

Britain's general election and the coming struggle of the working class for socialism

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Today's snap general election in the UK was made necessary by the inability of the contending factions of the ruling class to resolve their disagreement over membership of the European Union (EU). But the Socialist Equality Party was correct in predicting, "For workers and young people, despite the insidious divisions fostered over Brexit, the decisive issues are social: falling wages, brutal exploitation, rising unemployment and the destruction of vital social services."

The SEP warned that this election would be "the most socially and politically polarised in the post-war history of the UK." Numerous commentators now acknowledge it to have been the dirtiest ever fought. Political tensions have reached such a pitch that the essential framework of democracy is in danger of breaking down, with billionaire Rupert Murdoch's the *Sun* railing against the threat of a "Marxist revolution" and the pro-Tory *Daily Telegraph* declaring, "This election is really about saving capitalism."

Underlying the intensity of political conflicts is an historically unprecedented social polarisation between the classes that is now beginning to find expression in a global eruption of the class struggle.

The past year has seen millions take to the streets in mass strikes and protests—in Tunisia, Algeria, Sudan, Hong Kong, Puerto Rico, Haiti, Egypt, Ecuador, Iraq, Lebanon, Catalonia and Chile. We are now witnessing the explosive events across the Channel, a public sector strike and mass protests in France, in the very heart of Europe.

Everywhere the growth of social inequality is the driving force for a new period of revolutionary struggle. The ruling class understands that it will not be long before Britain too is engulfed in class conflict and is preparing to take on the working class.

Only this can explain the ferocity of the campaign by the mass media to oppose a Labour victory. Accompanying dire warnings of economic catastrophe is

the portrayal of Corbyn and the "left" as anti-Semitic and a threat to national security by a cabal stretching from the Chief Rabbi to the Archbishop of Canterbury, former heads of the armed forces, MI5 and MI6 and led politically by the Blairite right-wing of Corbyn's own party.

The SEP stood our own candidates in the general election. Our fight has been for workers to base themselves on a socialist and internationalist perspective, one rooted in a profound concern for history and informed by its lessons.

We do not call for a Labour vote. To do so would only reinforce illusions in Corbyn and Labour that must be exposed and dispelled. If Corbyn comes to power, he will either attack the working class himself, as did Syriza in Greece, or deliver the working class bound hand and foot to the forces of political reaction like Salvador Allende did in Chile.

Since he was elected Labour leader in 2015, Corbyn has done everything possible to demobilise the hundreds of thousands who joined the party seeking an end to austerity, militarism and war. He has sought to block any political move to drive out Blairite MPs whose nakedly pro-business politics and warmongering are the true face of the Labour Party.

For its part, the trade union bureaucracy has relied upon the illusions generated in a possible Corbyn government to suppress workers' struggles, including a planned strike by 110,000 postal workers and curtailing action by 40,000 university staff during the election itself—strikes that, along with action on two rail franchises serving London, would now be taking place in tandem with the movement in France.

The SEP opposes the claims of pseudo-left groups, such as the Socialist Workers Party and Socialist Party, that Corbyn's leadership offers the prospect of a renewal of the Labour Party and a chance to implement a national

reformist policy. At the same time, we oppose illusions in a national path for the working class regarding Brexit, with the same tendencies boosting Corbyn claiming that Brexit will provide the basis for a “left” Labour government.

Labour is a pro-capitalist and imperialist party of more than a century standing. It will not be transformed by the election of a “left” leader or even an influx of new members seeking a socialist alternative.

Our criticism of Corbyn and his backers is based on the realities of contemporary capitalism. Advances in science and technology have enabled the development of globalised production, ripping the ground from under the feet of the outmoded national labour organisations and their programme of economic regulation to suppress class antagonisms. It is this, and not the merits or otherwise of this or that leader, that has led to the transformation of social democratic parties and trade unions into the direct instruments of their own ruling classes in imposing savage exploitation on the working class to secure global competitiveness.

On Brexit, the SEP insisted that the 2016 referendum offered a false binary “choice” between two right-wing capitalist factions—differing on whether to ally with the US or Europe in a deepening trade war but both hostile to the working class and anxious to deepen what they referred to admiringly as the “Thatcher revolution.” We said that the road forward was neither Brexit, nor support for the European Union and its policies of austerity, anti-migrant measures, authoritarian rule and the cultivation of the far right—but a unified struggle by workers across the continent for a United Socialist States of Europe.

We are oriented to the most advanced elements in the working class and the younger generation, with the aim of resolving what Leon Trotsky identified as the fundamental question of the epoch—the crisis of revolutionary leadership. The struggle for that perspective is the vital preparation for the political and social struggles that will follow the general election.

If Corbyn fails to secure a majority, or there is another hung parliament, then the Tories will lead an offensive against the working class of unbridled ferocity. An indication of what is planned is provided by the courts twice ruling against the planned strike by Royal Mail postal workers, which was backed by over 95 percent of union members. This was followed by Johnson’s threat to ban all strikes on public transport in response to the action taken by workers against South Western Railway.

What enforcing such strike bans means can be seen in

France, where the Macron government has repeatedly mobilised riot police against strikers and Yellow Vest protesters. The scale of what is being prepared in the UK was laid out in Operation Yellowhammer, with 50,000 regular and reserve troops made ready, backed up by 10,000 riot police in the event of post-Brexit civil unrest.

A Labour defeat will lead to Corbyn’s removal and moves to secure the Blairites ascendancy in the party. But if Corbyn wins, only the form of this offensive will change. The Blairites will move to split the party and create the basis for a multi-party realignment to the right—as they have been preparing for months under Corbyn’s nose.

Corbyn’s response will be to try and appease his opponents, obeying the commandments of the major corporations and the City of London to attack the working class. If further proof were needed of his infinite malleability and lack of principle, then Corbyn’s refusal to take a stand in defence of WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange and against his extradition to the US on espionage charges provides it. Any illusions that Corbyn offers an alternative to Tory rule, endless austerity and global military violence will be cruelly dispelled in the weeks and months ahead.

The ruling class will not, moreover, confine itself to parliamentary dirty tricks. It is preparing for counter-revolutionary violence against the working class. As soon as he took office in 2015, Corbyn was threatened with “the very real prospect of an event which would effectively be a mutiny” involving “senior generals” by an unnamed “senior serving British general”.

Whatever party has secured a majority on December 13, the election will prove to be a staging post in an escalating class struggle. Only the most powerful social force, a unified movement of the British, European and international working class, offers the means necessary to defeat the conspiracies of the ruling elite. We call on all workers and youth to vote for our candidates today and join and build the Socialist Equality Party, the only party that told the truth and that has the programme necessary to wage a counter-offensive against big business and its parties and for socialism.



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