

Britain's general election: The need for a socialist alternative

Socialist Equality Party (Britain)
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Britain goes to the polls today under conditions of an unprecedented and worsening crisis gripping the entire political system.

At stake for the ruling elite is the growing threat to British imperialism's standing as a world power. Whoever forms a government, the election raises the prospect of a possible exit from the European Union, a further deterioration in British relations with the United States and even the fragmentation of the United Kingdom itself.

Each of these political factors in turn is seen as a major threat to the UK economy—the second largest in Europe and the fifth largest in the world.

Yet, publicly at least, these questions are discussed only in the most superficial terms, if at all.

Most significantly, a political blackout has been imposed on the advanced preparations for a massive expansion of militarism and war—under conditions in which Britain is committed to operations in Iraq and Syria and is playing a key role in the NATO-led provocations against Russia.

During the election campaign, the UK hosted massive naval exercises off Scotland and air war games over South Wales involving 13,000 NATO troops, fighter jets and ships against Russian vessels. On Tuesday, the Royal Navy's flagship HMS Bulwark began operations off the coast of Libya, on the pretext of rescuing migrants in the Mediterranean.

The overriding concern of the ruling class is which party can form a government that will be able to continue with the savage programme of austerity imposed since the financial crash of 2008.

The search for a “stable government” is, however, a thankless task.

The Conservatives relied in 2010 on the Liberal Democrats to form a government. But having

implemented the most severe spending cuts since the 1930s, both parties are widely despised.

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Moreover, there are concerns in the ruling elite over Prime Minister David Cameron's pledge to hold a 2017 referendum on membership of the European Union—a prospect regarded with growing concern in Washington and Berlin.

Despite this, the City of London, the major corporations and all newspapers, with the exception of the *Guardian* and *Daily Mirror*, have come out in favour of a second Tory-led coalition—even if this means bringing in a combination of Northern Irish parties and the UK Independence Party.

Labour is also pledged to austerity, which is why it has been unable to capitalise more successfully on anti-Tory sentiment. Nowhere is the divide that now exists between Labour and the majority of working people more apparent than in Scotland, where it faces a wipeout.

In its efforts to re-ingratiate itself with big business, Labour has pledged itself to a “budgetary responsibility lock”, opposed a referendum on EU membership, pledged to strengthen relations with US imperialism—especially on the military front—and ruled out any formal agreement with the Scottish National Party.

Even so, Labour leader Ed Miliband's timid suggestion that cuts can be implemented more slowly is considered impermissible. More important still, concerns over the future stability of the UK due to a minority Labour government's potential dependence on the SNP presently outweighs fears of a “Brexit” under the Tories.

Coming out for the first time in favour of a Tory-led

government, the *Independent* editorialised: “Britain has entered a long period of relative decline, as emerging powers such as China and India acquire greater influence. To splinter our country, either through Scottish independence or withdrawal from the EU, would be fatally stupid...”

It continues, “Any partnership between Labour and the SNP will harm Britain’s fragile democracy. For all its faults, another Lib-Con coalition would both prolong and give our Kingdom a better chance of continued existence.”

This is an extraordinary statement that points to a fundamental crisis of rule in Britain. However, the crisis in Britain is only a particular manifestation of the global breakdown of capitalism and its nation-state system and the explosive growth of national and, especially, class antagonisms.

Whatever government is eventually formed, it will be unable to paper over these intractable and strategic fault lines. Its agenda will be set by the rapacious demands of the financial oligarchy, which has no answer to the economic and social catastrophe other than more of the same.

It will have no legitimacy in the eyes of millions of working people who have made clear again and again their desire for an end to the constant assault on jobs, wages and vital social provisions.

It is this that explains the stampede into the arms of Labour by the SNP, Plaid Cymru (Party of Wales) and the Green Party. Under the banner of a “Progressive Alliance” to keep out the Tories, they are offering to prop up Miliband so he can impose Labour’s anti-working class agenda.

The innumerable pseudo-left groups are seeking their place within this political fraud—either through an alliance with the SNP in Scotland or with sections of Labour and the Greens elsewhere in the UK. Their discussions of a post-election “realignment of the left” are modelled on Syriza in Greece, which is pledged to implementing the attacks on workers and youth dictated by the EU and the International Monetary Fund.

The Socialist Equality Party and its candidates, Katie Rhodes in Glasgow Central and David O’Sullivan in Holborn and St. Pancras, offer the only genuine alternative for workers and young people.

We advance an independent political perspective to mobilise the working class against the twin threats of

austerity and war through the fight for a workers’ government based on a socialist program. There is no parliamentary solution to this crisis because the obscene levels of social inequality and escalating militarism are incompatible with democratic forms of rule.

As our manifesto explains, “As in 1914 and 1939, the basic contradictions of the world capitalist system—between globalised production and the division of the world into antagonistic nation states, and between socialised production and private ownership of the means of production—threaten humanity with catastrophe.”

The fight for socialism in Britain must be understood as an integral part of a unified offensive of the European and international working class. The prerequisite for such a struggle is the building of the International Committee of the Fourth International. All those able to do so should vote for Rhodes and O’Sullivan. Most important of all, we urge you to join the SEP and build it as the new socialist party of the working class.



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