

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE ELECTORAL VICTORY OF THE LABOUR PARTY

J. POSADAS

13.10.74

Editorial note to the reader:

There were two general elections in Britain in 1974. The first took place on **28 February 1974**. The result was a 'hung parliament'. The Conservative Party of Ted Heath having won less seats (although more votes) than Labour, a minority Labour government was declared with Harold Wilson¹ as Prime Minister. Due to the instability, Wilson called new elections on **10 October 1974** (3 days before this text was elaborated). This time, the Labour Party won a majority, although by only 3 seats. Wilson continued as Prime Minister but resigned on 16 March 1976. As James Callaghan² won the Labour leadership contest that followed, he took over from Wilson as Prime Minister to finish the Labour term in 1979. In the opposition, meanwhile, Margaret Thatcher³ had become leader of the Conservative Party in Feb 1975.

The fundamental aspect about these elections is that they have more to do with the crisis of the capitalist system than of the Labour Party. Compared with the February 28th elections, Labour lost 200,000 votes but it increased decisively its share of the vote cast, making the losses for the Conservative Party considerably greater⁴.

Many labour right-wingers have left the Labour Party; although not all of them, because Roy Jenkins⁵ remains. A great chunk

¹ **Harold Wilson**: 1916-1979. Prime Minister 1964-1970 and 1974-76. Complained of British secret services' plots to overthrow him.

² **Leonard James Callaghan** (Baron): 1912-2005. Prime Minister 1976-1979. Labour Party leader 1976-1980. Started on the Party's left, drifted to the right. Supported the 'yes' vote in the Referendum.

³ **Margaret Thatcher** (Baroness): 1925-2013. Prime Minister 1979-1990. Leader of the Conservative Party 1975-1990.

⁴ Before February 1974, the **SNP (Scottish Nationalist Party)** had 1 MP. On 28 Feb., it won 11 MPs, and on the 10th of October, it won 77. Editorial.

⁵ **Roy Harris Jenkins** (Baron): 1920-2003. Labour MP 1948. Home Secretary 1965-67. Chancellor of the Exchequer 1967-1970. Deputy Labour leader: 1970. Resigned from the Labour leadership in 1972. Hated the leftwards trend inside the Party. Became President of the European Commission 1977-1981.

of them has gone. At each general election, these people sabotage the Party. They trigger campaigns of propaganda against the Labour Party, timed for maximum electoral effect.

The bourgeoisie has ways and means to manipulate the public, the constituencies, the electoral systems. It always has fascist ambushes and actions of civil war up its sleeve.

In the run-up to these October elections, the Labour right-wing leads a blatant campaign of sabotage against the Labour Party. The Party lost 200,000 votes compared with February, but the share of Labour votes increased in relation to turn-out⁶. All the Conservatives went to vote. Those who abstained are not Conservatives. The abstentions come from the Labour side.

The Labour Party lost votes because of desertions on its right-wing side. This loss was compensated for, however, by the increased intervention of the active trade unionised petty bourgeoisie. The Labour vote lost in quantity, but it gained in quality. This will show in future events. This is another expression of the concentration of the masses around Labour. There may not be immediate changes, but there will be social consequences. Similar processes take place in Germany, France and Italy.

In Germany, the Social Democratic Party (SDP) lost votes⁷ although it still won the elections. A right-wing sector of the Party decided to give up and abandon the Party, whilst the rest conducted a right-wing campaign which attracted no-one. As much in Britain as in Germany, it is the solid working class base of the Party that attracts the rest of the population.

In this October election in Britain, the working class has weighed with more determination than in February. Electorally,

⁶ In 1970, turn out had been 72%. In Feb 1974 it was 79% and in October it dropped to 73%.

⁷ On 2 March 1975, there were elections to the Berlin House of Representatives. **The SDP** lost 7.8 percentage points. It still managed to score 42.6%, but lost the overall majority it had held since 1954. The SDP was forced to make a coalition with the Free Democratic Party (FDP) but its Mayor Klaus Schutz was allowed to lead the coalition.

this convinced more sectors of the population to vote Labour. Something along those lines is observable in Germany and elsewhere. The population uses this means to put pressure on the Socialists, the Communists and the Trade Unions.

In Britain, Republic means Revolution:

This month's Labour victory is much more important than in February. It has been achieved thanks to a fairly advanced programme of anti-capitalist measures. This improved programme - and not just the working class in general - allowed the workers' vanguard to weigh better on the rest of the population. The workers' vanguard was then able to use its increased authority in the population to apply mass pressure on the Labour Party.

Many Labour right-wingers have deserted; not all of them, but yes, enough of them to make a sharp difference. The weight of Trade Unions as a sector of government has therefore increased sharply. On the scale that measures how much capitalism can sustain itself through the Labour Party, the indicator is jerking violently. British capitalism was already vacillating before that. It is not impossible, within a short time, for a series of proposals and measures to appear and lead logically to calls for a British Republic.

Mind that the Republic in Britain is the revolution. We support the idea of a Republic as a measure to impel the fall of the capitalist regime. There is support in Britain for the idea of a Republic, and we support it. We propose at the same time a programme for the planned functioning of the economy based on nationalisations and workers' control. We add to this the programme of independence and self-determination for Ireland, with a view that it may eventually re-join Britain in a Socialist Republic.

The victory of the Labour Party this October is reason to feel an immense joy. The Liberals lost a million votes! It is true that

they still have some support, considering that their vote had increased by 3½ million in February. Now, they have 5 million. This is mostly at the expense of the Conservatives, who are weakening.

The Wilson leadership is now preparing to ditch some of its electoral promises. It wants to be free of the left and of the Trade Unions. The latter will resist of course. To combat this resistance, Wilson will want to please liberal-minded sectors in the Party and beyond. This is how, eventually, the Labour left will have to become more consciously Marxist. To organise this Marxist left is the role of the Communists. It is our role. A consciously Marxist left needs to be organised. And this, in the Labour Party.

Ireland is a crisis that capitalism cannot resolve:

The capitalist class has its own standing army: an army at its service, and paid for by the State. Why then does the British capitalist class need another, clandestine army? If it were not afraid of the standing army, it would not do this. It realises that the army will not be immune from influence should a Left Labour Party wins supported by the Trade Unions, or should revolution roll over the world.

The whole of British capitalism is concentrated around the Stock Exchange. Who protects the Stock Exchange? The standing army! This is absolutely true however much capitalism wants the masses to believe in the democratic functioning of the State, the parliament, the monarchy, etc. The reality is that capitalism depends on the army!

The British capitalist class realises how weak and inadequate the United Kingdom has become. As a class, it sees the immense authority of the working class, proven by the constant shifts of the Labour Party to the left. The 'democratic' functions of State, parliament and monarchy cannot stop this shift to the left. Capitalism sees all its powers collapsing.

Through its electoral victories and Trade Union struggles, the proletariat is the engine of social change in Britain. The British working class has taken many steps forward through the Labour Party, and none of this can be without some effect in the standing army. Although the army is independent of politics, it observes that parliament and monarchy do not decide where the country is going. And it also realises that the crisis in Ireland has no solution.

The Irish masses fight directly to expel British imperialism. The latter sees this as a problem for which it has no solution. It is true that British imperialism does not entirely want to resolve that problem⁸, but Ireland is still a crisis that it cannot resolve. The weakening structure of Britain leaves it with no economic or social authority to resolve it. It is this very feebleness that causes British imperialism to keep going ferments of unrest, as in Ireland, to justify the other military interventions it has in mind.

When this sort of thing happens, fundamental transformations are not very far off. The British proletariat is no longer isolated from the world. The Trade Union leaderships used to keep the British working class cut-off from the advance of the world revolution - but this is waning now⁹. The British workers receive the influence of the world. The next step is to build social organs of workers' power that correspond to this level of liberation.

Nationalisations must serve overall economic planning:

The same applies to the left in the Labour Party. Without discounting its electoral struggles, its next task is to organise itself systematically. One of its greatest achievements lies already in its constant inclination towards nationalisations and

⁸ With its war in Northern Ireland, British imperialism seeks to intimidate the British masses, keep the proletariat of the British Isles divided and increase the militarisation of the whole of society. Editorial.

⁹ The working class of Cuba, Venezuela, Brazil (and many others) receives tenacious support in most of the British Trade Unions, for instance. Editorial, May 2017.

anti-capitalist struggle. Now this needs to be organised at the level of Party structure and Party leadership.

The British Trade Unions must propose their own plans of nationalisations. They need systematic plans of intervention in the Labour governments too. They must propose to Labour the socialist measures that allow the economy to be planned. Nationalisations must be under workers' control. The British Trade Unions must act in United Front between themselves, and appeal to the European workers and their Trade Unions. They need to make militant links with all the workers' organisations in the rest of Europe, the Socialists, the Communists, and all their allies.

A European working class United Front can already be made under the banner of: "Down with imperialism! Down with capitalism!"

This second Labour victory is a great boost to the confidence of the workers as they continue to struggle. This victory reinforces them in the realisation that they are the force that has led to the defeat of the Conservatives¹⁰.

This victory confirms the proletarian vanguard in the knowledge that this is the way forward.

J. POSADAS

13.10.74

¹⁰ The first election was on 28.2.1974 (hung parliament). This second election was on 10.10.1974.