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British General Election Looms

Respect prepares Election intervention

- News from around the world -

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Respect, the new left coalition in Britain formed out of the anti-war movement, held a well-attended day-school to prepare its general election intervention on Saturday January 15 in London. It was attended by well over a hundred people, many of them local organisers of Respect.

Most people think there will be a general election in Britain on May 5 2005. Of course the Prime Minister chooses the date of the election, and the absolute final date of the five-year term would be June 2006; but it is clear that May 5th this year has already been chosen. All the political parties, including the party of government - the Labour Party - have opened what is effectively their general election campaigns.

[<https://internationalviewpoint.org/IMG/gif/Respect23.gif>]

Respect, the new organisation of the left in Britain, formed a year ago out of the anti-war movement, held its conference at the end of last year and decided its tactical approach to the general election. The conference decided not to attempt to stand in as many seats as possible - which had been the approach of its forerunner the Socialist Alliance - but to stand in a limited number of seats where Respect could expect to get good results.

It is of course impossible to stand in all seats - there are 620. The Socialist Alliance stood in about 100 in the 2002 election. Whilst the Respect conference did not decide on a precise figure (that will be decided by the Respect National Council), the decision implied that it will be a quite a bit less than a 100. The political situation, of course, remains favourable for a new left anti-war party - since the war in Iraq remains central to the political situation in Britain.

Alongside the decision to stand in a limited number of constituencies was the decision to resource those constituencies far more adequately and to improve the professionalism of constituency organisation.

The day school was centred on the nitty-gritty of election organisation - and represents quite a sharp turn, from the days of the Socialist Alliance, towards systematic door-to-door canvassing and constituency organisation and away from relying on fly-posting and general public profile.

There was detailed discussion on canvassing from how to organise it to how to conduct yourself on the doorstep and even (a bit more contentious) what dress code to have!

At the same time the Respect National Council is discussing priority constituencies in conjunction with local Respect organisations. The aim is to achieve a balance across the country whilst concentrating on the constituencies which are best for Respect.

Quite a few constituencies have already selected candidates, as a result of these discussions and others have started the selection process. Some of the East London constituencies where Respect had excellent results, some of them remarkable, in the various elections last June, have selected candidates. George Galloway - the Glasgow MP expelled from the Labour Party for his opposition to the war and now a leading member of Respect - will stand in Bethnal Green and Bow, where he must have a good chance of winning. This would be a major breakthrough given the first-past-the-post voting system. Oliur Rahman - the newly elected Respect councillor in Tower Hamlets will stand in the Poplar and Limehouse constituency. Stop the War coalition organiser Lindsey German (who got a good vote for the London Assembly last June) will stand in West Ham and Abdul Khaliq Mian in East Ham.