

LESSONS OF THE ELECTION

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THE 1951 election will, I am sure, take its place as a landmark in the history of the British working class. There has never been one just like it. For long enough dissatisfaction had been growing within the labour movement at the Labour Government's subservience to America and at the heavy burden of armaments that followed from this. This was made manifest by the resignation of Bevan and his colleagues and the vote that was registered for them at the Labour Party Conference. Throughout the country there was a dull, unhappy feeling of frustration breaking out occasionally, particularly amongst working class women, into what appeared to be definite opposition to Labour and all it stood for.

It seemed an ideal situation for the Tories, when the Labour Government decided to pack in and have an election. Forecasts of a majority of 150 were the general rule. The Labour leaders did nothing to lessen the likelihood of those prophecies coming true. They were without policy or programme. They gave no leadership whatever to the working class. Morrison peddling cheap, smug impudence handed out what he thought to be soothing syrup to the middle class, especially the Liberals, but only made it more certain that they would go over to the Tories. For only strength, not whining, will attract the 'wobblers'; and effective leadership of the working class will, at any crisis, arouse the working class to a demonstration of strength that wins all except those who are quite definitely enemies of human progress, the landowning and capitalist class and their parasitic hangers-on. And if ever there was a whining speech it was Attlee's the Saturday evening before polling day. I have never heard a speech like it. When he finished I said to my wife 'He doesn't want to win'. What a boost he gave to Eden. What an honourable man he was and how helpful he had been on Foreign Policy. Then, to still the fears of the timid, he told them there was no danger of Bevan being Prime Minister unless the Parliamentary Party elected him as leader.

Such a chance for a real working class leader. Just think what Harry Pollitt could have done in that half-hour. The next morning I met an old friend of mine, a baker and a loyal supporter of the Labour Party. 'I listened to Attlee last night' he told me, 'it was the worst speech that's been made in the series'. I don't think any-

one will question him on that. It looked all set for the Tories. There was Churchill parading around with the ballots ready in his pocket. The Tories were jubilant. But then, as polling day drew near, their confidence began to melt. Things didn't look near so good. For try as they might they could make no impression on the great mass of the organised workers. They, not the Labour leaders; accused the Tories, with good cause, of being war-mongers. So much so, that Churchill, of all people, had in the later stages to try the impossible task of passing himself off as a Pacifist. You can imagine the hard-faced gents on his platform sitting there with their tongues in their cheeks. But it didn't take a trick with the workers. Their comments on his spurious pacifism would have made his cigar fizzle if he could have heard them.

For despite disappointment and even disgust with the performance of Labour leaders, the hatred of the Tories, as symbolising all the evils of capitalist exploitation, kept the workers solid for Labour, regardless of how weak the leadership had proved itself to be.

And here it has to be noted that a mighty factor in stimulating the men and women in the factories, the decisive elements in the election, was the *Daily Worker*. True, it hasn't the mass circulation of the big capitalist dailies, but it goes into the factories and gives a lead to the shop-stewards and through them to the factories as a whole. And the *Daily Worker* election campaign was one of the most telling and decisive that 'our own workers' paper' has ever conducted. Day after day it exposed the type of men who constituted the leadership of the Tory Party and the interests they represented—Stock Exchange speculators, armament makers, aristocratic landowners, and all the unholy crew that live in idle luxury at the expense of the working class. This was something the workers could understand, and it fanned their hatred of the Tories.

Then in so many of the constituencies we hear of the members of the Communist Party being welcomed by the rank and file of the Labour Party as comrades in the common struggle to defeat the enemies of the working class. In some cases where the morale was low the entrance of the Communists gave a new spirit to the fight and aroused many of those who were lying back to renewed effort. Everywhere the watchword of the Communists, as with the *Daily Worker*, was 'Defeat the Tories'. Shop stewards in the factories, District Committees of the Unions, everywhere the call went forth—'Defeat the Tories'. And for the workers the only way to defeat the Tories was to vote Labour.

In such a situation there was no chance of our candidates registering anything like a substantial vote. Should we have run them, some may ask. Most certainly. True, it was a wise decision to cut down the numbers as far as possible, leaving only sufficient to ensure a strong Party campaign in certain important areas. For this campaign meant that our policy and programme was being discussed not only in the constituencies we were contesting, but in the factories up and down the country and was most surely being contrasted with the lack of policy and programme on the part of the Labour leaders. Mr. Morrison in his cheap-jack fashion could talk of Churchill accepting the Peace policy of the Communist Party. But Mr. Morrison ought to know that Churchill made his 'pacifist' speech for the simple reason that he knew the workers were accepting the Peace policy of the Communist Party.

I have been in many campaigns, election campaigns and others, but I have never been in one where our Party comrades were so warmly and sincerely welcomed or where what we had to say was listened to with such keen, eager attention. Foremost in every speech was the question of Peace and the Five Power Pact as the means of achieving it; the reduction of armaments expenditure and our resources used to build up the health and well-being of the people. Never have I heard our policy put with such good effect as by our candidates in Scotland (It would be the same elsewhere).

But I was in the four Scottish constituencies and can give heartfelt testimony to the magnificent job they did in their respective constituencies. Their efforts will not be lost. It will bear fruit in the not very distant future. For we should have no illusions about what has happened in this election. The Labour leaders may close their eyes to it and hope to keep the old game of Ins and Outs going for a little while longer, but the sands are rapidly running out. We had in this election, and will have from now on, an open confrontation of the classes. The Tories, representing capitalism, with the uncertain middle class and a section of confused workers on one side, but arrayed solidly against them the strong unconquerable millions of organised workers. Once before in this century we had an open confrontation of the classes, in the General Strike of 1926. Then as now, Churchill was the active leader of the enemy forces. Then as now the leadership was incapable of facing up to the task that such a situation demands. Then as now, at the height of the struggle, the leadership threw in its hand.

There will be a next time and soon, despite the spineless pro-

nouncement of the General Council and desertion of Socialism by the Labour leaders. A next time when we must ensure that there will be a leadership capable of carrying the struggle through to victory. For had there been leadership in the elections, had the spirit of victory been aroused, the confused workers and the middle class would have been won to the side of the workers.

This is the lesson of history in this as in all other lands. Where the workers are marching strong and resolute on the road to victory and working class power, all the weaker, vacillating elements are drawn towards them. The workers here are ready to march, the election result has demonstrated that beyond any question, but who will lead them? There are comrades in the Labour Party, in the trade unions, who, if once allied with the Communists, could provide the leadership necessary for the task. Can we bring about such unity? The cause of Peace, the future of this country and of its people depends upon its realisation. History has taken us a further stage in the great struggle of the classes, and in doing so has placed upon us a great responsibility. The workers stand true. Let us see that they get the leadership they deserve. A resolute class leadership for a resolute class army.

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