

Foundation for Proportional Representation-based Socialism

Website: www.PRsocialism.org Forum: tinyurl.com/PRsocialismforum Newsletter 8 (16 April 2010)

Editor's note: I, Steve Wallis, have written all the articles in this newsletter. I would welcome replies to points in this newsletter and articles/letters for future newsletters, posted to the forum (with the web address above) or emailed to me personally at revolutionarysocialiststeve@yahoo.co.uk. Various socialist organisations in Britain (Respect, the Socialist Party, CPGB, CPB and Democratic Socialist Alliance) and Alex Callinicos of the SWP have come out in favour of PR, and I'd welcome the involvement of members of those organisations in the Foundation.

As with previous Foundation newsletters, anyone who agrees with (some or most of) the politics in it can download it from the website (www.PRsocialism.org) in Word or PDF format, print it out, photocopy it and distribute it.

Vote Socialist, Green or Liberal Democrat – and prepare for a Greece-style revolt!



There is a general election in the UK on Thursday 6 May, at which voters will have the opportunity to dismiss Labour Prime Minister Gordon Brown. The Conservative Party (Tories) are currently leading in the opinion polls, but not by a sufficient margin to gain an overall majority. It looks as though other parties, particularly the Liberal Democrats (Lib Dems), will hold the balance of power and be able to determine the shape of the next government.

The electoral system in the UK, misleadingly called “first-past-the-post” with the candidate who receives the highest vote in a particular constituency getting elected, is extremely unfair. In only about 150 of the 650 constituencies – the so-called “marginals” – is there any realistic chance of causing an upset, so most people's votes are “wasted”. The so-called “floating voters”, who tend to be quite well-off and middle class, decide between Labour, the Tories and Lib Dems (plus the Scottish National Party or Plaid Cymru in Scotland or Wales) as to who is elected. Well, that is not entirely true! A credible well-known candidate of one of the “fringe parties” or an independent, of the left or right, may stand a chance of causing a massive upset if they put forward well-argued election material and perhaps are featured enough in the media. Also in this election, for the first time, there are also live TV debates between the leaders of the three main parties (Labour's Gordon Brown, the Tories' David Cameron and the Lib Dems' Nick Clegg). This is providing the Lib Dems with a great opportunity to make big advances and even win in supposedly safe Labour seats or Labour-Tory marginals!

People tend to vote out ignorance, to a large extent. The parties produce manifestos, which are supposed to be their contract with the people to justify us not having a vote for another four or five years. However, very few people bother to read them and rely on snippets featured in the TV, on newspapers or in election leaflets, as to who to vote for. These snippets are based on the biases of journalists and media bosses (plus the whims of party members/leaders in the case of the parties' own material).

See overleaf for proposals of how to run elections more fairly, under capitalism or in a future socialist society.

I felt that, for such an important election, it was necessary for me to read the full manifestos, downloaded from the parties' websites, in order to come to an informed decision. Some of the Tories' arguments for people power in their manifesto were quite convincing, but were completely dropped by Cameron in the first TV debate! They cynically argue for big cuts in corporation tax at the same time as professing to be reducing the deficit more than Labour, and have a very tough stance on crime and immigration to appease the right-wing press and similar minded voters such as Sun readers.

Although the Liberal Democrats have traditionally been the centre party, and have sometimes claimed to be “equidistant” from Labour and the Tories, there has been such a massive shift to the left in society as a result of the credit crunch (and the actions of many individual activists) with a hatred of bankers, the rich generally and of course politicians (which has even forced the Tories to pretend to want to hit the rich and help the poor), that the Lib Dems have now come up with a manifesto that is on the whole far to the left of Labour. Don't believe me? Download it from www.libdems.org.uk and decide for yourself! Socialists have traditionally argued that the Lib Dems (and Liberals before them) are just another big business party and criticised “do-gooders”. Well, it is a justification for my New Good Intentions Manifesto (see socialiststeve.me.uk/good-intentions-manifesto.html or socialiststeve.in/good-intentions-manifesto.html), which argues that wanting to make the world a better or worse place is a better guide to what side people are on in struggles in society than what class they are in.

The Lib Dems have, to some extent at least, costed their programme, unlike Labour or the Tories who have blatantly

advocated many (usually small) measures which add up to large unfunded spending commitments. Some have criticised them for calling for “savage cuts”, but in reality no government (Labour, Tory, Lib Dem or a coalition) could carry out cuts significant enough to seriously bring down the deficit quite simply because it is not economic to do so! Sacking workers necessitates redundancy pay, benefits and lost tax receipts taking money out of the economy (and quite possibly causing a double dip recession). That is why cuts identified so far have been limited to contracts like IT and not filling vacancies, avoiding redundancy pay (or passing such needs on to the private sector). Furthermore, workers are not just going to take such attacks lying down. There has already been an upsurge in industrial action, but that is nothing compared to what will happen with the level of cuts envisaged by the major parties! And if they can’t carry out such attacks, there is a further complication – the money markets will stop lending (by buying bonds) to UK plc, so the government will have to go cap-in-hand to the European Union or International Monetary Fund. And that opens up the possibility, if we adopt good enough strategies and tactics, of not just triggering a strike wave and huge demos like in Greece, but socialist revolution! The next section will be devoted to discussing a programme for avoiding cuts, as a contribution to the necessary debate on what to do in that situation.

But voting Lib Dem is not sufficient! Good votes for socialist candidates, and the Green Party which has produced a reformist socialist manifesto (that I’ve also downloaded from www.greenparty.org.uk and also provides detailed costings), even for those candidates that fail to get elected, will indicate support for left-wing policies and give a boost to the inevitable movement that will take place after the general election. Anti-cuts MPs in parliament would be particularly important, and I’d particularly identify Socialist Party councillor and former Labour MP Dave Nellist (standing for the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition which includes the SWP, against Labour warmonger Bob Ainsworth in Coventry), Respect’s George Galloway, Abjol Miah and Salma Yaqoob, former Scottish Socialist Party MSPs Colin Fox (standing against Chancellor Alistair Darling in Edinburgh) and Tommy Sheridan (now of Solidarity and part of the Scottish Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition), the Green Party’s Caroline Lucas, Adrian Ramsay and Darren Johnson as standing a good chance. Although I am generally arguing for a Lib Dem vote against Labour or the Tories, an exception should be made for left-wing Labour MPs (such as John McDonnell, Jon Cruddas, Jeremy Corbyn and Diane Abbott).

No cuts – nationalise banks and use bailout money! Close tax loopholes – force the rich to pay tax!

The scale of the economic crisis in Britain, in which there has been a longer recession than any other Western country despite the massive stimulus package, is so severe due to previous Tory governments decimating manufacturing and industries like coal and steel to try to smash the trade unions, with the economy now relying on services largely based in the City of London. After the run on Northern Rock, that looks foolhardy. There are big opportunities for the left, and the right blaming immigration. We need to put across our ideas skilfully, particularly with respect to where we suggest the money should come from to avoid the cuts planned by the main parties. Whereas most socialists oppose wars, Trident and ID cards, as well as taxing the rich of course, the economic problems are too great for such savings to be sufficient.

Around £1.3 trillion (i.e. £1,300,000,000,000) of our money has been spent by Labour on bailing out the banks. Socialists should argue strongly for nationalising all the banks, but this would cost money the government doesn’t have unless we only compensate pension schemes. This would allow whatever’s left of the bank bailout money to be used for the benefit of all, avoiding cuts. We should also argue for all banks, whether currently nationalised, part-nationalised or private, to be run democratically from below with most control in the hands of borrowers, savers and workers (plus government representatives). Marxists typically argue for workers’ control, but it seems clear that those whose money is at stake should have at least as much control as those who happen to work at a particular bank. If the European Union objects, a socialist government may need to withdraw (unless socialists come to power across Europe at once).

The Liberal Democrats have been criticised for being “unrealistic” about saving £4.6 billion from closing tax loopholes. Meanwhile the Greens claim in their manifesto that they can save £10 billion from closing tax havens and clamping down on tax avoidance and evasion. It may be that international agreements are necessary to get the really big sums of money that the rich avoid in this way. It may also be that rich people and corporations relocate to elsewhere in the world to continue avoiding paying a fair share of tax. There are two answers to that – don’t let them take their assets with them and encourage revolutions in other countries so they have nowhere to run to!

Proposals for real democracy – under capitalism or socialism

The “alternative vote” (AV) system has been proposed by the Labour Party for electing members to the House of Commons. With AV, voters specify as many candidates as they like for their vote to be transferred to if their earlier preferences are eliminated, until one candidate gets over 50%. Though sometimes called a form of proportional representation (PR), it is not proportional; Labour would have had a bigger landslide in 1997 if conducted under AV!

Like the Electoral Reform Society and Liberal Democrats, this Foundation favours the “single transferable vote” (STV) form of PR. With it, there are multi-member constituencies and votes are transferred if earlier preferences are eliminated or get more votes than required to be elected. As well as being fairer it gives voters the opportunity to choose between candidates of the same party, removing power from party machines.

Measures are also needed to guard against politicians selling out. There should also be annual elections and the ability to recall a whole government, triggering a general election via a petition of some proportion of the electorate.