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**Britain**

# **End the Tory Nightmare!**

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**The Tories have spent the last 18 years launching massive attacks on the working class. They have wreaked havoc on the trade unions, taking on and defeating section after section of workers, taking advantage of the weakness of the union leaders.**

They have privatised and contracted out the public sector to the benefit of their fat cat friends and the detriment of services, working conditions and jobs.

They have undermined the National Health Service, education and every other part of the welfare state. They have grossly increased poverty, homelessness and used unemployment as a deliberate weapon to discipline workers. They have weakened workers' ability to resist all these by introducing eight packages of anti-trade union legislation stripping away almost every right which previously existed and making a legal fightback almost impossible. And they plan more of the same - total privatisation of pensions and the London Underground system, and further curbs on the right to strike. It has to be time to end the Tory nightmare.

The vast majority of workers recognise that the Tories represent the open class interests of the bosses and want to see them out. They will do that by voting Labour and hope that Labour will be at least a little better. They are crying out for a government which tackles unemployment and the deterioration of the welfare state. Socialist Outlook knows that a Labour government led by Blair will not do any of these things of its own free will, but it has never been more important that a Labour government is elected, despite the extent to which Blair has taken it to the right. A fifth Tory term would create widespread despair while a Labour victory would create higher expectations and new conditions for a fightback.

If elected, Labour leader Tony Blair would immediately face hard choices, such as whether to go into the single currency. A Labour government is committed to building on the Tories' achievements for British capitalism. Gordon Brown, due to be Chancellor if Labour takes government, is committed to carrying out the limits on public spending set out by the Tories, including the limit on public sector pay increases. Labour will continue with much of the Tory programme, its anti-union laws, its attacks on the welfare state, no reversal of privatisations. Even where Labour is committed to better policies, like the statutory national minimum wage, it will take a fight to ensure that it is implemented, and at a level which significantly improves the living standards of the lowest paid.

Whether we like it or not, the vast majority of class conscious workers will vote Labour in the general election (unfortunately, a significant minority will vote Tory or Liberal Democrat). Those who doubt that this is a 'class against class' election should consider what the effect of the election of the Tories for another term would be on the morale of militants. Labour not winning the election would be seen as an endorsement of the Tories, who would feel they could continue their attacks on the working class with impunity, and whole layers of the working class would feel they had no defence against these attacks. The modest increase in struggle in the last year in the expectation that the Tories are on their way out would be set back to a considerable extent.

While it is the case that Blair has moved Labour's programme considerably further to the right than ever before, the basic nature of the Labour Party has not changed. Despite Blair's worst intentions, the affiliation of the trade unions means the Labour Party is in essence a workers party, even though it has always had a pro-capitalist programme.

We would take issue with those socialists who believe that what is necessary in order to break the working class from its support for Blair is to simply denounce Labour and stand candidates critical of New Labour. While that might make us feel good and attract a small layer who totally reject New Labour, it will have little effect on the vast majority who

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will see such candidacies as marginal to the central question in the election. That is what happened when they stood in the Hemsworth, Barnsley East and Wirral South bye-elections. Far more productive and likely to gain a hearing in most areas is for socialists to link a call for a Labour vote with both a critique of Labour's policies and building struggles which place demands on Labour around key policies and fights to force a Labour government to carry them out. Workers who, despite all the evidence, expect Labour to deliver something, will relate to that much more than simple denunciation of Labour.

By and large, the job of creating an alternative to New Labour with serious support is ahead of us. There are very few places where candidates to the Left of Labour in the election represent serious forces. Whilst calling for an overall vote for Labour we support some of the most credible and well-placed candidates of the left parties and organisations, the Socialist Labour Party, the Socialist Party (ex-Militant Labour) and the Scottish Socialist Alliance.

We support Dave Nellist in Coventry (standing for the SP), Tommy Sheridan in Glasgow (SP/SSA) and Arthur Scargill standing in Newport East for the SLP. Although these organisations are different, and the SLP problematic in the way it was established and has functioned since, this is a recognition both of the base of support these individuals have in the workers' movement and of the importance of the forces developing to the Left of the Labour Party. The SSA comes out of the radical political situation in Scotland, and the SLP emerges from the rightward march of Blairism.

If Labour wins the election, we can expect conflict between the government and those who elected it expecting Labour to be better than the Tories. Brown's commitment to keeping down public sector pay will not go down well with those workers who have already experienced several years of pay restraint from the Tories. Blair's desire to prevent the trade unions having any real say in Labour Party policy is already causing upset, and is likely to be one of the major issues of debate at this year's trade union conferences.

Not only will the election of a Labour government lift the air of gloom over the working class, it will also release the class from the arguments of their union leaders over the last decade that any struggle would damage the chances of a Labour victory. It will begin to show the limitations of Labour in government and allow socialists the scope to put forward alternative policies to a much wider audience than has been possible in the recent past. Although Blair can expect a certain "honeymoon" period while he is given the benefit of the doubt, struggles will develop against a Labour government from those expecting it to reverse the actions of the Tories. Those who rule out support for Labour in the election either rule out or refuse to relate to such crucial developments.