

European election: British left discusses urgent need for left unity

Monday 15 June 2009, by [HEARSE Phil](#), [No2EU](#), [Permanent Revolution](#), [Respect](#), [SWP \(UK\)](#), [Workers Power](#), [YAQOOB Salma](#) (Date first published: 9 June 2009).

See also: Socialist Resistance: [European election: 'An alarm is ringing' – time 'to build the broadest possible left unity'](#)

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If this debacle doesn't wake up the British left, absolutely nothing will'}} **{{By Phil Hearse June 8, 2009 -- Marxsite}}** -- The outcome of the county council and European parliament elections means that the British left -- the left to the left of New Labour - - has to wake up and break out of its dire sectarian, bureaucratic and factional mindsets. Nothing is more shameful than the lack of of united left slate, around a minimal set of demands in the interets of the working class, in these elections. The near absence of the left from the electoral field was one important reason -- though far from the only one -- that such a large number of the protest votes against the main parties went to the hard-right United Kingdom Independence Party (UKIP) and the fascist British National Party (BNP). It is shameful that the left abandons so much of the electoral field to the far right because of nothing more than hardened, bone-headed, factional idiocy -- topped off by bureaucratic exclusions and anathemas. There was of course the No2EU slate (more on No2EU here), supported by the Communist Party of Britain (CPB) and Socialist Party and promoted by Bob Crow and the National Union of Rail, Maritime and Transport Workers (RMT). This made some impact, but not much -- around about 1% in most

places. It's very unfortunate name gave rise to wrong impressions and in its headline -- although not of course its policies -- seemed indistinguishable from the UKIP. But more than this, the No2EU was a temporary lash-up, a new name and not something easily recognisable and established, as a real political party or long-term electoral front has to be. In London the Socialist Labour Party (sole proprietor A. Scargill) got 17,000 votes, nearly as many as No2EU. Scargill is playing the role of a spoiler and disrupter of real left progress in elections by using big money at his disposition to continually stand a party that does not in reality exist. But why did the

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ZiBhPC9jb2RlPg==">small capital'' basis, eagerly counting
the number of new recruits and papers sold, hopelessly fails to
meet the situation. Left leaders have to start talking to one
another, irrespective of past conflicts and prejudices. The left
has many activists and immense resources of talent, experience and
political capacity. But being stuck in the narcissistic bunker of
narrow minds and narrow organisations won't make any impression on
the national political map. Of course the left faces an almost
total ban on publicity in the national media, and indeed the right-
wing domination of the media more generally. But we start from
where we are, not from where we would like to be. We are much
further behind where we ought to be in building a united left
alternative. We now have to rapidly build a new Alliance for
Socialism. It'll be the first name on any ballot paper. [Phil
Hearse writes for the British socialist newspaper Socialist
Respect.] ----- {{{No2EU calls for unity
to defeat the BNP}}} No2EU: Yes to Democracy coalition convener Bob
Crow has called for urgent discussions involving socialist
organisations, campaigns and trade unions to build a concerted
response following the election of two fascists from the BNP to the
European Parliament. No2EU was the first progressive EU-critical
coalition to stand in Britain in any election and it gained 153,236
votes despite an almost complete media blackout. The combined vote
in Thursday's poll for No2EU, the Socialist Labour Party and some
of the smaller left parties stacks up to nearly a third of a
million votes -- just over 2% of the total. In Scotland, the
combined left vote was close to 4%. Meanwhile, the Labour share of
the vote has dropped by a massive 31%, the Lib Dems by over 7% and
the Tories, despite all the hype, have only managed a tiny increase
in share with turnout collapsing to just over 30%. Bob Crow said

today: {"There is no question that the BNP have benefitted from the collapse of the establishment political parties and from media coverage that has pumped them up like celebrities on I'm a Nazi — Get Me Out of Here.'"

"Sections of the press, which have deliberately ignored anti-establishment parties from the left, need to take a long, hard look at the way the blanket coverage they have given to the fascists from the BNP has contributed to their success." But it's the collapse of public support for the three main parties - each of which is pro-business, pro-EU and supportive of the anti-union laws — which has created the conditions for the scapegoat-politics of the BNP to thrive.

"The fascists support in former mining communities like Barnsley is shocking and throws down a massive challenge to the Labour and Trade Union movement." Along with our colleagues from the SLP and other left groups we won nearly a third of a million votes. From No2EU we won over 150,000 supporters from a standing start in the teeth of a media blackout. That gives us a solid platform to build from.

"We now need urgent discussions with political parties, campaigns and our colleagues in other unions like the CWU to develop a political and industrial response to this crisis." I also want to pay tribute to our colleagues from the Hope Not Hate campaign. There is no doubt that without their tireless efforts the BNP would have won even more seats," he said.

An open letter to the left from the Socialist Workers Party: it's time to create a socialist alternative

June 10, 2009 — Socialist Worker — Labour's vote collapsed to a historic low in last week's elections as the right made gains. The Tories under David Cameron are now set to win the next general election.

The British National Party (BNP) secured two seats in the European parliament. Never before have fascists achieved such a success in Britain. The result has sent a shockwave across the labour and anti-fascist movements, and the left.

The meltdown of the Labour vote and the civil war engulfing the party poses a question—where do we go from here?

The fascists pose a threat to working class organisations, black, Asian and other residents of this country—who BNP führer Nick Griffin dubs “alien”— our civil liberties and much else. History teaches us that fascism can be fought and stopped, but only if we unite to resist it.

The SWP firmly believes that the first priority is to build even greater unity and resistance to the fascists over the coming months and years. The BNP believes it has created the momentum for it to achieve a breakthrough. We have to break its momentum.

The success of the anti-Nazi festival in Stoke and the numbers of people who joined in anti-fascist campaigning shows the basis is there for a powerful movement against the Nazis.

The Nazis’ success will encourage those within the BNP urging a “return to the streets”. This would mean marches targeting multiracial areas and increased racist attacks. We need to be ready to mobilise to stop that occurring. Griffin predicted a “perfect storm” would secure the BNP’s success. The first part of that storm he identified was the impact of the recession. The BNP’s policies of scapegoating migrants, black and Asian people will divide working people and make it easier to drive through sackings, and attacks on services and pensions.

Unity is not a luxury. It is a necessity. If we do not stand together we will pay the price for a crisis we did not cause.

The second lesson from the European elections is that we need a united fightback to save jobs and services.

If Cameron is elected he will attempt to drive through policies of austerity at the expense of the vast majority of the British people. But the Tories’ vote fell last week and they are nervous about pushing through attacks. Shadow chancellor George Osborne told business leaders, “After three months in power we will be the most unpopular government since the war.” We need to prepare for battle.

But there is a third and vital issue facing the left and the wider working class. The crisis that has engulfed Westminster benefited the BNP.

The revelations of corruption, which cabinet members were involved in, were too much for many Labour voters, who could not bring themselves to vote for the party. One answer to the problem is to say that we should swallow everything New Labour has done and back it to keep David Cameron, and the BNP, out.

Yet it would take a miracle for Gordon Brown to be elected back into Downing Street. The danger is that by simply clinging on we would be pulled down with the wreckage of New Labour.

Mark Serwotka, the general secretary of the PCS civil service workers' union, has asked how, come the general election, can we ask working people to cast a ballot for ministers like Pat McFadden.

McFadden is pushing through the privatisation of the post office. Serwotka proposes that trade unions should stand candidates. Those who campaigned against the BNP in the elections know that when they said to people, "Don't vote Nazi" they were often then asked who people should vote for.

The fact that there is no single, united left alternative to Labour means there was no clear answer available. The European election results demonstrate that the left of Labour vote was small, fragmented and dispersed. The Greens did not make significant gains either. The mass of Labour voters simply did not vote. We cannot afford a repeat of that.

The SWP is all too aware of the differences and difficulties involved in constructing such an alternative. We do not believe we have all the answers or a perfect prescription for a left wing alternative. But we do believe we have to urgently start a debate and begin planning to come together to offer such an alternative at the next election, with the awareness that Gordon Brown might not survive his full term. One simple step would be to convene a conference of all those committed to presenting candidates representing working class interests at the next election.

The SWP is prepared to help initiate such a gathering and to commit its forces to such a project. We look forward to your response.

Yours fraternally,

Socialist Workers Party

Respect: BNP victory shows the need for broad left to work together

**Statement on the European election results by councillor Salma Yaqoob,
Respect party leader**

June 8, 2009 — Respect — The historic scale of Labour's defeat at the ballot box is evidence of the deep betrayal felt by those who once voted Labour in the hope of a fairer society. The depth of disillusionment with the mainstream parties is underlined by the shocking breakthrough made by the BNP.

Labour is wholly to blame for its own crisis and has to take a large share of the responsibility for creating the conditions in which the far right is growing. Labour loosened the rules that gave licence to greedy bankers to gamble away our jobs and homes. Labour failed to protect our public services from wasteful and costly privatisation. Labour has overseen growing inequality and a chronic shortage of affordable housing. And Labour failed to tackle the scandal of MP's expenses.

Labour's failure to deliver for its core support has helped the BNP win votes in deprived white working-class communities. Labour's determination not to be outflanked by the Tories on questions of race and immigration has created fertile ground for racist arguments to win support. Too many BNP arguments have been legitimised by a political consensus that treats asylum seekers and immigrants as a criminal threat. The BNP has fed on the growth in Islamophobia, egged on by a barrage of racist coverage in national newspapers. Political ground was conceded to the BNP, and they have occupied it to devastating effect.

Labour has betrayed the hopes of millions of people who believe in a fairer and more equal society and those who believe in an ethical foreign policy based on peace and justice. These election results are a warning of the potential scale of the drift to the right.

This right-wing threat cannot be confronted by conceding the argument in advance. There is every practical and political reason for tackling the recession by extending state intervention, piling investment into a massive programme of house building, taxing the richest to support the big majority of the population through this recession. But a recent survey showed that more than half the working population have seen a cut in pay, reductions in hours or a loss of employment benefits since the recession began. While bankers and shareholders have been bailed out, millions of workers are paying for the economic crisis through lower pay, longer hours or unemployment. The Tories, Labour, Lib Dems and UKIP are all competing with each other on who will push through the most ruthless cuts to public spending.

Giving ground to a right-wing consensus will not undercut the growth of right wing parties. It will only encourage them. It is now critical that the broadest swathes of the left and progressive opinion in this country work together to lever the political agenda in the opposite direction.

We need an alternative to failed free-market dogma.

We need an alternative to an electoral system that disenfranchises the millions of people who don't vote for the winning party and consigns whole geographical areas to be taken for granted. And we need a reassertion of a politics embedded in principles of peace, social justice, equality and anti-racism.

The broad left must work together, irrespective of party affiliation, to maximise the impact of the progressive vote at the next general election.

I am proud of the contributions that Respect members made by supporting Green candidates in the West Midlands and North West. In the North West, with BNP leader Nick Griffin on the brink of a breakthrough, the choice was surely clear. For those who would not give their vote to Labour, the Green candidate - Peter Cranie - was more than a credible alternative. A left-wing Green candidate, with a principled record of opposition to racism, deserved our support.

The results are in, and Peter Cranie was less than 5000 votes away from stopping Nick Griffin's election. Yet almost 50,000 votes were cast for the Socialist Labour Party and No2EU. Together they amounted to just 3% of the vote - nowhere near enough to make a positive impact. The plain fact is that had even a minority of that left-wing vote gone to the Greens we would not be waking up to the fact that the North West is sending a fascist to the European parliament.

If nothing else, these results should spark a renewed and more energetic discussion about bringing the broad left together around a common agenda for progressive change. I will be speaking at the very timely Compass conference next weekend, and I look forward to discussing these and other issues with Labour and Green supporters.

I do not believe that the British public have become hostile to basic progressive policies on the responsibility of the state in providing decent housing, protecting jobs, and regulating the economy. But the retreat of Labour from even a modest social democratic alternative has led to a lack of connection in the public mind between the effects of the recession and the neo-liberal policies responsible for it.

The manner in which Labour has vacated the traditional ground of the left has served to weaken any convincing notion of a political alternative to neoliberalism. This has created a dangerous vacuum which is in danger of being filled by hate fuelled simplicities of the far right. The challenge for the left is to renew itself and reassert some basic socialist critiques and solutions

into mainstream political debate.

Respect will be doing everything we can to contribute to the renewal of a progressive and left-wing politics. But we need to broaden our challenge to the failed parties. There will be many who want to see the values of peace, civil liberties and social justice represented at the ballot box, and in a fairly elected parliament. I encourage them to put themselves forward for consideration as candidates at the next general election.

We need each other and this country badly needs a political alternative of the left.

It is not beyond our ability to create this alternative. There are lessons we can draw from the anti-war movement. In a hostile climate and against formidable obstacles, a clear message, delivered with determination and organisational verve, was able to influence, shape and organise public opposition to war. We need a similar ambition to ideologically and practically build resistance to neoliberalism and racism.

After the Euro Elections - Left Unity?

Permanent Revolution

The European election results marked a significant political turning point in British politics. They confirmed that the Tories will win the next election, for the first time in British history a fascist party has made an electoral breakthrough and that the political, organisational and numerical weakness of the left in Britain has been revealed as terminal, not transitory. ..writes Mark Hoskisson....

The scale of the defeat that the Euro elections represent is revealed by the votes cast. This election cannot be dismissed as an irrelevance. In one sense it was a better guide to the state of the political nation than a general election. It was an election in which all of the most thinking political people in Britain - from the party activists through to the active supporters, i.e. all those who think politics is important - voted. Those who abstained in this election - an abstention that many of them knew would aid the fascists - cannot be counted as in any way advanced because they failed to understand the decisive political significance of a Tory victory and a fascist breakthrough.

The results unpicked

The most class conscious people in the labour movement voted Labour, SLP, No2EU or SSP. Together they totalled 2,718,515 people. These people are the active core, or active supporters of the labour movement. This was the “Barebones” working class vote, stripped of the radical middle classes who voted Liberal or Green. The most advanced people of the right voted Tory, UKIP, BNP and English Democrats. Together they totalled 7,920,019. The active members or active supporters of the right and far right outnumber us to the tune of 5.25million. That is the ugly reality behind the European result.

There will be plenty of people on the left who console themselves with talk of percentages, good starts and so on. Bob Crow is already saying it. After all 153,236 for No2EU from a standing start is surely a creditable percentage vote for a brand new party that faced a media blackout. This is like saying the rosary in the hope of salvation when you are staring death in the face. It is mumbo jumbo.

Most people did not have a clue what the English Democrats were, didn't get a single leaflet from them and missed their election broadcast. Yet these nationalists mustered almost twice as many votes as No2EU. This salient fact underlines what the starting point for any discussion of the election results, what to do now and left unity has to be. The left has to face up to the scale of the defeat, the degree of isolation it suffers and the fact that reactionary forces are on the march. Cameron is marching on Number Ten at the head of an army of pug-ugly reactionaries and will wreak further havoc on the lives of workers when he bashes through its front door.

Schemas don't work

One schematic hope would be that a Tory government will provoke widespread resistance to attacks. Workers reined in by bureaucrats in Unison, Unite and the GMB who are fundamentally loyal to Brown will be let loose should the Tories come in. Resistance will spiral and the balance of forces will change. The political consequences of such widespread action would be to recalibrate the left, reinvigorate activists and redraw the political map once again.

The reason this is a schema is that it does not take account of the very real weakness of organisation, the scarcity of committed activists and the impact of two decades of new realist/service unionist ideology across the movement.

After all, if fights are provoked by attacks then why has the generalised response - faced with the terrible attacks on jobs and pay in this recession - been to accept pay cuts and negotiate redundancy packages?

The truth is that Visteon, Lindsey, the Tube Strike, the London Post Strike and

the parents' struggles against school closures are sporadic examples of resistance amongst either the best organised or the angriest communities. They are not the norm across the movement. That will not change overnight if a Tory government comes in. Of course there might be a revolt - and that would be excellent. But the left must prepare for the most likely development not the most preferable one.

The victory of the right in the elections will have an impact on the Labour Party and the unions. It will, eventually, lead to a change of leadership in the party. However, between now and the general election, it will produce a massive drive for unity around Brown. That is why Blears has issued a grovelling apology. The calculation at the highest levels of the party is that a leadership challenge now, in advance of the election, will guarantee annihilation at the polls.

A unity drive and an attempt to salvage something from the election will, on the other hand, enable a smooth transition to a new leadership and a renewal of Labour in opposition under that new leadership, after the election. And that is what the Blair and Brown factions have agreed will happen. That is why Brown has survived the calamity. Behind this calculation lies the belief that a deal can be struck between the factions after the elections and a new leadership axis, palatable to the union leaders, will be enthroned.

If all goes according to plan this will happen without any irritating challenge from the left. And if the union leaders are given sufficient promises within this process then all could go according to plan. The left cannot mount a serious civil war inside the party after the coming defeat in the way the Bennites did in the early 1980s. There is still less prospect of them being able to do very much at all if the key union leaders and the Labour leaders stay in an alliance. Only a split between the emerging Johnson/Miliband new leadership and Woodley/Simpson/Prentis could open up a real space for the left to be able to make any advances.

Unions won't abandon Labour

Such a fracture with the union leaders is unlikely. The union leaders know that the Tories will undo the entire network of government/union co-operation that has underpinned the years of Labour rule. They know that their already slender rights will be attacked yet further by Cameron. They are also aware of how weak rank and file organisation is and will fear that even if they authorise a fightback against Tory attacks the troops may not respond with the sort of determination that was shown by workers in the first seven years of the last period of Tory rule (1979-86).

This all means that they will stress unity now, to preserve a Labour government, and stress unity after the coming defeat to help reshape Labour

into a credible electoral alternative as quickly as possible. They will sanction a period of protest - today against the impact of the recession and probably against Labour MPs who have been tarnished in the expenses row, and later against the Tories - but they will not put forward a perspective of widespread class action against either.

They will have a say on the complexion of the new leadership and they will be given a new deal by that leadership that they can sell to their members. A quicker than expected return to economic growth will strengthen their conviction that this is the right approach and that a Labour government under Johnson and Milliband has a fair chance of regaining ground without there being another 18 years of Tory rule.

The impact on the far left, the most left wing union leaders and possibly (but only possibly) on the left of the Labour Party, is taking definite shape. The left's terrible weaknesses stand exposed by the fascist gains. As stated earlier there are those who will publicly claim that things are not as bad as they appear, but such statements will merely serve, once again, to give the poor old dialectic a bad name - an excuse not to face up to the truth rather than a tool to understand it.

SWP's "unity" drive

However, another result will be to impress upon the left the need for its own version of the Labour leadership's push for "unity". This has already been revealed by the Socialist Workers' Party's open letter for left unity and by a sudden flurry of texts, e mails and phone calls in which activists who normally prefer to spit venom at each other are suddenly puckering their lips, smiling invitingly and offering unity around this or that initiative.

Whether this lasts we will soon see. But the activists of the left need to understand what is going on and respond. There is an outside possibility that the SWP has learnt the error of its ways and is genuinely concerned to promote unity. It is highly unlikely, however. The stronger probability is that it recognises that the Socialist Party has strengthened itself in the last period and, by participating in No2EU has got itself in with the RMT. They will also have noted that the CPB - which they originally hoped beyond hope would join the now deeply divided Respect - is in this alliance. And this alliance is a far more likely partner for Serwotka and the PCS, who ran an extremely energetic and very political campaign against the fascists in the elections, than the shrunken SWP.

By posing as the advocates of unity now the SWP are manoeuvring to get themselves a place at the table when these forces come together to consider what they do in the general election. That is why the SWP's call is being made now and being framed as a call for a united left election campaign, not a united

left organisation. Whether the SWP's plans come off the will see. But together with the proposals from the Socialist Party, Bob Crow and others for an urgent debate on unity in the run up to the general election, there will be a discussion in the ranks of the left around what sort of unity it needs.

On present form anything to emerge from negotiations between the CPB/SP/RMT/PCS (and possibly the SWP) is not likely to be an ideal form of socialist organisation. It will not - at least in advance of the election - win over the Labour representation Committee (LRC), though it could win over some of the LRC's base. It will have an electoral focus. It will have a minimal programme. All of that goes without saying. The forces involved are not basing their new plans on a radical reassessment of what they have done wrong previously. They are simply moving on to the "next thing". Despite this and with all of these limitations, will the emergence of a united left coalition represent a step forward?

Given all that has gone before there is no reason to think that the forces that could come together in a new left formation will behave any better than they have previously. Predatory factionalism, manoeuvrism, tinpot bureaucratism and political opportunism are second nature to many of the leading players. Therefore, if we give a positive welcome to the potential emergence of a new coalition, we should do so in the knowledge that we will have a job on our hands to stop its rapid degeneration.

Unity on what programme?

But the whole left should welcome the moves towards unity nevertheless because it may give revolutionaries a greater possibility of reaching wider layers of the working class.

The organisation will be set up on a minimal programmatic basis. The fight for a revolutionary programme is not the axis of the debate at the moment because those prepared to fight for it are few and with little influence on the bigger groups and unions. This does not mean revolutionaries shouldn't argue for revolutionary ideas and proposals where appropriate. It does mean recognising from the outset that this emerging formation is not, and cannot become a revolutionary party in the short term.

Any attempt to "graft" a revolutionary programme onto it is likely to lead at worst to isolation - and the stigmatisation by the best elements as putting propaganda before action - and at best to some confusing hybrid formulations like those in the old "People Before Profit" manifesto of the Socialist Alliance.

The RMT and PCS will not accept a revolutionary programme because most of their members are reformists; the CPB are reformist too; the SWP, SP and the

individuals from COTL etc. who will join don't believe in the need for such a programme at the moment. If they won't accept a revolutionary programme - and they won't - then proposing it is a mere literary exercise.

Instead, revolutionaries should make clear in their propaganda, that they accept participation in this organisation on a minimal programme of socialist demands while retaining our right to put forward our own views and answers to those questions left unanswered by the programme of the coalition. In a nutshell, we should follow Marx's advice to Bracke in the famous letter prefacing his Critique of the Gotha Programme:

"Every step of real movement is more important than a dozen programmes. If, therefore, it was not possible - and the conditions of the time did not permit it - to go beyond the Eisenach programme, one should simply have concluded an agreement for action against the common enemy. But by drawing up a programme of principles (instead of postponing this until it has been prepared for by a considerable period of common activity) one sets up before the whole world landmarks by which it measures the level of the Party movement."

Marx worked to prevent the new party agreeing a programme because the revolutionary one couldn't be won. He was for a minimal programme of action so that common activity could increase the scope for revolutionary ideas.

Revolutionaries should approach a new left coalition in the same way.

Any new coalition should be explicitly socialist and agree an action programme on the key issues. It must elevate the centrality of workers' action above all else. But it is just as important to bring real new forces into any coalition. They can act as a real counter-weight to the existing left groups and their apparatuses. It needs strong local groups if a national coalition is to be stopped from travelling the same path as the Socialist Alliance and Respect. It should wage a campaign against the top down mentality that predominates amongst the existing left.

Unity from the bottom up

It should champion the drawing in of activists from the local unions, campaigns, from the Climate Campaign, from the anti-fascist campaigns, from the colleges etc. It should argue that prior to the formation of a national coalition there should be a three month campaign (October to Christmas) in every locality to build local Socialist Coalitions. The RMT and PCS should be asked to finance meetings, rallies, activities, etc. Their premises should be made available to local coalition members to produce leaflets, websites, facebook campaigns, text messaging drives, local meetings, socialist events, open "surgeries" for local communities telling people what socialist MPs would do and acting as organising centres for local struggles, campaigns and

individuals issues.

These activities should all be aimed at creating vigorous and large local groups that can find a voice that is strong enough to shout down the petty bureaucrats in the sects and the not so petty bureaucrats in the RMT and PCS if they try to turn the coalition into a passive vote gathering machine for them. In other words, they should try to build active socialist coalitions, oriented to the class struggle and centred on action in the run up to any national organisations being set up. Only that way will be able to draw in forces to make any new coalition a meaningful answer to the political crisis that has led to the election of two fascist MPs and that is likely to see the return of a Tory government next year.

Alongside this revolutionaries should continue their efforts to try and turn the fragmented forces of resistance into a network - especially in the unions with those who are or have been in struggle to become champions of the idea of struggle within the movement - the St Paul's Way teachers, the Visteon workers, Linamar, the tube workers, the parents struggling over schools, the workers at and around the Lindsey strikes. Such militants working closely with the coalition (if it comes about) can help ensure that the idea of organising the working class for a fightback now is kept at the forefront of the moves towards left unity.

Mon 22, June 2009

Permanent Revolution

It's time to create a new working class party

A response from Workers Power to the Socialist Workers Party's 'Open Letter to the Left', 10 June 2009

2009/06/12

Dear Comrades,

Workers Power welcomes the Socialist Workers Party's "Open Letter to the Left, It's Time to Create a Socialist Alternative."

In particular, we support your proposal "to convene a conference of all those

committed to presenting candidates representing working class interests at the next election.”

We believe there is an urgent need for such a conference, which could draw in representatives from socialist groups, campaigners against fascism, antiwar activists, existing left wing electoral initiatives and above all trade unionists in struggle against the effects of the crisis and this rotten government.

There is every possibility that a conference of this type would draw support from members of unions which have broken with Labour, like the RMT, and from the PCS, whose leader Mark Serwotka has, as you note, expressed his support for electoral challenges to Labour. It could also attract support from the growing numbers in the big Labour-affiliated unions who are trying to break the link with Labour, including from the CWU which is right now debating its affiliation.

Above all, we believe that a conference of this type would be a chance to take a step which could transform the situation in the class struggle in Britain: to form a new political party of the working class.

The historic meltdown of the Labour Party’s vote was part of a general trend across Europe - a collapse in support for the established parties of Social Democracy. The reason should be clear to all socialists - in the context of a huge economic crisis threatening millions of jobs and deep cuts in services, the SPD in Germany, the SP in France, the Labour Party in Britain are all tarnished by years of carrying out pro-market, pro-capitalist policies.

Everywhere the main beneficiaries of this collapse in working class support for the traditional reformist parties were the centre right Conservative parties and even in some countries the far right and fascists.

In the UK, the rise in support for the fascist BNP and the far greater surge in support for hard right parties like UKIP were a product of this. But whereas in Germany and France a clear pole of attraction existed to the left of the Social Democracy, in Britain there did not. So in the European elections the Left Party in Germany won eight MEPs; in France the new Left Front scored over six percent and the New Anticapitalist Party won nearly five percent.

Despite the absence of a strong and well-prepared leftwing challenge, two of the leftwing lists in the UK won around 300,000 votes between them. But their message was diffuse, they were not widely recognised, they offered no unified pole of attraction. They won just under a third of the votes of the BNP, but a single nationwide campaign could surely have won many more.

The broad mass of the people do not understand non-party alliances,

platforms, joint lists and blocs. In elections they vote for those organisations that have the self-assurance to constitute themselves as unified formations with a set of policies and which aim for power. That is what a political party is.

The dangerous reality is that the fascists have formed a party while the socialists have not. All the socialist groups in Britain are propaganda societies, not parties: in a sense we are factions of a party that is yet to be built.

The time to build a new party is now. Labour's collapse has hugely weakened the argument of those on the left who want to focus on reforming Labour. The shock of the BNP's advance presses home to many thousands across the left the need to create a strong pole of our own. An initiative for a new party would - if it came from serious forces in the movement - doubtless meet with an enthusiastic response.

That is why Workers Power welcomes your call for a conference, commits itself to work hard to build the conference among workers and youth, and will attend such a conference with the aim of persuading the delegates that it is time to go beyond alliances and joint tickets. Instead we should agree to set up a new party and begin a democratic debate on its structure and above all on its political programme.

A new workers' party should by no means be just a vehicle for elections - we need a party that is so much more than this. It would give us the chance to commit many thousands across the country to campaigning on the estates and the streets against the lies of the racists and nationalists and for a working class answer to the crisis. It could prove to workers that migrants aren't stealing jobs and that capitalism is to blame for job losses and cuts in services. It could capitalise on anger at the system and the rich elite and express it in socialist rather than nationalist terms. It would oppose the slogan 'British Jobs for British Workers' and fight for jobs for all. It would break the sickening situation in which the BNP is able to pose as the main anti-establishment party.

Creating a new party would also help unlock that other key element of the situation you identify in your letter: the need for 'a united fightback to save jobs and services'. There is a jobs massacre in progress across manufacturing and the service sector, but the leaders of the biggest trade unions are blocking action and bending the knee to the employers and the government. These self same leaders are supporters of the Labour government and of Gordon Brown. A strong political challenge to Labour's hold over our unions can only help to coordinate action against the will of these leaders where necessary, to bypass and unseat the sell-out right wing union leaders and replace them with fighters under the control of the rank and file. It could rally workers around the need for action in the here and now, for strikes and occupations against job cuts,

around the slogan 'we won't pay for their crisis.'

In short, the need for a new party is posed not just by the elections, but by the state of the fightback against the recession and by the need for a political fight against the BNP. Your open letter deals with these three things separately. We think the formation of a new party would be a way to respond to them all and link them together.

The experience in France of the formation of the New Anticapitalist Party shows that it is possible to form a new workers' party without waiting for the approval of the trade union leaders. By contrast, the process in which the Left Party in Germany was created gave a privileged role to former Social Democrat MPs, former East German party apparatchiks and union officials. It is no accident therefore that the NPA in France has emerged as an activist party which rejects the idea of governing in alliance with pro-market parties and which is developing a fighting policy, while the Left Party has entered a ruling coalition with the pro-market Social Democrats in Berlin, and has carried out anti-working class neoliberal policies.

In both cases, the approach socialists took to the way the party was formed had a powerful effect on the type of party they got.

Closer to home, as we know from a succession of our own experiences in Britain over recent years, giving privileged role to labour movement celebrities is not a short cut to success but a road to catastrophe.

We fully accept that it is essential for the new initiative you are proposing to draw in broader forces from the labour movement. One of the great weaknesses of the Socialist Alliance and the Scottish Socialist Party was that they began as little more than agreements between socialist groups. We think it is possible to combine a broad appeal to the most determined sections of the labour movement with an approach that does not grant existing MPs and union leaders a veto in advance over the form and policy that the new party will take.

How? Alongside your call for a conference, let's link the campaign for a new party to the fightback right from the start. Local committees could not only spread the idea of a new party amongst wider layers, they can also lay the basis for a fighting party, by helping to co-ordinate resistance to the crisis. In the unions many of the activists who see the need for a new party also want greater coordination of the struggles too.

And while we're at it, why not contact the other left parties in Europe facing the same economic crisis, in France, in Greece, in Portugal, invite them to share their experiences and opinions, and help create a real practical and political coordination of the socialists across national boundaries.

It is no secret that there have been several unsuccessful electoral initiatives of the left since 1997. There are many criticisms that can be raised but one point above all needs to be borne in mind. Not one of them aimed to establish a unified and democratic all-Britain political party of the working class. It would be a failure of imagination and of will if we bypass this opportunity once again.

We look forward to continuing this discussion, confirm our support for the conference proposal, and commit ourselves to working with you on this project.

Yours fraternally,

Workers Power

P.S.

*** Collection of article done by Links, plus some others:**

<http://links.org.au/node/1093>