

FIGHT RACISM! FIGHT IMPERIALISM!

**ELECTION
Special**

Revolutionary Communist Group

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General Election A general fraud

The General Election is a complete fraud. Six weeks of electioneering are being presented as the high point of political life in this country. In reality, it is a crude auction for the votes of the greediest, most bigoted, egotistical sections of this society: the middle class. In the 19th century before the secret ballot was introduced votes were openly bought and sold in the street. Nowadays, there is an attempt to make it look respectable. Instead of hard cash or favours, it is tax cuts or selective education. The candidates do not buy the votes directly: instead they offer IOUs and promise that in government they will maintain the privileges of middle class people. No one at this election will represent the working class.

So what's the state of play in the auction so far? Round one to New Labour. With its support for complete deregulation of the media it picked up the support of *The Sun*. That is how politics works. New Labour promises Rupert Murdoch a free hand to dominate the media by opposing any limits to cross-ownership of the TV and the press. Rupert Murdoch gives his support to New Labour. It is that simple.

What next? Well the Tories gave the middle class a top tax bracket of 40 per cent. Labour have matched the offer with knobs on: 40 per cent top tax bracket for a further five years at least. The Tories reintroduced the policy of selective education to give middle class children a better start. New Labour have matched it - grammar schools are safe in their hands! You want cuts in public spending? Labour and Tory will give

them to you! You want the streets cleared of the homeless, of noisy working class children, black people? Either will oblige.

The last 18 years have seen the Tories shovel untold blessings down the eager throats of the middle class. And the middle class want this to continue: their greed has no limit. New Labour agrees: they are after all a middle class party themselves - their membership, their councillors, their MPs all have their noses in the trough. So they have no conscience about participating in the auction: their ambition for power is so overwhelming.

The fraud then is that the outcome of the election matters, that it will make a difference. It won't. Big business will still call the shots. It wants to go into Europe, and so into Europe it will go. It wants public spending cuts and so there will be spending cuts. To keep things stable, it will make sure that as many middle class people as possible will keep riding the gravy train. It needs them as an agent of social control, to regiment and control the working class as the crisis deepens.

So the working class will continue to pay to keep the middle class happy, for this is the other side of the equation. The good fortune of the middle class has been paid for through the impoverishment of the British working class and super-exploitation of the Third World.

Working class jobs in Britain are part-time, temporary, casual and therefore without any employment rights. Workers do not have unions to represent their interests. More and more such jobs are to serve the middle class - in fast-food centres, leisure centres, supermarkets and so on. One million workers are now employed directly in domestic service by the middle class. The middle class is interested in the working class

only as servants. It does not want to pay for working class healthcare or education. Nor does the ruling class: in its view you don't need to educate workers to be a servant, nor do you need to worry about their health when there are so many competing for jobs.

The election is not going to change any of this. Labour or Tory, the result will be the same for the working class. It will have to pay for the privileged life of the middle class - in meaningless, low-paid drudgery, in deteriorating education and poorer health. Its children will be driven off the streets by curfews. More and more will be sent to prison.

Organisations such as the Socialist Labour Party (SLP) and the Socialist Party (SP) continue to collaborate with Labour even though they are putting up candidates in some constituencies. The SLP will not stand against 'left' Labour MPs, whilst the SP will not stand in marginal seats; indeed it calls for a vote for Labour in these circumstances. Meanwhile the Socialist Workers Party wants the best of everything: its slogan is now Vote Socialist or Labour. All of them obscure the parasitic role of the middle class, and the fact that unless there is a fundamental break with the parties and organisations that represent middle class interests, there can be no new movement of the working class.

The lesson is that we must instead follow the lead of the Liverpool dockers, the anti-roads protesters and the Hillingdon hospital workers and start to organise. There is a movement to be built, one which puts working class interests at its heart and rejects all forms of privilege - a communist movement.

Voting in this election will not help this process. So let us reject the general fraud, and shout out the message loud and clear: don't vote - organise.



DON'T VOTE ORGANISE!

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Manifesto for action

Fight for jobs, homes, fair benefits and a living wage for all

- organise to defend the unemployed, the homeless, families threatened with homelessness, the low paid, the pensioners
- fight the Jobseeker's Allowance
- end all means-testing
- for a decent minimum pension linked to the rise in average pay
- for the restoration of full housing benefit to single people
- fight the anti-trade union laws

Fight for good education for all

- abolish the public school system and the grant-maintained school system
- abolish all forms of selection
- restore free school milk and dinners for all primary school children
- reverse all cuts in local library services

Fight for a decent health service

- end the NHS internal market
- abolish GP fundholding
- abolish the Private Finance Initiative
- end the compulsory tendering of services
- end all prescription charges, and all charges for eye tests and dental treatment

Defend democratic rights

- re-instate the right to silence
- repeal the Prevention of Terrorism Act, the Public Order Act, the Criminal Justice Act, the Security Services Act and the Police Act
- re-instate the right to challenge jurors
- immediate repeal of all anti-gay and anti-lesbian legislation

Fight for women's rights and an end to discrimination on grounds of sexuality

- state subsidised nurseries and child care available to all who want it
- full employment and pension rights for all regardless of length of time in a job
- the right to abortion on demand

Fight to defend the environment!

- stop the roads programme
- for a cheap and integrated public transport system
- emergency action to conserve world resources

Fight racism!

- repeal all immigration controls and repeal the Asylum Act
- self defence is no offence - fight racist attacks
- defend all under attack from the racist police and courts

Fight imperialism!

- oppose British occupation of Ireland: troops out now!
- oppose British imperialist collaboration with Zionism and Turkish fascism
- oppose imperialist threats against Iraq and Libya - hands off the Middle East! Self-determination for Kurdistan!
- support liberation movements in all oppressed nations
- oppose the US blockade of Cuba

Britain 1997

The condition of the working class

It is now just over 150 years since Engels wrote his celebrated work on *The Condition of the Working Class in England*. It was the first serious attempt to portray the appalling conditions in which the mass of the working class lived at that time, crowded into slum houses lacking any sanitation, always on the verge of starvation with no prospect of basic education for their children let alone health care. With today's General Election focusing entirely on the concerns of the middle class, it is time to look at the impact of 18 years of Tory government on the condition of the working class.

Work

- Only 35% of the workforce is in full-time tenured work compared to 55% 20 years ago.
- Only 38% of new jobs between 1993 and 1996 were for full-time, permanent employees; in 1996 it was less than 30%.
- 1 million people have to hold down more than one job.
- 1 million people work as domestic servants.

Unemployment

- Unemployment now stands at 1.75 mil-

lion, but this is the total after the Tories have changed the way it is calculated more than 30 times. The real figure, as defined by the Labour Force Survey which counts those without a job and who are ready to start work in two weeks, is 3.1 million.

- 3.3 million households, 20% of the total, are workless, compared to 1.2 million in 1979.
- 40% of all heads of households in Tyne and Wear, Merseyside, South Yorkshire and Wales are unemployed.
- 500,000 construction jobs have disappeared since 1990.
- The jobs taken by unemployed people pay on average £100 per week, a fall in real terms of 12% since 1979.

Pay

- In 1979 the top 10% of male employees earned on average 2.53 times the lowest 10%. The gap is now 3.73 to 1.
- 3.9 million workers earn less than £4.00 per hour, 1.5 million less than £3.25 per hour. 800,000 women workers earn less than £2.50 per hour. All categories are underestimates.
- 10 million people, 48% of all employees, earn less than £6.03 per hour

(£228.68 per week), the current 'European decency threshold'. This includes 49.5% of full-time women workers, 75.9% of part-time women workers, and 30% of full time male workers.

Conditions and hours

- In 1979, workers qualified for full employment rights after six months. Now it is two years.
- 10 million workers lack such rights and can be sacked at will. This includes 4.5 million part-time workers.
- Two thirds of British workers work more than 40 hours per week, and a quarter more than 50 hours.

Housing

- 800,000 houses are empty; 100,000 of them are council or housing association-run. There are 200,000 homeless people.
- In 1977, 147,300 council houses were built. By the mid 1980s, this had fallen to an average of 20,000 units. No council houses were built in the last six months of 1996.
- Only 22% of the heads of council households are in employment. 38% of them are aged 65 or over.



A parliamentary regulation has cut Housing Benefit for single people under 60 so that it covers no more than the rent of a single room in shared accommodation. This takes effect from October this year.

Children

- 31% of all children live in a household where there is no one in full-time employment, compared to 18% in 1979. Overall, 4.3 million children live in poverty although only 1.4 million children qualify for free school meals.
- 2 million children are to varying degrees malnourished. Anaemia is now widespread amongst working class children.
- Children from the poorest 10% of the population are twice as likely to die before the age of 15 as those from the richest 10%.

Health

- Life expectancy at birth is seven years longer for those in social class 1 (the richest) than those in social class 5 (the poorest section). This is equivalent to 42,000 more deaths for manual workers each year.



Destroying the environment

Human activity is wiping out 150 species of plants and animals a day. 17 million hectares of forest are destroyed each year. Top soil is being eroded 20-40 times faster than it is being replaced. 44% of commercially targeted marine fish stocks are over-exploited. These are the effects of monopoly capital's hundred-year rampage across the globe. Twenty companies sell 94% of the world's agri-chemicals; five control 90% of the world grain market. Land in underdeveloped nations is purchased by the Structural Adjustment Programmes of the World Bank and the IMF, which, in recent years, have pressured over 70 countries into changing their mining laws in favour of multinational investment. These bodies force underdeveloped nations into producing cash crops and raw materials for export, using intensive methods that destroy the soil and drain resources.

Eleven out of the top 100 multinationals (ranked by overseas assets) are British. Labour will never challenge their ascendancy - the middle class it represents would not tolerate it; the global cash-crop economy is increasingly tailored to particular luxury foods for Western consumption. In Britain, gangs of women and migrant workers work for a pittance, at the mercy of unscrupulous farm labour contractors. In underdeveloped nations, such as Kenya, which and chilled Britain in 1995 and suffers infant mortality of 108 per 1,000 live births, or Zimbabwe, where a farmer is paid 1p for a 99p packet of mangetout, the vicious circle of poverty and environmental destruction is exacerbated by the operations of the multinationals. This too is an increasingly centralised business. The top ten British supermarkets, with 4,621 UK stores, between them ring up an annual turnover equal to the income of the poorest

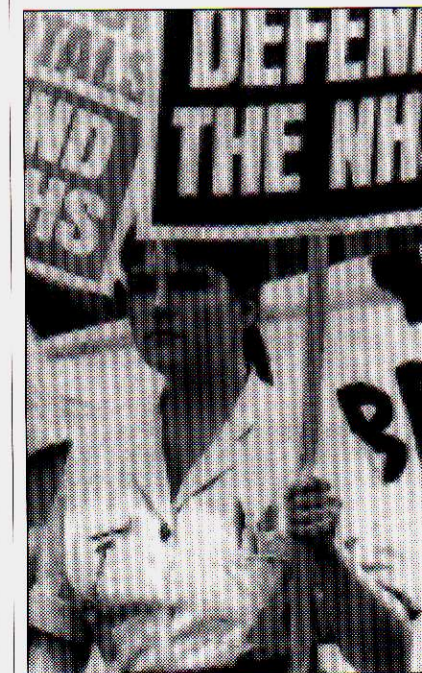
35 third world countries. David Sainsbury (chair, Sainsbury's) and Niall Fitzgerald (chair, Unilever) already have part-time jobs advising Tony Blair.

Environmental destruction will never be solved by an imperialist party. Labour's target of a 20% reduction in CO₂ emissions on 1990 levels by 2010 - largely achieved in the last seven years anyway - is laughable compared to the reduction of up to 92% cited by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change. Gestures towards improving public transport are aimed more at the City and the CBI than at the needs of the environment (90% of London stockbrokers use public transport; the CBI estimates that road congestion costs British businesses £18bn). Their decision to abandon a budget amendment to reduce VAT on domestic thermal insulating materials from 17.5% to the 8% rate on fuel shows where their real priorities lie. At one stroke they hit not just the environment, but the poor as well.

The attack on trade unions

The last 18 years have seen an unprecedented attack on the trade unions with no less than seven laws being passed restricting their right to organise:

- 1980: Secondary picketing made unlawful
- 1982: Unions made responsible for unlawful industrial action, with possible sequestration of their funds as a consequence
- 1984: Industrial action made unlawful without a secret ballot
- 1988: Industrial action to force union membership made unlawful. Separate ballots now required for each workplace involved in an action





Attacking the NHS

There is no reason why a wealthy nation such as Britain cannot afford a good system of healthcare, with services freely available to young and old alike. But in six months' time the NHS will face a funding crisis of unprecedented proportions, one which will intensify in the following year.

This is the inevitable consequence of the Tory spending plans which Labour will support if it wins the election. The facts are clear: spending on the NHS has risen on average 3.5% each year in real terms over the last 17 years. Because NHS inflation is higher than the general rate, savage cuts in services and rationing are still required.

Plans for the next four years are that spending will rise by less than 1% as a whole. In real terms, this will mean a cut of £2 billion over two years, and £5 billion

over four years.

This is unprecedented. It makes a mockery of Labour's claims that they will cut waiting lists. The Labour Party has already conceded to all the changes the Tories have introduced to the detriment of working class people:

- It supports the division of the NHS into purchasers and providers;
- It supports the continuation of GP fundholding under the name of 'GP commissioning' or 'locality purchasing'.
- It attacks the Private Finance Initiative - privatisation by any other name - but only for being too bureaucratic;
- It supports the contracting out of 'non-clinical' services, with the savage attack on working conditions this brings.

Whoever wins the election, there will be draconian

rationing of services. This will hit working class people most, since they experience more ill-health, particularly if they are elderly. More and more ways will be found for people to pay for treatment. Eye tests and dental check-ups are examples of this trend. The cost of a prescription has risen from 20p in 1979 to £5.65 today. None of this will change under Labour. The next step will be payment for 'non-essential' operations, and charges for better 'hotel' services - private rooms and so on. Meanwhile the NHS will be increasingly dependent on charity, which already pays for 10% of hospital equipment.

The message is that the NHS, far from being safe in Labour's hands, will increasingly become a two-tier system, where the privileged can buy the care they need, and the poor get the dregs.

Labour: a racist party

The 1996 Asylum and Immigration Act is the latest in a long line of increasingly draconian anti-immigration laws introduced by the current government. The Act withdrew state benefit from any refugee who does not announce their intention to apply for asylum immediately on arrival in this country. It introduced a so-called 'white list' of countries from which asylum claims are presumed bogus and brought in 'fast-track' procedures, which speed up deportation and leave would-be asylum-seekers no time to collect vital evidence about their mental and physical torture. Despite a succession of court cases which have reaffirmed the obligation on local authorities to feed and house asylum-seekers, withdrawal of benefits has already left many destitute and homeless. Nearly 37,000 decisions on asylum applications were made by the Home Office in 1996: 6% were granted refugee status and 14% 'exceptional leave to remain'; the other 80% were rejected. Without a hint of irony, the government cites these figures as 'proof' that its system of weeding out 'bogus' applicants is working.

We can expect no better from Labour: it has no plans to repeal the law. Far from it: 'Under this government thousands of peo-

ple every year settled in Britain illegally. We are determined to clamp down on this,' Tony Blair told rabidly xenophobic Sun interviewer Garry Bushell. And Labour's record speaks for itself.

Labour introduced the 1968 Immigration Act, which removed the right of British passport-holders to enter Britain unless they had a British grandparent (ie unless they were white).

The 1974-79 Labour government operated the 1971 Immigration Act without a single qualm. This Act was the first to distinguish between 'patrial' white citizens and 'British overseas citizens and non-patrial' black citizens. The same government condoned virginity tests on Asian women arriving at Heathrow. It used thousands of police to defeat the Grunwick's strike of Asian women workers. It sanctioned the police attack on the Notting Hill Carnival in 1976 and the obsessive use of the 'sus' law against black people. In the 1979 General Election campaign 5,000 police were used to protect a National Front meeting in Southall; 800 people were arrested, 1,000 injured and Blair Peach was murdered by the police.

Labour will be no different in 1997. Once a racist party, always a racist party.

- > Infant mortality is more than 50% greater for those in social class 5 than those in social class 1. This has remained unchanged for the last 15 years.
- > Angina is twice as common among male manual workers as it is among male non-manual workers in middle age.

Old age

- > Only 7% of all local authorities provide free home care service to all.
- > The Law Lords have just ruled that home care services are not a legal obligation on councils.
- > The average grant from the Social Fund for funerals has been cut from £924 to £791. A new change means that spending will be capped at £600, and will only be available where all the immediate family of the deceased are on benefit.
- > In 1980, pensions were indexed to price increases rather than wage rises. If the link had been retained, the single pension would now be £82.55 rather than £61.55, and the married couples' pension £132.10 instead of £97.95. The single pension is now 20.3% of average male manual earnings.

Back on ons

Action by unions against scabs made unlawful

1990 All secondary industrial action made unlawful

Unions now financially liable for unlawful industrial action called by any union official or body
Dismissal of employees taking part in unofficial action is now permitted (eg the Liverpool dockers)

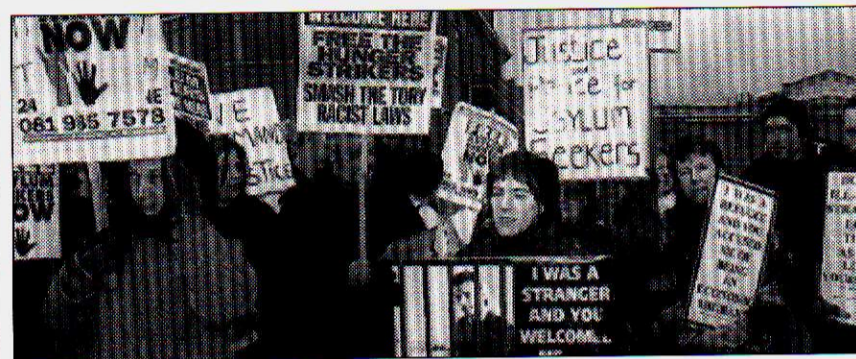
1992 Existing laws consolidated

1993 Seven days' notice required for all industrial action.

None of this will be changed under Labour, as Tony Blair recently boasted: 'There is no return under our proposals to the legislation of the 1970s - no secondary action, no secondary picketing, flying picketing, no return to the days of strikes without ballots or the days when union leaders didn't have to be elected by ballots. Even after every change we are proposing, Britain would remain with a more restricted trade union legislative framework than any country in the Western world.'

Trade unions today are little more than company unions, which organise the middle class and exclude the mass of the working class. Forty per cent of their seven million members are managerial, professional or associate professional workers; less than two per cent are under the age of 20.

Even where unions have substantial numbers of low paid workers, for example Unison, it is the better-off managerial staff who generally run the branches, and whose interests the union protects. Thus it was that the Hillingdon strikers had to occupy Unison offices to secure recognition of their strike, and then found themselves left high and dry when Unison found them an embarrassment near the General Election.



Education for the middle class

There are two fundamental divisions within the British education system: the first between public and the state schools, and the second between state schools in middle class areas and those in working class areas. These divisions ensure that only the middle class has access to anything like a reasonable education. For the working class, state education under capitalism serves to provide only the most basic training on the one hand, whilst enforcing social discipline and control on the other. Under the Tories, the price of middle class education has been paid by deteriorating standards for the mass of the working class. The National Curriculum serves to maintain control of teachers whilst national tests are used to strengthen the hierarchy between schools.

However, Tory policies have proved a failure. National educational targets for the year 2000 are not going to be met. Only 54 per cent of 19 year olds have five 'good' GCSEs compared to the target of 85 per cent, whilst 45 per cent of 21 year olds have NVQ level 3, Advanced G.NVQ or two 'A' Levels, well short of the target of 70 per cent.

What New Labour will do

New Labour intends to re-inforce the role of education in maintaining social control. There will be schemes to improve pupil discipline and conformity to the system, including lessons on citizenship and special courses for disaffected students. Home-school contracts will cover parental responsibility including homework, attendance at parents' evenings, punctuality, school uniforms, young peoples' curfews. Labour is primarily concerned with the need to discipline the estimated 250,000 youngsters aged between 16 and 19 who

are neither in work nor education. The hated Chris Woodhead will be kept on as head of the schools inspectorate Ofsted; he has been advising Tony Blair on Labour's education policy.

Favours will continue to shower on the middle class. Labour will retain all existing independent and grammar schools, the better to educate little Blairs and Harmans. Study time will be increased and setting, selection and streaming will be introduced from an early age and replace 'mixed ability' teaching. Shadow Chancellor Gordon Brown says there will be no extra money for education, which means that essential educational material will only be available to those who can afford it. The proposed abolition of post-16 Child Benefit will serve to exclude working class children from higher education.

New Labour will not change the school experience for the poorest. The proportion of students living in deprived areas who leave school with no exam results is 50 per cent higher than the national average.

And whilst social class is the single biggest influence on educational achievement, it is compounded by racism. Black students are twice as likely to leave school for unemployment as white students. Afro-Caribbean boys are six times as likely to be excluded as whites.

The old split between vocational and academic qualifications will remain. There will be no change in the corridors of power in Britain. A ruling class of a few thousand will continue to hold the top posts in the Civil Service, the Armed Services, the courts, the media, the boardrooms of big business. Sixty per cent of parliamentarians went to a handful of public schools. New Labour - old ruling class.

The end of council housing

Whichever party wins the General Election, all the remaining 4.5 million council houses will be sold off. The Tories talk of a 'private sector solution' whilst Labour prefers private-public 'partnerships', but the end is the same: £58 billion worth of council stock will end up in private hands, much of it

given away. The new private companies will raise money for the estimated £20 billion backlog of repairs by using the housing stock as a collateral. The effect will be to send rents soaring. One study has shown that where housing associations have refurbished council houses, rents were between 25 and

75% higher than equivalent, modernised local authority homes. Labour's Sandwell Council is taking the lead in this and will privatise its 8,500 houses by next year. Rent increases will be 5% higher than the rate of inflation in the first five years. This is a foretaste of what is to come.

Imperialist Labour

Middle East

• Labour has repeatedly unleashed British military force to preserve Middle East oil reserves for imperialism and has been a consistent defender of Zionism. 'One of the greatest factors in helping us to overcome our initial difficulties was the fact that from the first, since 1917, we constantly received encouragement from the British Labour movement,' - Golda Meir, former Prime Minister of Israel.

• In 1948, the Labour government withdrew British troops from Palestine, making way for the Zionist terror that drove 900,000 Arabs out of Palestine. From then until today, the Zionist 'Friends of Israel' group has regularly claimed over 100 Labour MPs as members.

• Before the 1991 Gulf War, Labour tried to outdo the Conservatives in bellicosity, with Shadow Foreign Secretary Kaufman denouncing the government as 'slack, lax and negligent' in response to the Iraqi occupation of Kuwait. At the end of the war, Kinnock defended the slaughter of retreating Iraqi troops. He was supported by the General Council of the TUC.

Malvinas

• In 1982, Labour supported the war against Argentina for the Malvinas/ Falkland Islands. They supported the sending of the task force, the exclusion zone, the sinking of the Belgrano and the needless slaughter of some 1,000 soldiers.

Africa

• Not one African colony achieved independence under the 1945-51 Labour government.

• The 1964-70 Labour government colluded with the illegal racist Smith regime in Rhodesia/Zimbabwe to break sanctions and threatened to veto any mandatory resolutions in the UN Security Council to isolate the regime.

• The 1974-79 Labour government backed a South African request for an IMF loan, allowed Marconi to sell battlefield communication systems to the South African Defence Force and vetoed a UN resolution embargoing arms sales to South Africa. By 1977 it had used its UN Security Council veto four times: each time in support of apartheid South Africa.

Southeast Asia

• The 1945-51 Labour government used British troops, concentration camps and death squads to keep the tin and rubber revenues flowing from Malaya. It also restored French colonial rule in Vietnam, pushing that country into 30 years of war for liberation.

• The SAS were dispatched to Vietnam by the 1964-70 Labour government, and to Indonesia by Labour Defence Minister Denis Healey in 1965 where they helped destroy the biggest communist movement in Asia outside China. Over 700,000 people were killed and 200,000 gaoled.

Ireland

As in the rest of the world, Labour has taken care not to be outdone by the Tories in their willingness to resort to the most brutal methods in defence of British imperialism's interests in Ireland.

• In 1969, Labour sent the British Army into the Six Counties to suppress the nationalist working class.

• In 1974, Labour passed the Prevention of Terrorism Act and then presided over the Guildford 4 and Birmingham 6 trials.

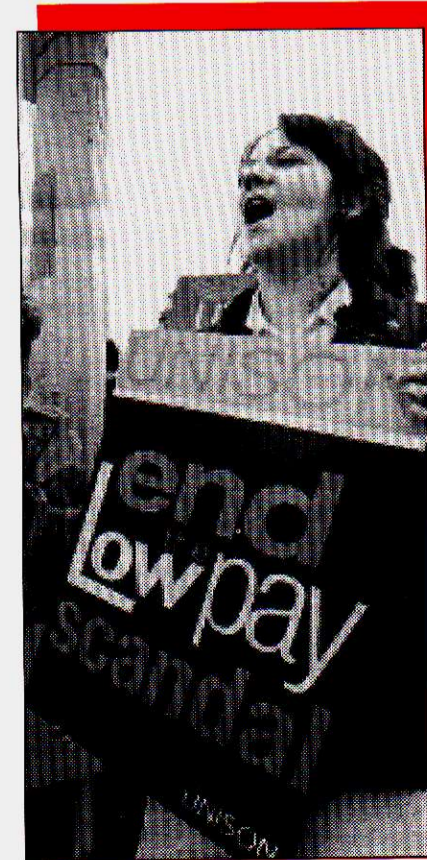
• In 1976-79, Labour ran a regime of terror with the use of torture in Six Counties police stations. Special Category status was withdrawn from Irish political prisoners and the H-Blocks were set up.

• In 1981, Labour sent Shadow Minister Don Concannon to tell Bobby Sands, as he lay dying on hungerstrike, that Labour would not support the demand for political status.

• In 1988, Labour joined in the House of Commons celebrations at the murder of the Gibraltar 3. George Robertson, then Labour Foreign Affairs Spokesman, opined: 'I don't think anybody can afford to be squeamish...'

• Last year New Labour refused to vote against the renewal of the PTA and threatened to expel Jeremy Corbyn MP for inviting Gerry Adams to the House of Commons.

New Labour is, in its own words, 'four-square' with the Conservatives over their north of Ireland policy; together they seek to isolate and subdue the nationalist working class.



FIGHT RACISM

ELECTION SPECIAL

Organising in Scotland

John Major's announcement of the General Election came a week after 1,000 people in Glasgow's George Square gathered to support the occupation of the City Chambers in protest against the Labour council's cuts budget. Glasgow's Labour councillors - one of whom referred to campaigners against school closures as 'the great unwashed' - are pushing through cuts which will fall hardest on some of the poorest working class communities in Scotland. Glasgow will lose £80 million and 1,500 jobs; Edinburgh £34 million and 800 jobs; Dundee £8 million and 100 jobs; Aberdeen £15 million and 200 jobs. What these figures mean on the ground is vicious. They mean cuts and charges for home-help services and the closure of old folks' homes, day nurseries, community and youth centres. In Glasgow, the unemployed, mothers with kids in prams, disabled activists and council workers threatened with redundancy organised to prevent the councillors voting through the measures.

Meanwhile, Labour councillors are attacking democratic rights to control dissent. City Centre managers have been clamping down on political activity on the streets. Stalls now need permission as laws are dusted off which are never applied to businesses and street vendors. Knife-wielding council employees cut down placards and bill political organisations for clearing posters. Community activists are stopped by the police for handing out leaflets. On 2 April, during our so-called democratic election process, the Labour council used police to clear away Tent City in George Square in Glasgow during the anti-cuts vigil. It is a foretaste of what a Labour victory will mean for the people of Scotland.

Labour and prisons

Before 1979 the prison system was administered by a succession of Tory and Labour governments, with no obvious difference: neither exhibited concern for prisoners' welfare but nor did they use mass imprisonment and the 'war on crime' as a rallying cry.

As Thatcherism took hold, imprisonment increased, sentences became longer and more people were remanded in custody. Conditions were squalid and prison staff brutal.

Prisoners protested throughout the 1980s, culminating in the Strangeways uprising in 1990, which publicly exposed conditions so thoroughly that no politician dared defend them.

This mood was short-lived and by 1993 the backlash had begun, clearly signalled by Michael Howard's call for 'greater austerity' and John Major's assertion that 'Prison Works'.

In many respects, Labour and the Tories mirror one another on law and order: when David Waddington condemned the Strangeways protesters, Roy Hattersley joined in heartily; when 'reform' became the rage, Labour were 'reformers'; today Michael Howard and Jack Straw compete to be the most right-wing; that is when Straw is not actively colluding with the government, as he did by giving the go-ahead for the new prison ship in Portland Harbour.

There has been, however, a class difference which surfaced in times of crisis. Labour, having its origins in the labour aristocracy, has tended to support the Prison Officers' Association's reactionary but anti-government line of 'need for more

General Election Fraud 1997

The spectacle

Napoleon said he would give three regiments for a newspaper. What price would Tony Blair pay? Whatever was asked. Remarking on how the most modestly gifted might assume statesmanship, Baudelaire observed that 'the supreme glory of Napoleon III will have been to prove that anybody can govern a great nation as soon as they have got control of the telegraph and national press'. Well, almost - don't forget the costume! 'Fake it till you make it.'

World advertising expenditure is now over half the world expenditure on public education. The rate of growth of advertising spending far exceeds that on educa-

tion: marketing works. It lures, seduces and we buy. And so this political process laughably called a democratic election is colonised by public relations agents, focus groups, sound bites - anything that fits on a t-shirt; the ever-optimistic, entertaining, smiling pose, the photo-opportunities, film sets and art of shop window dressing. A tale of two dummies and a political process without people. The electorate are passive observers and information flows one way - down to the consumers. Millions of pounds, miles of newsprint and screen hours are devoted to sustaining the myth of choice.

Gone are political meetings open to the public. Welcome to the sanitised, staged rally and woe betide the intruder.

Presented like reassuring memories of the authentic in this world of fakery and fraud are Major's soapbox and Blair's handwritten contract. Mocking parodies of things that were once real and, as such, suitable emblems for this deceit.

'In the era of printing and parliamentarianism, it is impossible to gain the following of the masses without a widely ramified, systematically managed, well-equipped system of flattery, lies, fraud, juggling with fashionable and popular catchwords and promising all manner of reforms and blessings to workers right and left - as long as they renounce the struggle for the revolutionary overthrow of the bourgeoisie.'

(VI Lenin)



Kids are 'Alright'

Last August's MORI/TUC poll suggested that 60% of 18 to 24-year-olds won't vote. According to the Treasury this is as high as 86% among young black people. In contrast 1995's *The Kids Are Alright?* survey said most cared about the NHS (66%), rights for the disabled (71%) and housing the homeless (73%).

Young people endure rates of unemployment that are double the national average; three-quarters of under-24 year olds in Britain earn less than the European decency threshold. Those rich enough to make it to higher education will shortly be expected to foot the entire bill themselves. Labour pledge to get 250,000 young people off benefits. This is more threat than promise. You can be sure that it won't be into £300,000 jobs like Cherie's. The 'Environmental Task Force' will be more of the same: low pay, 'zero hour' contracts and lousy conditions, clearing up the mess that business leaves behind.

In the context of the deeper cuts in state expenditure, the real thrust of Labour's intentions for young people will be found at the end of a police baton: 'fast track punishment for persistent young offenders' is now their number two policy pledge; Jack Straw's intentions for beggars, 'squeegee merchants' and children under ten are well known, as is Tony Blair's zero tolerance of

the homeless. At every turn they will attack those for whom their 'New Britain' has no room.

So we who refuse to recognise the Labour party 'old' or 'new' - as any form of opposition have been left to build our own networks of resistance. At Twyford Down, Pollock Free State, Newbury and Devon capital's destruction of the environment has been met by organised defiance and at every campaign new links are being made. Increasingly those involved are focusing their opposition against the monopoly capital behind the bulldozers. Active campaigns are now being fought against RIZ, BP, Shell and McDonalds and Reclaim the Streets have linked up with the sacked workers in Liverpool and Hillingdon.

Labour's support for the Criminal Justice Act gives a taste of their contempt for our movement and for all young people who resist capitalism. Jack Straw will be no different from Michael Howard. Their masters are the same: the arms dealers of British Aerospace and GEC who dine with Tony on Monday nights, or the car dealers (Britain's biggest) Lex Service who allegedly fund Tony's private office. Labour knows who its real friends are and so should we.

For young people in Britain there really is no alternative: Don't Vote, Organise!

Election Special was edited by Robert Clough. Contributions by: Carol Brickley, Steve Byrne, Robert Clough, Nigel Cooke, Ann Eliot, Ken Hughes, Nicki Jameson, Mike McGregor, Trevor Rayne

London

Destroying the Earth: imperialism and the struggle for the environment
Sunday 20 April 1.30 to 5.30pm
Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, WC1
Nearest tube: Holborn. Speakers:
Joe Makepeace, Brighton 'Justice?' and Schnews; Trevor Rayne, Fight Racism!
Video - discussion

Blackburn

Don't vote - organise!
Sunday 27 April 2:00 pm
Bangor Street Community Centre,
Brookhouse

Birmingham

Don't vote - organise!
Thursday 24 April 7:30 pm
Sparkhill Centre, off Stratford Road

Scotland

Labour, Tory, both the same! Don't Vote - Organise!
Saturday 26 April 2.00pm
Conference Room, Wellgate Library,
Dundee

Still thinking of voting Labour? - there has never been a better time to read:

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by Robert Clough
ISBN 0 905400 14 3
Published 1992 192pp Price £4.95

The untold story of the Labour Party: how it used the RAF to defend the British Empire against the Kurdish and Indian peoples, used headhunters against Malayan freedom-fighters and tortured and interned Irish nationalists.

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The story of a Party which, representing a small privileged section of the working class, has constantly betrayed the interests of the mass of the working class: unemployed workers, black, Asian and Irish people, all those engaged in a struggle against the British state.

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Law and Order

It is no surprise that ever since Tony Blair uttered his soundbite 'Tough on Crime; Tough on the Causes of Crime' the Tories and Labour have competed bitterly to be the 'toughest'. They are, after all, competing to win the support of the same narrow-minded, self-interested section of the middle class in this election. But that is not all. Whichever party runs the State after this election will be keenly interested in 'tooling up'; equipping itself with all the powers necessary to whip the working class and its supporters into line.

The Tory government, with the wholesale support of Labour, has introduced an unprecedented tranche of criminal justice legislation over the last few years: just for example, the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994 which removed the right to silence (only Neil Hamilton now has this right) and criminalised peaceful assembly; increased police powers to stop and search; widened powers for MI5 to breach individuals' privacy. Much of this breaches human rights, but they don't care.

In the inevitable rush to pass laws before the election, three Bills are of significance: the Police Bill (authorising bugging, entry and search without judicial warrant; employers can demand criminal records of job applicants); Crime Sentences Bill (introducing mandatory life sentences for a wide range of repeat offences); and the Social Security Administration (Fraud) Bill (allowing the sharing of information on individuals between a wide range of government departments and quangos). You will not be surprised to know that these Bills will reach to the Statute Book, slightly amended, solely because of Labour Party support.

CHOOSE THE RCG

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