

Socialist Party in Britain encourages illusions in a Conservative “plan B”

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The fake-left groups function as the last line of defence for British imperialism by encouraging reformist illusions amongst workers that keep them tied to the coattails of the Labour Party and trade unions.

Their propaganda centres on claims that left-talking bureaucrats will lead the fight against the attacks of the Conservative/Liberal Democrat government. In tail-ending a politically degraded trade union bureaucracy, they are lurching ever further to the right.

The misnamed Socialist Party is a good example. A recent editorial in its weekly newspaper, *The Socialist*, ripped out of context two sentences from a February 3 editorial in the *Financial Times* headlined “The Chancellor and the Case for Plan B” and used them to support its own reformist nostrums.

Referring to the government’s introduction of the most severe austerity measures since the 1930s, the sentences read, “Given the uncertainties, the government may have to adjust its plans in the light of events. To refuse to do so would be irrational.”

The Socialist said nothing of the rest of the article, but the paragraph immediately following these sentences read, “As the latest Green Budget from the Institute for Fiscal Studies makes clear, these uncertainties are both structural and cyclical. They also cut in both directions. It might be wise to cut the deficit by a greater amount or more swiftly. Alternatively, it might prove wise to cut by less or more slowly. At this early stage, we cannot know.”

The *Financial Times* was simply warning the ruling elite not to put all their eggs in one investment basket, as there are several ways of dealing with Britain’s structural deficit. They feared getting burnt unless the government was prepared to tack sharply should a second recession develop.

It is already the case that the Tory-Lib Dem coalition is pursuing one economic plan A, while the Labour and trade union bureaucracy is offering a plan B based upon a slower implementation of austerity and cuts. Both are directed towards safeguarding capitalist profits clawed out of the exploitation of the international and British working class.

Financial Times article ended, “Investors are aware that any programme of retrenchment needs public support. Specifying what some of the adjustments might be would enhance credibility, not reduce it. As Hamlet himself advises, ‘The readiness is all.’”

From one sentence taken out of context, *The Socialist* sought to disarm the working class politically by overstating the weakness of the Tories, while failing to explain the political tasks facing the working class. It declared, “Yet, like the Wizard of Oz, behind the curtain of shock and awe, a very weak coalition government, trailing in the polls, is pulling the strings. Chancellor George Osborne’s declaration that there is no ‘plan B’ has never been more than propaganda. It is clear that the government has no choice but to have a plan B in reserve.”

The Socialist was making a rather desperate attempt to endow its own national reformist perspective with some credibility and convince workers and youth attending the March 26 TUC demonstration that union militancy to pressurise the government was all that was needed.

“In the face of mass outrage, the Tory/Liberal coalition has already shown that it is capable of retreat,” it stated. “In one week in February it delayed the plans to privatise Britain’s forests, continued the threatened funding of debt counsellors for a year, and demagogically warned universities against charging the £9,000 a year fees, introduced by the very same government just two months before.

“These are not major retreats, but they give a glimpse of how scared the government is of potential opposition. David Cameron has had to admit openly that: ‘It is not possible to make those cuts without cutting some things that are important. It will not make us popular. It will make us unpopular. It will make me unpopular.’”

The Socialist then declared, “It already has! Some opinion polls now show Cameron is as hated as Maggie Thatcher, the Iron Lady, was at her most unpopular.

“The Con-Dems are far weaker than the governments of Maggie Thatcher. Yet the Iron Lady was reduced to iron filings by a mass movement of 18 million people refusing to

pay the flat rate tax (poll tax) that her government had introduced. That movement ended the tax and brought down Thatcher. It was led by the Socialist Party (then called Militant).

“Today again, with the right strategy, the movement can be successful.”

As the *Financial Times* advised, Cameron may be prepared to try some “adjustments” to keep a layer of the middle class onside, but that is not the same as the rout under pressure predicted by the Socialist Party. It is also a glib boast for *The Socialist* to claim, “Thatcher was brought down by the Poll Tax movement.”

It should be remembered that by this time she had already been in power for a decade during which her government had launched one attack after another on the working class.

Opposition to the Poll Tax showed how unpopular Thatcher was, even amongst a layer of the middle class that formerly supported her. This played its part in her downfall. But the party was not prepared to rally behind her and take on popular opposition as it had with the 1984 miners’ strike because of huge internal conflicts that centred on Europe and economic policy and led to the resignation of two of her chancellors in quick succession—Nigel Lawson and then, more damagingly, Geoffrey Howe.

The Tories were irrevocably split over how Britain could maintain its fading influence on world events. She had become a minority within her own party and had to go.

Once the Tories had replaced Thatcher and dropped the Poll Tax, John Major was elected in 1992. It was another five years before Major was replaced by the Labour governments of Tony Blair and Gordon Brown—a party that had ditched its reformist Clause Four and continued the rightwing, free market, privatising agenda of its Tory predecessors.

While a narrow section of the upper-middle class did well under these governments, the ruling class continued policies that drove social inequality up to unprecedented levels.

The Labour bureaucracy has never needed the fake-left groups more than it does today. *The Socialist* asserts that the TUC demonstration “will give the anti-cuts movement oxygen and confidence.”

This is despite the trade unions proposing nothing concrete to fight back. In the last week alone, tens of thousands of public-sector workers have seen their wages and employment conditions arbitrarily ripped up without the trade unions lifting a finger.

It continues, “Nationally, the National Shop Stewards Network (NSSN)—an organisation of militant trade unionists—launched an Anti-Cuts Campaign and is appealing to all local anti-cuts campaigns to get involved in its work.”

Everything the Socialist Party writes is to perpetuate the

trade union bureaucracy’s domination over the working class and oppose the development of an independent political movement based on a socialist perspective. This is what lies behind its boast of “organising and giving direction to the movement.”

The critical role of the revolutionary party is to provide workers with a Marxist scientific historical perspective and revolutionary programme necessary to overthrow capitalism and establish a workers’ government. It can give no guarantees, but can state without fear of contradiction that unless the working class intervenes on the basis of its own independent political programme, the ruling class will drag it ever further into a catastrophe.

It is true the Tory/Lib-Dem coalition is politically weaker than the Thatcher government of twenty years ago—because British imperialism itself is far weaker. But at this point the workers’ movement is also weaker, because of the betrayals of the labour bureaucracy.

The ruling class has been emboldened by the seeming inability of the working class to resist its attacks. The Eton-educated Bullingdon clique at the helm of the Tory/Lib Dem coalition believes their time has come. They have taken Britain into yet another imperialist war. The economic crisis has become the justification for slashing hundreds of thousands of jobs and workers’ wages, while those who created the crisis—the bankers—are rewarded with multimillion-pound bonuses. Huge cuts and privatisations are being carried out in every part of the health and social services system.

Further attacks are being made on democratic rights—such as Home Secretary Theresa May rushing through Parliament an urgent “remedial order” allowing “much tighter stop and search powers by the police and armed forces.”

The crisis is the responsibility of capitalism, not the working class. But to defeat this onslaught, workers and youth must build their own revolutionary leadership, the Socialist Equality Party.



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