

NO CHANGE IN THE BOSSES LINEUP

After a particularly nauseating General Election campaign it is time to reflect on what the return of Thatcher and Co. for a third term bodes for the class struggle in Britain.

Unlike the myriad leftist groups we are not shedding any tears for the defeat of the Labour Party. The Labour party is not a workers' party and indeed never has been; on the contrary, it is a crucial weapon in the arsenal of British capitalism. In the second half of the Twentieth century the communist position on parliament and parliamentarism is absolutely ABC with no room for equivocation: an unambiguous denunciation of the whole charade, a refusal to participate in any way and on any basis, and a call on the working class to boycott the polling booths and take up their own struggle. This is what our own organisation attempted to argue in the distribution of the leaflet reproduced elsewhere in this issue, aimed specifically at those workers seeking to fight back but being enveigled into the election charade.

Whoever won the election the mechanisms of the state would have remained unchanged. The permanent organs - civil service, police, army - run the state, hand in hand with the elements traditionally identified as the bourgeoisie: the City and industrialists. The parliamentary executive has ideological baggage to carry, baggage reflecting both its own bourgeois perspective and the state of the class struggle in the country, but fundamentally it serves the consensus interests of those elements it works with. Parliament is a wholly capitalist stage; any attempt by workers to enter it serves only to legitimise it. Workers' democracy differs from capitalist democracy absolutely. Capitalist democracy robs workers of their one strength, their collectivity, by isolating them individually in the polling booth and dishing up a surrealist caricature of representation. Compare this with workers' democracy expressed in every major class struggle since the Paris Commune; real representation, mandated collectively, directly revocable, directly responsible to workers mass assemblies.

Whoever won the election the needs of British Capitalism remain the same: the imposition of austerity. Reviewing the 1983 election in Bulletin Four we said:

"more and more the ONLY policies open to ANY government is a full scale austerity programme and a direct attack on the living standards of workers."

To back this up we demonstrated how the attacks of the "socialist" Mitterand in France mirrored those of Thatcher. Four years on the deepening economic crisis demands still deeper austerity and all capitalist factions are jockeying to carry it out - be it 'right wing' Thatcher embarking on her third term of government in Britain or 'left wing' Hawke about to do the same in Australia.

Thatcher remained in power, with a majority of over 100 seats, because of (1) her success in smashing strikes (notably that of the miners in 1984/85)

(2) her successful division of the working class through economic policy and (3) a whole string of highly successful, if largely short term and cosmetic, ideological campaigns.

British government in the Seventies made the mistake of imposing austerity on a broad front and as a consequence provoked a class-wide, albeit union dominated, response. Since coming to power in 1979 the Thatcher regime has sought to eliminate industrial disruption by a cold blooded policy of divide and rule, slicing the working class into the three categories we enumerated in our analysis of the Miners strike in Bulletin Eight:

"a core of full-time workers; a second group chasing after poorly paid part-time and temporary jobs; and a third group who are consigned to permanent unemployment."

It is the third category that have been the true sufferers during the first eight years of Thatcherism. In Bulletin Nine we tabulated the avalanche of Benefit cuts prepared and in this issue we examine their continuation and the State's offensive on the housing of the poorest sections of the population.



On the Edge of the Abyss.

The bosses have striven to create a mood of dampened expectations, despair and apathy among those hardest hit by their fast decaying system. This strategy has been largely successful, but as this despair has periodically exploded into inner-city riots the state has radically strengthened its repressive arm. The speed at which the state has thrown off the disguise of its police, (the disguise which portrayed them as guardians of the peace), to have them stand quite openly as the symbols of naked force they always have been in essence has been one of the clearest indications of capitalist decomposition.

The election result demonstrated that many workers in full-time employment feel that they have 'never had it so good' (though this trend is obviously marked by strong regional variation - as is discussed in the article following this one). At first glance a bizarre development in an economy.

inclining towards the abyss, but on closer inspection a clever piece of social manipulation by the state. The rise in the disposable income takes no account of the decline in the social wage (health, education, local government services etc.) nor the steep rise in rates of exploitation, but remains a palpable fact. Oil revenues and the sale of State assets have given the Tories the economic flexibility to maintain, even raise the living standards of a section of the working class. The concept of a "property owning, share owning democracy" is dear to the modern Conservative Party, and by such measures as the sale of council houses and shares in denationalized industries this government has sought to permanently win to the side of capitalism a chunk of the proletariat.

In the face of these developments it is important that revolutionaries don't become overwhelmed by this ideological barrage; don't abandon hard-won theoretical gains (such as the universal tendency towards state capitalism in the Twentieth Century) nor reintroduce out-dated concepts such as the "Labour Aristocracy". Six points can be made about the purpose and consequences of privatization:

1. The generation of sorely needed liquid funds to finance tax cuts, extra "defence" spending etc.
2. Improving the efficiency of management.
3. Workers patently don't identify with state owned industry - persuade them to buy shares in their company and take on a big mortgage and they'll think twice before they go on strike.
4. Privatization provides convenient excuses for "rationalization", ie. layoffs and speedups.
5. In the longer term privatization enables capitalism to splinter the work force, play one plant against another, confront workers with a soft face of private management while the state keeps its distance.
6. Although it renounces legal ownership, the state retains control of the newly privatized monopolies, indeed informal state domination of the economy continues to grow - young workers employed on government funded schemes, state subsidies and regional grants etc.

During the election campaign much was made of Britain's economic recovery under Thatcher. Much of this recovery can be ascribed to the ruthless slashing of traditional cornerstones of the economy (steel, coal, Manufacturing industry) abandoning the fiction of an independent British Capital, becoming the loyalist lieutenant of the USA and tailoring production to the overall needs of the bloc. In Europe this appears to be a purely British phenomenon - made possible by the abnormally large contribution of Insurance, financial services etc. and the gift of North Sea Oil.



The Leader and Deputy leader
of the Labour Party during
an Election 'Photo Opportunity'

As the Thatcher government begins its third term the bourgeoisie is supremely confident, but already black clouds are forming on the economic horizon. Economic commentators are already forecasting a serious economic recession in 1988; US inflation is rising and a continuing trade deficit all spell trouble. The fragile and tacky ship that constitutes the British economy is ill-placed to weather the coming storm. The only way out is greater austerity and here the coalition of support that the Tories have built up will begin to melt away. It will no longer be enough to tighten the screws on the poorest sections of the population - bit by bit they will chip away at the mass of workers who have prospered under Thatcherism. Class wide attacks cannot be postponed for long; the imminent VAT rises and Poll Tax are just a taste of things to come.

Lurking in the wings to head of any rising class struggle are the Labour Party and the Unions. Although disappointed that they didn't recover more of the losses of 1983 (who, watching the Labour Party during the election, can doubt that it and the creatures that run it lust for power and the accompanying rich pickings, just like all bourgeois factions?). The Labour Party can take some comfort from the election - they have halted the decline in their support, they have a credible leadership once more and the squabbling Liberal/SDP has missed its opportunity to replace them as the main opposition party. Kinnock and Co. will hope to funnel discontent into a 'responsible' campaign to elect a Labour government in 1991.

The Trade Union movement is still adjusting to the impact of Thatcherism, smarting under a string of rebuffs from a government that is crushing strikes without needing much assistance from them. Here Tory ideology can prove a handicap to the state: the attacks on the Unions by the Tories have included some real attacks on Union power and influence. The Tory executive and many elements within the party, being ideologically blinkered, fail to see the unions as their class allies. For these neanderthals, the unions and the working class really are synonymous, hence recent legislation which seriously weakens union potential to control class struggle. Eventually the state will recognise and defend its class interests, unfettering the unions so that they can attack workers effectively, but for the moment there is a soft spot in their armour.

The period since the defeat of the Miners' strike has been a difficult one for revolutionaries in Britain - several groups have lost members and experienced demoralization. However there are some signs of a growing maturity, a willingness to debate and work together. We must hope this bears fruit.

Rowntree

THE ELECTION DEMONSTRATES DIVISIONS WITHIN THE WORKING CLASS

As revolutionaries we take for granted the farcical nature of bourgeois elections. Every once in a while the working class is given the chance to elect its own executioner although for most of the time the working class has only a spectatorial role; direct participation only happens when a cross is put on the ballot paper. And thus the farce of bourgeois democracy is played out. But we should beware of extending the theatrical metaphor too far. The election process is not wholly scripted from beginning to end. We don't deny that collusion goes on between parties as they carve up areas to be fought in and the subjects to be avoided (see the politics of Northern Ireland for instance). But this does not mean that the result of elections are absolutely determined from the outset. The nature of elections in the liberal democracies precludes such certitude. For a start bourgeois parties do contest for power. In the recent election the Labour Party did want, and tried to beat the Tories. The fact that they thought it highly unlikely is neither here nor there. The same applies to the Alliance, although the summit of their ambition was to hold the balance of power in a hung parliament. This would have given some degree of power and the ability to mould part of government policy. Thus when collusion happens it does so with the intentions of avoiding issues and situations which might be mutually damaging or which threatens the state.

On the other hand the response of the electorate, a large part of which includes the working class, is another variable. The way in which votes are cast is determined by interplay of bourgeois schemes, the material situation of voters and resultant consciousness. This consciousness is manipulated by the bourgeoisie but is open to the 'vagaries' of the electorate which in turn are the product of material and historical circumstances.

We don't suggest that revolutionaries should spend their time analysing every little detail of the electoral process or the results. The bourgeoisie has its own set of idologues who obscure the class nature of voting by concentrating upon the so-called power of the electorate. We should, however be aware that the way that the working class votes does tell us something of the state of class struggle at a moment in time. Obviously when workers put their cross on the ballot paper they are not acting in a collective fashion. They are individualised and separated from the elemental power which they have in collective action. Consequently, the act of voting has no potential for raising the consciousness of workers. Nonetheless the pattern of voting does give us a 'snapshot' into how bourgeois ideology is affecting the working class and by extension we can relate this to particular aspects of material life. The recent election has hinted at how eight years

of Tory policy has imprinted itself upon sections of the working class.

Unfortunately some revolutionaries seem to be completely unaware of the complicated mechanisms of the electoral farce. Coming to and understanding about the complicated nature of class struggle is not easy but it is essential. The International Communist Current for a long time now has preferred to go for a simplistic, unproblematic and conspiratorial explanation. Yes, once again their tired old nonsense of the "right in power, left in opposition" has appeared. This time its used to explain (not really adequate to describe the ICC's rubbish) the election process. In the June issue of World Revolution it suffices for the ICC to say that

"all parties, at the behest of the state machine are busy ensuring the re-election of the Tories."

Thus, at a stroke, the ICC reduces the election to the simple battle between a unified bourgeoisie working to ensure that the Labour Party remains in opposition and Thatcher stays in power. Total rubbish. We've already dealt with the theoretical inadequacies of their approach (see Bulletin Four), for the present we just want to look at how useful the ICC's approach is for understanding the actual voting patterns.

For example, just how did the bourgeoisie manage to get such regional divisions to occur? How did the 'North - South' split happen? If we are to take the ICC seriously we have to believe that for some

	All seats in region			79 marginals				
	Con	Lab	All	Con	Lab	All		
North	-2.4	+7.1	-3.8	+1.2	+5.6	-6.8		
North West	-2.0	+5.2	-2.8	-1.5	+1.7	-0.6		
Yorks	-1.2	+5.4	-3.9	-0.9	+7.4	-5.4		
W. Mids	-0.6	+2.1	-2.5	+2.0	+2.6	-4.3		
E. Mid	+1.5	+2.1	-3.1	+3.9	+3.2	-5.9		
E. Anglia	+1.1	+1.1	-2.5	+1.6	+0.3	-1.5		
South West	-0.6	+1.5	-0.5	+2.2	+0.3	-2.1		
South East	-1.2	+0.9	-1.8	+3.7	+3.0	-6.6		
London	+2.5	+1.5	-3.2	+3.3	+1.0	-3.8		
Wales	-1.2	+7.6	-5.7	-1.4	+8.4	-8.1		
Scotland	-4.3	+7.3	+5.3	-3.1	+6.2	-7.2		
Overall	-0.2	+3.3	-2.9	+0.9	+3.6	-4.8		
Regional calculations from Press Association								
Two Conservative exclusion zones								
	Con	Change since 83	Lab	Change since 83	All	Change since 83	SNP	Change since 83
Liverpool	17.5	-11.8	56.4	+9.1	25.9	+5.4		
Glasgow	12.6	-6.2	61.9	+10.0	14.9	-6.3	10.2	+2.7

strange reason, the Tories in Scotland, for example decided to put forward a "loony" face and thus lose half its seats; or, alternatively, the "loony" politics of the Labour Party did not scare off the Scottish workers who voted for them. And again, how do we explain the Labour Party sweeping up all the seats in Liverpool, the so-called home of the loony left?

Again, was it a mistake by the state. It's no use the ICC claiming that voting patterns from the Midlands southward validates their theory. If it is to have any analytical strength it must be able to cope with the countrywide patterns. This it demonstrably fails to do.

Was the "North - South" division planned or 'decided in advance' as the ICC would have us believe? Or was it, as Marxism used properly says, a product of particular ideological and material battles. Firstly, let's be clear that the North - South division is not an elaborate lie produced by bourgeois statisticians. Just look at the votes cast in the north and north-west of England, Wales and Scotland. In all these areas there were significant swings towards Labour ranging from 5 - 7½%. On the other hand the best that Labour achieved in the areas of the Midlands, the South and London was plus 1½%, falling to plus 2½% for the Tories. Tories were wiped out in the cities of the North and in Scotland. In these areas workers were voting Labour

TABLE 4: THE NEW DIVISIONS IN THE MIDDLE CLASSES*

	Universally Educated		Public Sector		Private Sector	
	1987	1983-87	1987	1983-87	1987	1983-87
Con	34	-9	44	-4	65	+1
Lab	59	+3	24	—	13	—
Lib/SDP	36	+4	32	+4	22	-1
SWING FROM:						
Con to Lab		6		2		-½
Lib/SDP to		-4		-2		½
Lab		-½		-2		½
Lib/SDP to		-8½		-4		1
Con						

*NOTE: Vote is share of three-party vote

At the same time the appearance of this major economic division, the Tory Party has pursued new ideological policies which have helped reinforce the fragmentation of the working class: selling off council houses and the general strategy of privatisation. The emergence of "peoples capitalism" has had an effect upon the working class. Those who have "done well" over the past few years wish to hold on to what they have. This applies not only to City yuppies but also to sections of the workers. They don't want to see any shares they may hold in Telecom etc being grabbed by the Labour Party; they want to keep their 'council houses'; they look forward to tax cuts and are keen to see "high-spending Labour councils controlled. Apart from these incentives to vote Tory its almost certainly true that anti-homosexual and anti-black policies played a role in determining how workers voted in London. On the other hand if you live in the declining North, are unemployed and face daily the threat of

TABLE 5: VOTE BY SOCIAL CLASS

	Professional/managerial			Office/clerical			Skilled manual			Semi-skilled/unskilled manual			Unemployed		
	1987	1983-87	1979-87	1987	1983-87	1979-87	1987	1983-87	1979-87	1987	1983-87	1979-87	1987	1983	1979
Con	59	-3	-8	52	-3	-6	43	+4	-2	31	+2	-1	32	+2	-8
Lab	14	+2	+12	22	+1	+1	34	-1	-11	50	+6	+5	51	+6	+2
Lib/SDP	27	—	—	26	+2	+6	24	-3	+14	19	-9	-9	17	-9	+6
SWING FROM:															
C to Lab		2½	2		2	3½		-2½	-4½		2	-2		2	5
Lib/SDP to		—	—		—	—		—	—		—	—		—	—
Lab		1	-8		-½	-2½		1	-12½		7	—		7½	-2
Lib/SDP to C		-1½	-10		-2½	-6		3½	-8		5	-3		5½	-7

whereas significant numbers of workers were, in London and the Midlands, moved towards or stayed with the Tories. Rather than this division being a reflection of a general bourgeois conspiracy it is a sign of a material separation which has affected the working class throughout Britain. Generally the Tory Party has pursued a policy of "deindustrialising" areas of the North, Wales and Scotland. The so-called traditional industries, mining, engineering, steel and shipbuilding have been run-down and tens of thousands thrown out of work. The hand-aid of these attacks has been increased poverty, misery and collapsing social services. This is the only way that the capitalist crisis can be handled. But this process of immiseration is not uniform. From the Midlands southwards sections of the working class have done relatively well: jobs have been retained, and in some instances standards of living increased. (ie, at individual not social level). Service industries have shown significant growth. The fact that these industries can only exacerbate the crisis is neither here nor there for the workers concerned. They see themselves as secure and doing relatively well, thank you.

poverty, what had the Tories to offer? Obviously nothing. The fact that the Labour Party also had nothing to offer the working class as a class is a separate question. It's rhetoric and the historical legacy of the British working class movement made it appear as a real alternative to conservatism. Thus when workers in the North voted they were responding to material realities.

The North-South division has material underpinnings. We don't say that the fact of different voting patterns means that the working class is mortally weakened. Divisions can be overcome in struggle. But we do say that revolutionaries should be aware of fragmentation. Indeed the working class has never been a totally homogeneous class. Capital's very nature precludes such a possibility this side of the revolution. Economic and ideological stratification flows from the division of labour. During moments of heightened class struggle there is a tendency for homogeneity to appear but this is neither inevitable nor automatic. This is the point where revolutionaries meet and influence the class struggle.

TABLE 5: THE NEW WORKING CLASS THE TRADITIONAL WORKING CLASS:

	THE NEW WORKING CLASS			THE TRADITIONAL WORKING CLASS:				
	Lives in South	owner-occupier	Non-union	works in private sector	Lives in Scotland/North	Council tenant	Union member	Works in public sector
Con	46	44	40	36	29	25	30	32
Lab	26	32	38	39	57	57	48	48
Lib/SDP	28	24	22	23	15	18	22	19
Con/Lab maj 1987								
Con	+18	+12	+2	+1	+32	+17	+28	+18
Con/Lab maj 1983								
Con	+16	+22	+6	+1	+35	+17	+10	+21
Category as % of all manual workers (change from 1983 in brackets)								
	40 (+4)	57 (+3)	66 (+7)	+2	-1	-4	(-7)	-2

At the moment in Britain we are faced with a particular division in the working class which has manifested itself along fairly stark geographical lines. This is one of the reasons for the election result. We can't blithely ignore these differences or wish them away as the ICC do. Following and intervening in class struggle is only possible if we are aware of its material constituents.

Flett

SO YOU'RE THINKING ABOUT VOTING THIS ELECTION

You've been battered by the Tory government for eight long years now.....
Eight years of wage cuts and redundancies; eight years of hospital closures and queues; eight years that have seen our housing deteriorate and no new housing built; eight years in which every section of the working class has felt the full weight of the capitalist state - the smashing of the miners' strike, the attacks on the teachers, the civil servants and the nurses. Eight years of increasing austerity.

SO YOU WANT TO DO SOMETHING ABOUT IT !! WHAT'S YOUR ANSWER THEN ? ?

VOTE LABOUR ? ?.....OH COME ON NOW. YOU CAN'T REALLY BE SERIOUS.

DON'T YOU REMEMBER THE LAST LABOUR GOVERNMENT ? ? ?

The wage freeze, the Social Contract, the doubling of unemployment, troops used to break the Tanker Drivers' strike, the Firemen's strike and the ambulance drivers' strike, the smashing of the Engineers' strike - and countless others.

SURELY YOU HAVEN'T FORGOTTEN ALL THAT !!

When in power the policies of Labour and Tories differ only in details. Since both are representatives of the bosses who own this country they essentially have the same policy.
THEN AND NOW !

MAKE THE WORKERS PAY

MAKE THE WORKING CLASS PAY FOR THE CRISIS THEY GOT US INTO.

Cut the living standards of workers' families, throw as many onto the dole as is necessary to discipline us and make us accept starvation wages so that their rotten system survives.

DON'T BE A MUG ! DON'T VOTE FOR THE BOSSES !
DONT VOTE FOR ANY OF THEM !

START FIGHTING BACK!

In Spain, Russia, Yugoslavia, Mexico, France, Belgium, Turkey and elsewhere workers have been fighting back against the attacks of the state - Tory or Socialist - for the past year.

At this very moment...the miners and steelworkers of Yugoslavia are fighting back against the so-called 'communist' state there..the miners, steelworkers, railwaymen, textile and aircraft workers of Spain are using the MASS STRIKE to fight the wage-cuts being imposed by the 'Socialist' party in power there..in Turkey the telecommunications, tyre, textile engineering and rubber workers are fightin the military government's attacks on their living standards..in Mexico the electricity, telephone, airline and teaching workers are fighting their so-called 'socialist' bosses too. Last year and earlier this year there was a wave of strikes and workers' actions throughout Western Europe just as there was the year before in Denmark and elsewhere...and this very day in South Africa the workers are locked in struggle in the mines and townships against the brutal capitalist regime there.

THE LIST GOES ON AND ON.

SUCH STRUGGLES ARE THE ONLY WAY TO COMBAT THE AUSTERITY PLANS OF THE BOSSES.
ONLY WHEN THESE STRUGGLES LINK UP WILL A REAL ALTERNATIVE TO CAPITALIST DECAY BE SEEN.

And the Election...? Well, for the bosses its a fight amongst themselves about how best to screw the working class; how best to implement the programme of pauperisation they need to prop up their rotting system....For the workers its a gigantic charade, a pantomime, a media carnival to divert us into the polling booth and AWAY from our real, natural response to the attacks of the state...TO SAY

THE CRISIS IS OF YOUR MAKING NOT OURS - SO WE'RE NOT PAYING FOR IT !
What we need to do is to Start fighting back and to WIDEN that fight throughout our class.

ONLY OUR STRUGGLE AND THE STRUGGLES OF WORKERS INTERNATIONALLY CAN OFFER US ANY FUTURE.

STOP VOTING AND START FIGHTING!

This leaflet is distributed by the Communist Bulletin Group. We can be contacted Box CBG
167 King Street Aberdeen.