workers power

We need a new kind of party!

IN THE aftermath of Labour's fourth successive election defeat the question is posed point blank: what kind of party does the working class need to turn the tide?

The middle class pundits and Labour bigwigs are queuing up with their plans and proposals for a still more right wing party. Fewer links with the trade unions, fusion with the Liberals, ever more moderate policies—these are the only answers they can muster after 9 April.

The remnants of the Labour left offer a mixture of slightly more radical policies, coupled with vague calls for a return to "basics". By the "basics" they mean the failed politics of Labourism in the seventies and early eighties.

Since 1979 Labour has been calling on workers to hold back all struggles against the employers and their government in order to help Labour get back into power.

Kinnock called the miners' strike a "wasted year" because it distracted the attention of the party and the population away from his attempts to present Labour as moderate and responsible. In the meantime the Tories singled out and defeated militant groups of workers section by section. This led not only to the dissolution of the shopfloor organisation that had been built up in the sixties and seventies, but also to a decline in the numbers of workers in unions.

No serious attempts were made to build strong organisation within the new industries and fresh layers of the working class. The result of Labour's right wing electoralist approach has been to make the party less and less electable, as direct identification with Labour has been confined to shrinking sections of the working class.

This will not be won back by any amount of public relations, fresh packaging or more "responsible" policies for running the profit system. The Tory vote has stayed firm because millions of workers believe that if there is no alternative to capitalism, then it should be run by those who best understand and defend that system, the Tories.

The way to turn the tide and win workers to a real alternative to the Tories is to recognise the truth behind what revolutionary socialists have been saying since the days of Karl Marx: ideas change in struggle.

The Tory fourth term will see renewed attacks on the pay, employment rights, conditions and services of the working class. No matter how weak, sectional and isolated resistance may be at first, it is through resistance that ideas can begin to change.

To make the most of that potential we need a party that can organise the fight.

Labour is set to distance itself even further from association with the unions. What we need is a party that actually organises the militants within the unions to really put them

in the hands of their members—not through Tory legislation but through making the unions fighting democratic organisations.

Labour is set to distance itself from the oppressed: black people, women, youth, lesbians and gays can all expect to be sidelined as Labour carries on its search for respectability. What we need is a party that not only takes up the struggles of the socially oppressed but is prepared to help organise them to play a leading role in their own liberation.

Labour's inquest will focus on its taxation programme. Constantly challenged to say where the money comes from for spending on health and education Labour had no answers. We need a party with clear answers: tax the super rich and take away not just part of their income but its source—the vast wealth in stocks and shares that allows them to make millions from sitting on their backsides. Then there would be no need to hit the middle class and well paid workers to pay for social spending.

Labour is set to bury even deeper the idea of socialism. We need a party that can explain what socialism means to the huge layer of workers and youth who think socialism died when the statues toppled in Eastern Europe.

We need a party that fights for what workers need, not what the capitalists can afford.

Anybody who tells us that Labour can be turned into the kind of party workers need has got to be joking. Can it organise militant workers in the factories of the south east to combat rampant Toryism? After Kinnock's purge of activists, in many wards it is lucky if it can organise a jumble sale.

What we need is a new kind of party—a revolutionary workers' party that sets out to change ideas through struggle, that sets out to lead struggles in the workplace and society as a whole, and which allows the voice of the most committed workers and young people to be heard because it is led by them.

A revolutionary workers' party has to be organised with the maximum centralisation to permit the utmost effectiveness in struggle. Look how the bosses used ruthless centralisation to win the class battles of the 1980s. We have to do the same. But we have to combine this with the utmost internal democracy, avoiding bureaucratic or clique domination and enabling the party to be guided by the experience of different sections of the working class and by a scientific analysis of the situation.

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We need a revolutionary party most of all because the final goal of our struggle is not to put a set of careerist politicians in Parliament but to put millions of workers in control of their own lives.

For that we will have to take on and defeat the power of the police, courts, army and monarchy and replace it with the power of delegate workers' councils. A revolutionary party fights every struggle with the aim of mobilising and preparing for that final goal.

It does this by fighting for a clear programme of demands to meet workers' needs—not just better reforms under capitalism but for measures that advance workers' control and self-organisation.

We need a party that starts from the recognition that the struggle against capitalism is international. Every step along the road of European integration provides further evidence that just as the bosses organise across national borders, so too must the working class. A truly revolutionary party in Britain will have to be built as part of a new workers' international or not at all.

No such party exists in Britain today. The left wing organisations who call themselves revolutionary parties are not revolutionary. Nor are they real parties. A party is an organisation that represents significant forces in the working class. It is a measure of the left's failure to represent and organise such forces that the leaders of these groups are able to squander the energies of their members on one futile opportunist stunt after another without being called to account.

Our aim is to rally the forces committed to building a revolutionary party. The manifest failure of Labour's strategy and the decline of the Labour left give the fight for a revolutionary party a new relevance and urgency.

No one is pretending that building it will be easy.

But it will be a lot easier than completing the impossible mission of making Labour represent the workers' needs.■

What's the cause of Labour's electoral decline?

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