by Edward Heath, was manipulated into office.

(A fuller account of these manoeuvres appeared in the then organ of the MLOB, RED FRONT, of August/September 1970).

The Tory election programme had promised that a Conservative government would have nothing to do with any attempt at state interference in collective bargaining; but such is the character of capitalist "parliamentary democracy" that this mask was quickly dropped. The Conservative government proceeded to push through parliament its Counter-Inflation Act and its Industrial Relations Act, imposing legal restraints respectively on wage increases and industrial action - the legal restraints which the Labour government had tried but failed to enact. Furthermore, the Conservative government declared its intention to enforce these Acts despite the continued opposition of the whole trade union movement.

Immediately following the 1970 election, the organ of the MLOB expressed the view that the Heath government would fail to implement anti-trade union legislation (the introduction of which it was at that time firmly repudiating):

"A government of the Conservative Party, the open party of Big Business, cannot hope to deceive workers along these lines where a Labour government failed. .. The Heath administration is not a suitable vehicle for these moves". (RED FRONT, August/September 1970; p.7).

Subsequent events have established the correctness of this analysis.

#### THE HEATH GOVERNMENT VERSUS THE MINERS

The primary honour for making the Heath government's policy of state-imposed wage restraint inoperable falls to the miners.

This is not because the present leadership of the National Union of Mineworkers is exceptionally militant or particularly loyal to the interests of its members. On the contrary, the character of this leadership is shown in the settlements made by the NUM leaders over many years - settlements which have left the miners of Britain the worst paid in Europe and which virtually forced them to work overtime weekend after weekend in order to live - and by the efforts of President Joe Gormley to persuade the NUM executive to respond to Heath's appeal and call off the already agreed strike action "in view of the election". The strength of the miners lies in the fact that their product is at the present time essential to the capitalist economy as a whole, in the fact that because of the particularly dangerous and unpleasant nature of their work they enjoy wide public support, but above all in their solidarity. This solidarity has made it necessary for the leaders of the NUM to adopt a firm stand in order to retain their positions.

In 1970 the miners struck in support of a wage claim beyond the legal limits permitted by the government, forcing it to waive (through Wilberforce) these limits in favour of the miners.

In November 1973 the miners began to operate an overtime ban in support of a new wage claim outside the government's Stage Three Pay Code. This time the government determined to "enforce the law" on the miners "at all costs". In December, on the pretext of "fuel shortage", the government imposed a three-day working week on all but a few exempted industries, in the expectation that

the hardships resulting from this would cause such widespread hostility on the part of other workers towards the miners as to force them to capitulate.

(The facts which demonstrate that the imposition of the three-day week was an unscrupulous political manoeuvre were given in the pamphlet "National Lock-out and Shrewsbury Lock-in", published in January 1974 by the RED FRONT MOVEMENT.

Official figures of coal stocks at power stations announced since the publication of this pamphlet confirm its conclusions:

December 23rd, 1973: 13.0 million tons  
February 3rd, 1974: 13.6 million tons).

But the government's strategy failed. More workers persisted in blaming the government for the hardships they were experiencing than were prepared to blame the miners. And the miners began to press for full strike action.

#### THE GROWING DIVISION WITHIN THE RULING CLASS

The government and the economists warned - this time with a firm basis of truth - that a full coal strike would mean, despite the threatened introduction of a two-day working week and electricity cuts of 27 hours a week, that the economy would virtually grind to a halt within a matter of weeks:

"Britain could be reduced to a near-subsistence level of activity in six or eight weeks if the miners go ahead with a full-time strike. ..

The British Steel Corporation has already warned that within 8 to 10 weeks output of steel - crucial for the engineering, shipbuilding, consumer durables and motor industries - would be down to 15%. ..

By that time .. industry would be remorselessly grinding to a halt." ("The Guardian", February 5th, 1974; p.1).

The miners replied by voting 81% to authorise their executive to call a full strike and, in the absence of any concessions from the government, the NUM leadership was compelled to call a strike from February 9th.

These developments increased the growing opposition to the government's policy among the monopoly capitalists themselves, as forecast in the RFM pamphlet already mentioned:

"The Government is facing growing pressure from employers to settle with the miners, even if it means giving in before next Sunday. ..

Mr. William Whitelaw, Secretary for Employment, has been secretly warned that the engineering industry cannot survive a prolonged stoppage. After last Wednesday's Cabinet meeting, he was told by leaders of the Engineering Employers' Federation that several companies would permanently lose their overseas markets if the strike went on for four weeks. ..

Employers fear that shortages of steel and components will become acute by the end of February and that they will suffer severe cash-flow problems even during a recovery period". ("The Observer", February 3rd, 1974; p.1).

On February 5th a delegation from the Confederation of British Industry had a meeting with Heath at which they secretly pressed for a settlement with the miners beyond the Stage Three Pay Code:

"Employers' leaders emerged tight-lipped from Downing Street last night. ..

The employers are certain to have put pressure on Mr. Heath to find an acceptable solution which could solve the miners' dispute, while still preserving as much as possible of the counter-inflation policy". ("The Guardian", February 6th, 1974; p.24).

And on the following day leaders of the CBI met with leaders of the TUC in an effort to seek a joint formula for a settlement with the miners:

"Employers and unions yesterday joined forces in talks which lasted until almost 1 p.m. in a desperate effort to agree a formula for settling the miners' dispute which could avert both a coal strike and the general election which Mr. Heath is poised to announce.

Yesterday's initiative has made public a division between the Government, which still seems unwilling to compromise with the miners, and the employers, who are now prepared to see more money laid on the table". ("The Guardian", February 7th, 1974; p.1).

The unprecedented action of the General Council of the TUC, the principal lieutenants of monopoly capital within the trade union movement, in requesting its affiliated unions to support the miners' strike and not to cross the miners' picket lines emphasises the alienation of a majority of monopoly capitalists from the government and their desire to avoid a long miners' strike which would be disastrous for their profits and markets.

A Conservative government which has lost the support of a substantial section of monopoly capital cannot, of course, maintain itself in office. On February 7th, Heath asked for the dissolution of parliament and a new general election was fixed for February 28th.

#### THE POLITICAL REFLECTION OF THE DIVISION WITHIN THE RULING CLASS

Political parties which objectively serve the interests of monopoly capital differ in that they direct their appeal to strata of the working people with differing levels of political consciousness. Thus, the Conservative Party directs its appeal to those strata of the working class which are virtually lacking in class consciousness, the Labour Party directs its appeal to those strata which have a minimum level of class consciousness, the revisionist Communist Party directs its appeal to those strata which desire a socialist society without the revolutionary organisation necessary to bring this about, etc.

But where there is a division on policy between different sections of the monopoly capitalist ruling class, a political party serving the interests of monopoly capital tends to become the vehicle of one or other of these antagonistic sections and to put forward a policy which serves the interests of that section.

By 1970, for example, a majority of British monopoly capitalists had become convinced that their economic future lay in breaking the dependence upon United States imperialism, which had been the dominant feature of the international position of British imperialism since World War II, and in joining the alliance of West European imperialist powers which had been set up in the form of the European Economic Community. As the MLOB pointed out at the time, one of the reasons for the "dismissal" of the Labour government in 1970 was the fact that it was tied to what had become a minority section of British monopoly capital which wished to eschew the EEC and continue the "special relationship" of dependence upon US imperialism:

"Because of its unwillingness to break its special dependence upon that (now minority) section of British monopoly capital which favours continued collaboration with, and subordination to, US imperialism, the Labour Party had ceased to be, at least for the time being, effective in serving the foreign policy desired by the dominant section of the British imperialists". (RED FRONT, August/September 1970; p.7).

Despite the fact that the Conservative government has brought Britain into the EEC, this difference on foreign policy continues to exist within the monopoly capitalist ruling class. It has for the moment, however, been overshadowed by the more immediate, more urgent difference on domestic policy brought to a head by the solid refusal of the miners to surrender to the government's wage restraints. This difference is reflected, at the moment, in a policy difference between the two major parties, each of which has placed itself at the disposal of one of the antagonistic sections of the monopoly capitalist ruling class.

A majority of monopoly capitalists, represented now by the present leadership of the Labour Party, want to abandon the present rigid system of wage restrictions. They are now convinced that these restrictions cannot be made effective until further steps have been taken to build a corporate state, in which the trade unions are incorporated within the machinery of the capitalist state under slogans such as "workers' participation in industry". This section of monopoly capitalists feels, rightly, that the Labour Party is best equipped to make use of these demagogic slogans in laying the foundations of a corporate state. Already Len Murray, the new Oxford/Cambridge General Secretary of the TUC, has made it clear that the General Council of the TUC would cooperate with a Labour government in accepting the "obligations" which would be imposed upon it by such a government:

"The Labour programme imposes very heavy obligations on trade unions. .. This could mean very difficult problems for us. It could mean asking the trade union movement .. to accept responsibilities. .. It means putting responsibilities and burdens on our shoulders, and we are not prepared to run away from this". (Len Murray, cited in "The Guardian", February 14th, 1974; p.1).

A minority of monopoly capitalists, represented by the present leadership of the Conservative Party, while recognising the necessity of building a corporate state in the future, want to continue the present system of wage restraint "as a matter of principle".

Normally, as in 1970, the majority of monopoly capitalists are able to manipulate an election sufficiently to secure the result they desire. But this manipulation is rendered more difficult in 1974 by the fact that the Labour Party represents the interests of the majority of monopoly capitalists in the matter of immediate domestic policy, but has not abandoned its representation of the interests of another, different, minority section of monopoly capitalists in relation to foreign policy. Wilson has sought to escape this dilemma by putting forward a foreign policy, not of withdrawal from the EEC (this has been left to the revisionist Communist Party and the fascist National Front), but of "renegotiation" of the terms of entry to the EEC to be followed by a referendum on the question; but the confusion of interest has not been completely avoided and has made the manipulation of the Labour Party into office more difficult to realise. Heath has sought to take advantage of this confusion by giving the monopoly capitalist majority the minimum time to resolve these contradictions and bring their manipulative machinery into action by forcing the snap election within three weeks of its announcement.

The fact that the monopoly capitalist majority desire the victory of the Labour Party in 1974 does not mean that the role of the Conservative Party in a corporate state - once the foundations have been laid - is underestimated. But this role requires the replacement of the present leadership of the party by a more openly pro-fascist leadership. The defeat of the Conservative Party in 1974 would make a change of leadership inevitable, and the dissociation of Powell from the

election and from the policies associated with Heath must be seen as a preliminary step in a serious bid for this leadership.

The minority section of monopoly capitalists still represented by the Heath government embrace sections which would suffer negligibly from a grave coal and steel crisis - for example, those linked with oil, property and land. They calculate that many petty bourgeois - as well as many workers who think like petty bourgeois - can be deceived into giving their electoral support to Heath on his platform of "fighting inflation" and of "resisting the use of brute force by the Red miners to win an inflationary pay rise".

But Heath's "principled position" is seriously weakened by a number of factors:

firstly, inflation - rising prices - has proceeded faster than even under the Conservative government's "counter-inflation" programme, and has even been imposed by government edict, as in the case of council house rents;

secondly, it is difficult for Heath to maintain that to pay the miners a few pounds extra would be "disastrous for the economy" in the face of public statements by leading industrialists that it would be disastrous for the economy not to do so; and

thirdly, Heath has, in fact, undermined the whole basis of his election platform by declaring that the previous "maximum possible" offer permitted by Stage Three would be stretched by the Relativities Board and made retrospective!

The question of whether sufficient voters can be deceived by the Heath election campaign into bringing about the return of a Conservative government is thus extremely doubtful.

#### THE QUESTION OF ABSTENTION

There remains the question of what a worker with socialist consciousness should do on polling day, when the electoral choice will lie between the candidates of political parties all of which objectively represent the interests of monopoly capital.

Despite its limitations, "parliamentary democracy" provides a greatly more favourable terrain within which the working class can develop its struggle towards the unleashing of the socialist revolution than do the conditions of extreme repression that would exist under a fascist dictatorship - or even the conditions which would exist under a corporate state. It is, therefore, vitally necessary for the working class to defend by all the means in its power the democratic rights associated with "parliamentary democracy" against attempts to abolish them.

The right to vote, limited though it is, is one of the democratic rights associated with "parliamentary democracy". To advise workers not to use this democratic right on February 28th is to imply that it is of no value, and so to play into the hands of the ultra-right elements who seek to inculcate the view that such democratic rights are "worthless" as a part of the ideological preparation for the attempt, when objective conditions should demand it, to abolish "parliamentary democracy".

In the existing circumstances advice to workers not to vote is harmful and reactionary, and it is not accidental that this advice is put forward by such proven enemies of the working class as the anarchists and the more disruptive Maoist groups.

#### HOW A VOTE CAN HELP FORWARD THE SOCIALIST REVOLUTION

Clearly, therefore, all genuine Socialists must advise workers to use their



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democratic right to vote in this election and to use it in such a way as will help to create the best conditions for the advance of the working class to positions of class struggle and ultimately of revolutionary struggle - which alone can bring about the establishment of a socialist society.

Since the next government will be one either of the Labour Party or of the Conservative Party, both of which represent the interests of monopoly capital, both of which represent the interests of the class enemy of the working class, this tactic involves an analysis of whether the situation of the working class would be more advanced by the election of a Labour government or by the election of a Conservative government.

In the existing situation, a victory for the Labour Party would represent a victory for that section of the monopoly capitalist ruling class which wishes to postpone for a time the operation of the rigid system of restraints on wages and industrial action which the Conservative government has attempted to operate.

Such a postponement would represent a victory for the working class, albeit only a temporary and limited victory. Furthermore, such a postponement would give a further period of time for the construction of a Marxist-Leninist party of the working class, a vanguard party alone capable of leading the working class to a more permanent and wider victory.

Since such a postponement of the fundamental confrontation between the working class and the monopoly capitalist state that is implicit in any state-imposed wage restraints would be in the interests of the working class, Socialists should advise workers to record their vote on February 28th for the political representatives of that section of the monopoly capitalist ruling class which, for its own reasons, favours such postponement - that is, for the Labour Party.

Furthermore, the next stage in the development of the movement of the working class to positions of class struggle and ultimately of revolutionary struggle will be brought about by those strata of the working class which are at present the more politically conscious, that is, from those strata which tend at present to support the Labour Party or the Communist Party. The development of this movement is at present held back by a number of ideological trends which serve the interests of monopoly capital - by the constitutional social-reformism preached by the Labour Party, by the revisionism of the Communist Party, the Maoists and the trotskyites.

The exposure of these ideologies as serving the interests of monopoly capital is thus a necessary pre-requisite for the development of class struggle and ultimately of revolutionary struggle. But this exposure cannot be carried out by propaganda alone, but only when propaganda is combined with the practical day-to-day experience on the part of the working class of the actual role played by the bodies which put forward these ideologies.

Workers can gain their experience of the true character of a political party more easily and more quickly when that party is in governmental office than when it is in opposition. When, for example, the Labour Party is in opposition, its politicians can indulge in unbridled "militant" and "socialist" demagoguery. But when such politicians form the government, they are compelled to act, to legislate, on behalf of their masters - the monopoly capitalists - and one single piece of anti-working class legislation is more educative than a hundred pamphlets.

In the present circumstances, of the various ideological trends designed to deceive the more politically conscious strata of the working class, only the social-reformism of the Labour Party can be exposed in governmental office. Thus, the election to office of the Labour Party will assist in the exposure of

the primary ideological trend designed to deceive the more politically conscious strata of the working class.

The advice of genuine Socialists to vote Labour in the 1974 election must be sharply distinguished from the advice of the revisionist Communist Party to vote Labour because the Labour Party is capable of "serving the interests of the working class" and of "opening the way to Socialism":

"We need a Labour government .. compelled by the Labour movement to carry out a left policy to solve the crisis in the interests of all working people. ...

Britain needs real social change.

Clear the Tory wreckers out. Solve Britain's crisis, and open the way to Socialism". (Election Statement, Political Committee of the Communist Party, in: "Morning Star", February 9th, 1974; p.1).

This policy is outright criminal deception of the working class. The advice of genuine Socialists to vote Labour must be associated with the categorical statement that the Labour Party is the political tool of Big Business and can never be anything else.

The fact that the 1974 election will not be contested by any party representing the interests of the working class underlines THE IMPORTANCE AND URGENCY OF BUILDING A MARXIST-LENINIST PARTY OF THE WORKING CLASS AT THE EARLIEST POSSIBLE MOMENT. For only such a party can genuinely represent the interests of the working class and lead it to "open the door to socialism" by means of a victorious socialist revolution.

The Socialist slogans for the 1974 general election must be:

**BACK THE MINERS !**

**DEFEAT THE TORY GOVERNMENT WHICH STANDS FOR RIGID RESTRAINTS ON WAGE INCREASES AND INDUSTRIAL ACTION!**

**VOTE LABOUR, WHICH STANDS FOR THEIR POSTPONEMENT!**

**PUT WILSON BACK IN THE DOCK!**

Marxist-Leninist Organisation  
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