

Registration of Political Parties Act used to disbar Socialist Party in British elections

Mike Ingram
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In a blatant attack on democratic rights, the Registration of Political Parties Act introduced by the Labour government last November has been used to prevent the Socialist Party from standing in elections under its own name.

The Socialist Party was launched in 1996 by the *Militant* group, led by Peter Taaffe. It has participated in both national and local elections since then. Its co-thinkers within the Committee for a Workers International (CWI), the Scottish Socialist Party, were also initially refused registration but this was overturned after an appeal. In Wales the CWI group has been forced to change its name to United Socialists in order to stand.

The act was introduced under the pretext of preventing voters being confused by parties with similar names to others already standing. An example quoted was of a candidate standing as a "Literal Democrat" in protest against the Liberal Democrats. It states that the registrar shall grant an application unless, in his opinion, it proposes a registered name which would be likely to result in the party being confused by voters with a party that is already registered.

The implementation of the act in this case reveals the profoundly undemocratic character of the legislation. Several parties in Britain which stand in elections have the name "socialist" in their title, including the Socialist Equality Party, the Socialist Labour Party and the Socialist Party of Great Britain.

In a letter to the Registrar published in the March 12 issue of the *Socialist*, the Executive Committee of the Socialist Party claims specific discrimination against them:

"We have ample reason for believing that there has been political discrimination against our party in the decision you have made. Five of the nine members of

the Parliamentary Advisory Committee for the registration procedure are Labour Party members, all of whom supported the expulsion of *Militant* supporters from the Labour Party in the past."

Militant was expelled from the Labour Party as it abandoned its old programme of social reforms. Their first electoral activity was under the name of *Real Labour*. They subsequently changed their name to Militant Labour before abandoning the term Labour altogether. As the *Socialist Party*, the Taaffe group hopes to win disaffected Labour voters by putting forward a programme of minimum social reforms.

The decision to disbar the Socialist Party is the Labour government's vindictive response. This has far reaching implications for all political tendencies. It will mean that the three parties represented in the Parliamentary Committee--Labour, Liberal Democrat and Tory--can determine who is allowed to stand against them on the most spurious grounds imaginable. The *World Socialist Web Site* and the Socialist Equality Party in Britain call upon all those concerned with the defence of democratic rights to demand the reversal of this decision.

The 18 March 1999 issue of *Weekly Worker*, newspaper of the Communist Party of Great Britain (CPGB) reports that the CPGB has also been informed that it will not be allowed to register for forthcoming elections. A letter of March 10 informed them that their name would be likely to cause confusion with other parties using the term "communist", specifically the Communist Party of Britain.

Letters of protest can be sent to:
The Registrar of Political Parties,
Companies House, Crown Way,
Cardiff, CF4 3UZ Fax: 01222 380149



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact