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Britain:

UKIP results shame the left

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The worst possible response to the local council elections at the beginning of May in which UKIP won 25% of the vote would be complacency. For this result is shameful for both Labour and for the left-of-Labour left. While it's true that the mainly rural areas and small town being polled are the heartland of sections of the petty bourgeoisie and not at all representative of the electorate in general, for all that the result is dispiriting and frustrating.

UKIP – nationalism, xenophobia and racism

This vote shows who is on the offensive politically, even if the vote is untypical of Britain as a whole. It reveals once again the chosen terrain for all of right-wing reaction in Britain – nationalism, xenophobia and racism – and the mass base it has. And it shows the terrible weakness of Labour's 'alternative' and the absence of a coherent left at the electoral level – mainly as a result of division and futile sectarian factionalism which has sabotaged unity initiatives over the last 20 years.

In June 2009, the day after the county council and European elections I wrote:

"The outcome of the county council and Euro elections means that the British left – the left to the left of New Labour – has to wake up and break out of its dire sectarian, bureaucratic and factional mindsets. Nothing is more shameful than the lack of united left slate, around a minimal set of demands in the interests of the working class, in these elections. The near-absence of the Left from the electoral field was one important reason – though far from the only one – that such a large number of the protest votes against the main parties went to the hard right UKIP and the fascist BNP. It is shameful that the Left abandons so much of the electoral field to the far right because of nothing more than hardened, bone headed, factional idiocy – topped off by bureaucratic exclusions and anathemas." (<http://www.marxsite.com/leftcrisis.html>)

What has changed of course is the relative demise of the BNP. UKIP is a much better instrument for right wing reaction without the stain of fascism and the bourgeoisie won't touch it.

Hundreds of thousands of workers voted in these elections and many of them voted for UKIP. It was a case of the reactionary petty bourgeoisie leading the working class, rather than the working class and the left making inroads into the petty bourgeoisie. Many of the people who voted UKIP were doubtless protest voters, but Labour doesn't inspire workers and middle class people who are suffering at the hands of the cuts and economic downturn. How can a Labour front bench that promises absolutely nothing for when and if it comes to power inspire anybody? The 'left' and no-so-left union leaders who think that Ed Miliband is their man and can maybe be pushed further left are foolish beyond belief. Even with tens of millions suffering from austerity Labour is struggling to get the kind of poll figures that would ensure its return to office.

The failure to construct a left electoral alternative to Labour shames the left, and in particular the leaderships of the SWP and Socialist Party, jointly culpable for the collapse of successive left unity initiatives. Certainly on the kind of unfavourable terrain that existed in yesterday's elections would not guarantee any kind of left electoral breakthrough. But the left should try to be a growing electoral force, to put forward an electoral alternative to austerity, xenophobia and racism. The present practice on much of the left is in fact a form of electoral abstentionism, although at a formal level organisations like the SWP and the SP reject it. Shrugging your shoulders and muttering about the primacy of mass struggle is (at best) a capitulation to syndicalism and spontaneism. The right wing must be fought in elections as well as in the mass struggle, obviously.

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Both the subjective forces and the objective circumstances exist for the creation of a force to the left of Labour capable of creating a credible national electoral challenge. Probably the circumstances are not so favourable as they were 10 or 12 years ago, but we can only start with where we are and the forces we have to hand. The logic of course is to fight for a broad left party which of course prioritises mass struggle, but does not abandon the electoral terrain.

The left has to do everything possible to confront racism and xenophobic nationalism, so assiduously cultivated by the state and right wing media over the past decade, particularly in relation to ‘our boys’ in Afghanistan and Iraq. Neither should the left act as an echo chamber for the anti-EU xenophobia of the right. UKIP and the Tories attack the most progressive things in the EU, like the European Convention on Human Rights. It is a total diversion to imagine that austerity and the plight of the working class and middle class people suffering from the effects of austerity can be solved by leaving the European Union, or indeed that the EU is a central factor in imposing austerity in Britain.

The Left in Britain has been marking time – no worse, wasting time. The construction of a broad left party is an urgent necessity to fight the right.

Phil Hearse wrote this piece for his site [Crisis and Revolt](#)