

# The death of British Labourism

**Chris Marsden, Julie Hyland****11 May 2015**

It is a measure of how right-wing the Labour Party is that the rout it suffered in Thursday's UK general election has prompted a chorus of demands for a return to "New Labour" and the legacy of its former leader Tony Blair.

Both Blair and his chief strategist Peter Mandelson have intervened to reinforce the message that Labour lost because it failed to make an appeal to the aspirant middle classes. Worse still, according to Mandelson, was that it gave the impression that it was "for the poor, and it hated the rich."

Following the resignation of Ed Miliband, a leadership contest is underway in which there are already seven potential candidates, with more likely to follow. All are careerist nonentities, strident defenders of unregulated capitalism, privatisation and militarism. They insist that Labour's defeat was because Miliband was too left-wing and focussed his strategy on mobilising its "core" working-class vote. Instead, Labour must return to Blair's strategy of the "big tent" and efforts to win over Conservative voters.

Talk is of a 10-year process to rebuild Labour, underscoring the fact that no one can expect even the feint of opposition from this discredited party of the state.

The election does indeed prove that Labour's core constituency has been eaten away. But workers have deserted it because they already view it as a Conservative Party Mark Two, with almost one-third of the electorate seeing no point in voting at all because no party has anything to offer them.

Miliband's feeble tack to the left was entirely unconvincing, coming from a party that was pledged to austerity and that is incapable of putting behind it the actual record of Blair and his successor Gordon Brown as a tool of big business and architect of the Iraq war.

For this reason, there is barely any reference to the fact that Labour's most significant losses came in

Scotland, where the Scottish National Party (SNP) falsely declared itself to be opposed to austerity.

The SNP were able to successfully deflect class anger against Labour in a nationalist direction. It meant that the Conservatives were successful, in part, due to their whipping-up of British, and even English, nationalism. It also helped the UK Independence Party to make significant inroads into Labour's former strongholds.

The pseudo-left organisations bear chief political responsibility for sowing divisions in the working class and strengthening the hands of the nationalists on both sides of the border.

For years, they have championed the SNP and Scottish separatism as a progressive alternative to rule from Westminster. In the run-up to the election, they attacked Labour not for its betrayal of the working class but for its defence of the Union.

In the aftermath of the SNP's victory, their perspective centres on some form of alliance with this party of the Scottish bourgeoisie, or, failing that, pressuring it to "deliver on its promises" to oppose austerity and fight for independence.

South of the border, the pseudo-left gave a howl of despair at Labour's defeat. But again they offer nothing to the working class other than bankrupt pleas to push the Labour Party and the trade unions to the left.

Left Unity speaks of another Tory victory in 2020 and urges efforts to be directed towards helping "unpick the Tory lies." The Socialist Workers Party states that "trade union leaders...have to be pressured to start fighting." The Socialist Party, which constitutes most of the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition, puts its hope in "Len McCluskey, General Secretary of Unite, [who] suggested that if Labour could not even defeat the Tories, the time had come to look at a new party." The "trade union movement as a whole" should begin discussing this, it states.

None of these tendencies speak for the working class.

They are wholly integrated into the structures of bourgeois politics. They represent a privileged layer of the middle class, anxious only to secure positions for themselves as political advisers to the major parties, leading trade union functionaries and the developers of bourgeois policy within academia.

Their particular role is to oppose the development of a revolutionary socialist movement and subordinate workers and youth to the political representatives of capital.

The events of May 7 were long in gestation and do not lend themselves to a quick fix.

Decades of political betrayals by the Labour and trade union bureaucracy in the UK, and social democracy and Stalinism internationally, have taken their toll. At every turn, they have blocked the class struggle while waging a relentless ideological offensive against any socialist political consciousness in the working class.

Indeed, Labour's rout is far more than the failure of just one party. It is the failure of an entire political perspective and of all the parties and organisations based on it. Across Europe, the former social democratic organisations are disintegrating. Having long ago abandoned their reformist pretensions in response to economic globalisation and capitalist breakdown, whether in Britain, France, Greece or elsewhere, they have become the ruthless exponents of austerity and war.

This presents workers and young people with grave dangers. They face a government that has already pledged billions of pounds in additional cuts and to rush through a new "snoopers charter" to strengthen the powers of the state and security apparatuses. It will seek to step up nationalist tensions, not only in the UK, but on the issues of immigration and Europe.

Moreover, this takes place under conditions in which capitalism is teetering on the brink of another financial crash and in which military aggression by the US, Britain and other major powers threatens to plunge the world into a bloody conflagration.

A road out of this nightmare depends on the building of a genuinely socialist party. There is no way forward through a return to national reformism, only a shift to a new axis of struggle—that of socialist internationalism. The productive forces of society must be freed from the fetters of the profit system and the division of the world into competing nation states. World economy must be

run on the basis of planned production to meet social need, not private profit.

Only the Socialist Equality Party and the International Committee of the Fourth International advance such a socialist programme and offer a means through which the working class can be unified internationally in a struggle against capitalism, which is the root cause of austerity and war.

The building of the SEP must proceed through the clarification of the most politically advanced and selfless workers and youth in the crucial historic experiences of the workers' movement, above all the decades-long struggle waged by Leon Trotsky and the Fourth International against Stalinism and of the ICFI up until today for the perspective of world socialist revolution.



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