

Foundation for PR-based Socialism

Website: www.PRsocialism.org Forum: <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/PRsocialism>

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Workers of the world unite – with the middle class!

May Day is the international workers' day, when there are many events around the world celebrating struggles of the working class. This year, it's the 40th anniversary of working class people challenging for power in France.

Capitalist economies throughout the world are in crisis – with the “credit crunch” resulting from sub-prime mortgages sold to people with poor credit records in the USA, escalating levels of government debts and massive increases in food and fuel prices. In the so-called third world, food inflation is so high that millions of poor people are literally starving to death once more.

In recent years, parties calling themselves “socialist” have taken power in many countries in Latin America. However, in the West, prospects for workers taking power seem more remote now than ever before in the history of capitalism! Most left-wing activists, including supposed revolutionaries, concentrate on putting forward reformist demands. In Britain, for example, they demand more money for public services and oppose cuts, at a time when the government is already borrowing about £40 billion a year!

It is important, particularly at a time of economic crisis, for revolutionary socialists to talk about the need for revolution and say how we would organise society better than capitalists do. But what sort of socialist society do we advocate? Marxist parties like the British Socialist Workers Party (SWP) stand for a form of socialism sometimes called “the dictatorship of the proletariat” in which only the working class is in control – via hierarchies of committees based on workplaces, with a “workers’ militia” to try to prevent such a society from being overthrown. Hierarchical structures, including those in the SWP itself, make it easy for infiltrators from hostile organisations to reach positions of power and stay there, because it is generally only those on such committees who know who the dodgy people are and what they are up to. Furthermore, in these days of a burgeoning middle class, when there is overwhelming support for some sort of proportional electoral system, such forms of socialism are outdated and stand no chance of receiving popular support.

In contrast, the Foundation for PR-based Socialism stands for a form of socialism based on proportional representation (PR) by single transferable vote (STV). Under STV, voters can specify preferences for different candidates so that votes are transferred to second and later preferences, if the first choice is eliminated or gets more votes than necessary. It is the fairest form of PR because it removes the need for tactical voting and allows voters to choose between candidates of the same party.

What sort of party/network do we need? Join the debate

There has been a tendency in recent years to form broad socialist parties, uniting revolutionary socialists and reformists around mainly reformist programmes. This strategy has sometimes resulted in such parties joining ruling coalitions (such as Rifondazione Comunista in Italy and Die Linke on the Berlin council) and losing support when those coalitions implemented cuts. In some countries, particularly Britain, there have been splits on peripheral issues after the parties lost momentum – the Tommy Sheridan defamation trial in Scotland and a change of tack by the SWP in Respect in England and Wales (away from encouraging Muslim businessmen to stand as candidates and limiting the programme to avoid alienating them). It is a good time for a realignment of the left in many countries. But what sort of party (or “network” if the term “party” seems off-putting or too hierarchical) can best lead to socialism?

- A broad socialist party, but better reflecting the views of revolutionaries within it?
- An openly revolutionary socialist party?
- A revolutionary anti-capitalist party, uniting revolutionary socialists with others opposed to capitalism, like the party being launched by the French LCR? Anarchists could join and ignore its electoral activities if they so wish.
- An ethical capitalist party, which forces rich people and companies to pay their fair share of tax?
- A libertarian party? The UK Libertarian Party, which was formed this year, wants a very free capitalist society under which a voluntary socialist mini-state could be created. It currently has a right-wing programme, on many issues apart from civil liberties and the STV voting system, but if it adopts a position of redistributing wealth at the start of a libertarian society or increasing the minimum wage, both of which Foundation founder Steve Wallis suggested on their forum, their policy of abolishing income tax could be both good and popular.

We may also need to consider setting up some sort of grouping of like-minded people, officially recognised or otherwise, within such a party. Our enemies are organised so we need to be too.

You can debate these issues on the Foundation's internet forum (see the top of the newsletter). You may go to the Libertarian Party forum at www.lpuk.org/forum (request access to the main boards – you don't need to join the party).