Britain: How the ex-left groups politically disarm the working class

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The role of the so-called "left" in the aftermath of Britain's general election has been politically instructive. The election concluded with the formation five days later of a Conservative/Liberal Democrat coalition.

The day after the election, while discussions were still taking place, a demonstration of over 1,000, mainly made up of youth, lobbied a meeting of the Lib-Dem hierarchy. They were demanding that its leader, Nick Clegg, join the Labour Party in forming a progressive left "Rainbow Coalition" government.

One of the demonstration's leaders was the musician and well-known Labour apologist Billy Bragg. With his accentuated cockney accent, Bragg has been strumming his guitar in the service of the labour bureaucracy for two decades now. He told the television interviewer the demonstration was the "Purple People"—a reference to the "colour" revolutions in Eastern Europe—and they were demanding a radical change from the old political "duopoly".

On the following Thursday, after the Tory-Lib Coalition had been made public, Bragg was the main guest on Andrew Neil's "A Week in Politics." Neil is a cynical ex-Murdoch newspaper editor and right-wing pundit. Bragg explained that he had voted Lib-Dem in the election. He went on to say that although he would have preferred a Labour/Lib Dem coalition, he believed the Tory/Lib Dem government should "be given a chance". He thought the Lib Dems would "take the edge" off the Tories, and it was breaking the "old political mould" in Britain.

Far from "breaking the mould", this coalition brings together the two oldest political parties in Britain's history. The Lib Dem's can trace their political ancestry back 300 years to the Whigs in the 17th Century. During the election, their manifesto publicly promised cuts that were even more draconian than those announced by the Tories. This was a major factor in their failure to win the type of support predicted by the media and cost them the loss of five seats. Two of their leading figures who have been given top jobs in David Cameron's cabinet are the former hedge fund manager, David Laws, and the former chief adviser to the Shell oil company, Vince Cable. Both these men will be perfectly comfortable putting together legislation that slashes public services and jobs.

The role of Peter Taaffe and the Socialist Party

Bragg is not alone in seeking to politically disarm the working class. The May 7 editorial headline in the *Socialist* newspaper of the Socialist Party reads, "Electoral Deadlock; all capitalist parties 'losers'".

The article is written by the Socialist Party's general secretary, Peter Taaffe.

All the capitalist parties were not losers. The Tories and the Liberal Democrats are "winners". Despite the minor internal differences between them, the bourgeoisie has been able to put in place a government that has a 50-seat majority.

Writing as the last of the results were coming in, Taaffe opines that if Cameron forms the government "in all probability he will 'go easy' in the first period in office, hoping to emulate Harold Wilson in 1974—who was also in a minority, initially".

This is totally misleading and ahistorical. First and foremost, the capitalist crisis today cannot simply be equated with the crisis of 36 years ago. It is at a far higher stage internationally. The development of a global economy has undermined the entire capitalist nation-state system and all those organisations and parties that base themselves on national programmes. This is intensifying imperialist antagonisms and has prepared the way for the break-up of the world into antagonistic warring blocs.

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In 1974 Wilson led a national reformist Labour Party until he resigned in 1976. One year later, Labour's leader James Callaghan, under pressure from the International Monetary Fund, formed an alliance with the Liberals. That was a pact, not a formal coalition such as the one between the Tories and Lib Dems today, but its purpose was also to facilitate an offensive against workers' jobs, wages and social conditions.

Since 1977, British imperialism's historic decline has accelerated dramatically. On the world arena it has been forced into an ever more subordinate position to US imperialism. Having sold off or shut down most of what remained of its manufacturing base, the ruling class has sought to become the world centre for managing speculative finance capital. This has made it increasing reliant on the City of London and the vagaries of international money markets.

Britain is governed in the interests of a small financial oligarchy that is ruthlessly determined to protect and maximise their investments through ever-greater brutal exploitation of the working class, both internationally and at home.

The representatives of big business are preparing for the next stage in their all-out war against the working class. Meanwhile, Peter Taaffe disarms workers by providing them with his own complacent assessment of the situation in Britain.

Another feature of the Taaffe editorial is the way he exaggerates Labour's real level of support in the election. "In Scotland, Labour's vote actually went up", the editorial reports. "The Tories were once more reduced to a capitalist sect with just one seat! This pattern was repeated in some of the important urban areas, such as Liverpool and parts of London".

Taaffe conceals the role pseudo-socialist groups like his own played in shoring up the Labour votes in all parts of the United Kingdom—and London in particular.

The pseudo-left groups all participated in the mobilisation behind a Labour vote championed by *Searchlight* magazine's "Hope not Hate" campaign and the TUC-sponsored Unite Against Fascism, led by the Socialist Workers Party and the Labour Party's black sections—in the name of combating the fascist British National Party.

Backed by the pro-Labour tabloid, the *Daily Mirror* and unions such as Unite, the biggest trade union in Britain, the campaign mobilised hundreds of people on election day to get the vote out. The *Daily Mirror* even made a call on its front page for a vote for Labour, under the "Hope not Hate" banner.

The *Guardian* reported that the campaign was supported by Joe Rospars, chief digital strategist for Barack Obama from 2007 until his inauguration, and his company Blue State Digital. Rospars said it was the "best example" of a British organisation applying lessons of the US presidential elections. He claimed they were able to identify key groups least likely to vote for the BNP—"women, pensioners and people from ethnic minorities". They built up an online volunteer force of 140,000 people, and Rospar advised on how to use them for maximum impact. In the month before election day, May 6, more than 1,000 volunteers descended on Barking, where BNP leader Nick Griffin was challenging Labour's Margaret Hodge, delivering 350,000 specially tailored leaflets and newsletters.

The campaign targeted other inner-city constituencies where they feared the Labour vote would collapse. As a result, hardnosed well-heeled Labour MPs such as Hodge and Diana Abbot doubled their majorities. The campaign cynically mobilised youth in the service of the Labour bureaucracy, the very forces responsible for the catastrophic social situation in which the working class now finds itself. It partly concealed the real alienation workers feel towards the Labour Party. If it had not been for this campaign, Labour would have lost far more than the 1 million votes and 90-odd seats it did.

Workers and youth want to fight fascism and racism, but they must reject the politics of the middle class groups and campaigns organised by the capitalist press and the Labour and trade union bureaucracy. It is their nationalist support for the military adventures of British imperialism that have led to war. It is their demands for "British jobs for British workers" and anti-immigrant rhetoric that encourage nationalism and racism.

The advanced nature of the political situation in Britain places before every class conscious and politically aware worker and young person the urgent job of building the Socialist Equality Party as its new revolutionary leadership.

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