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No 'lurch to the left' for Labour

DOES THE victory of Ed Miliband over his elder brother David – a modern Cain and Abel drama in reverse with the younger brother 'knifing' the elder – represent the dreaded 'lurch to the left' feared by the right-wing press? Many Labour Party members and others hope that it is so. The voting figures however do not bear this out.

Ed Miliband won by a handful of votes; a dozen MPs changing their votes would have made all the difference by securing victory for David. Underlining the unreconstructed Blairite character of the Labour Party, David was ahead amongst MPs and the 'ordinary' members of the party in the Labour Party branches. The standard bearer of the left, Diane Abbott, got the support of only six MPs and even her local party did not give her a majority of their votes! It was the votes of affiliated trade union members – whipped up by the general secretaries of the big unions in particular – that secured Ed Miliband's hairsbreadth victory.

Yet an examination of the figures shows that this is far from a ringing endorsement amongst ordinary trade unionists for the 'new' Labour leader or the party. Nor does it vindicate the union leaders' insistence that they must remain affiliated to the Labour Party because trade union members still look towards this party. Despite the valiant efforts of these leaders, turnout was in general, miserable. Only 8.7% of affiliated trade union members bothered to vote! The mountain – in this case right wing trade union leaders – laboured and produced a mouse.

Shop workers' union USDAW, which backed David Miliband to the hilt, achieved a phenomenal turnout of 4.3%!

The Unison leadership has spent more time witch-hunting militant fighters in its ranks than fighting the cuts. They argued against the disaffiliation of the union from New Labour. But they achieved just 6.7% turnout with

only 28,000 votes cast out of 419,000 ballot papers distributed.

Added to this were the 15% spoiled ballots in the union section. This cannot be explained away by confusion over voting procedure. It indicates most probably a conscious decision by a significant layer to spoil their ballots because none of the candidates reflected their urge for radical socialist policies to meet the challenge of the current devastating crisis.

Moreover, within minutes of being elected, Ed Miliband dismissed any idea that he would turn left. Unite joint general secretary Tony Woodley correctly said Miliband was not 'red' but "barely pink"! Also dismissed early was the charge that he was now in hock to the trade unions.

Nothing better illustrates the thorough rightward transformation of the Labour Party than the phobia of the right-wing press and Blairite MPs that the Labour Party, which was founded by the trade unions, could now be 'controlled' by them. If only this were the case! Then ordinary working-class people and trade unionists would have a possible route to enter and transform the Labour Party.

Yet even in this election, despite the fact that they are still the party's paymasters, donating millions of pounds every year, the collective voice of the trade unions was dissipated. They were only able to have a decisive effect on the outcome of the election because of the narrowness of the contest.

Ed Miliband has made it clear that he will not 'fully' support the trade unions in fighting the looming Con-Dem cuts. New Labour's parliamentary party's opposition will be largely verbal and will not extend to opposing 'all' cuts. What will this new Labour leadership say to the 26,000 local government workers in Birmingham who have received redun-

dancy warning notices, along with the newly announced 8,500 warned by the Tory-Liberal coalition in Sheffield? Tears and hand-wringing will not be enough.

Paradoxically, the very terror, indeed the paroxysms of bile, at the remote prospect that Miliband 'may' represent a leftward turn in the Labour Party, is a striking illustration of the explosive social situation developing in Britain now. The Financial Times pleaded: "Miliband must kill the 'Red Ed' tag." Editorials are full of warnings that along this road lies 'electoral disaster'. Don't abandon the 'middle ground', go on the so-called 'prawn cocktail offensive' – like Blair and Brown before him – Miliband is advised. All of this would convince the bosses that 'they can work with him'. This is a backhanded acknowledgement that a real, left socialist policy would find a huge echo and electoral success.

In his conference speech, Miliband pointed to the loss of five million votes by New Labour since 1997. But he also 'praised' Brown and Blair, while looking towards an undefined path for the future.

Policies for the rich

THE ELECTORAL debacle of New Labour arose from the fact that Blair and Brown carried through their ruthless policy which enormously benefited the rich at the expense of the poor, whose numbers grew during the New Labour governments. Miliband has now echoed the criticisms made by The Socialist on many occasions that Brown unsuccessfully sought to conjure away the economic cycles of 'boom and bust'. This was because he was in thrall to capitalism. This crisis did not drop from the sky, is not an act of God, but is rooted in the contradictions of capitalism.

Wishful thinking is the most dangerous policy in the kind of crisis confronting working-class people today. It is fatal to cling to the hope that New Labour, because that is what the party is, despite the blandishments of Miliband, is not still a Blairite pro-capitalist party in its policy, in the social composition of its members and how it is likely to act in this crisis. Miliband's policy merely proposes making the cuts at a 'slower pace' than the coalition.

At local level, Labour councils – unless they adopt the stance of the Liverpool city council of 1983 to 1987 – will become 'little butchers', carrying out the demands of the 'big butchers' in Downing Street. They will be resisted by a mass movement. Which side will Ed Miliband be on?

There will be lades of 'sympathy' but it will be by his deeds that his leadership and his party will be judged. Sure enough, for the first time since the election and beyond, even according to the Sun newspaper – New Labour has gone ahead of the Tories in the polls. This has nothing to do with a change of policy on the part of its new leader. It is a reflex reaction by working-class people, largely on the electoral plane at this stage, to the dire consequences arising from the plans of the 'deficit slashers'.

Therefore the conclusion that all socialists and active trade unionists should draw is that this is no time to foster illusions in New Labour or that there will be a 'change' in its programme and actions in the next period. On the contrary, this leadership election has highlighted once more the absolute necessity to fight the Con-Dem government, not just on the industrial and social planes, but also the need to provide a clear political alternative. The basis for a new mass workers' party, the only hope for the millions who fear the cuts about to destroy them and their families, must be created now.

Fight the cuts! - demonstrate on 23 October

RAIL AND tube workers, fire fighters, civil servants, teachers, and many other public sector workers will be joined by community campaigners, local anti-cuts unions and young people in central London on 23 October, when working class people in London say "No to cuts!"

Paula Mitchell

On 20 October, the full horror of the cuts planned by the Con-Dem coalition government will be revealed. The comprehensive spending review will announce what the 25-40% spending cuts across all departments will mean. Nothing is safe.

Cuts have already started in the most brutal fashion – like the threat to sack all Birmingham council's workforce, over 8,000 workers in Sheffield, and the entire London fire brigade. But this is just the tip of the iceberg.

At the moment, for many people, the reality of what these cuts mean has not yet hit home. But that could all change after 20 October. On the day there will be protests in local areas, and some trade unionists and campaigners are converging on parliament. Young people will be protesting up and down the country as part of a day of protest called by Youth Fight for Jobs and Socialist Students.

An almighty resistance is brewing, with demonstrations, strikes and occupations necessary.

The National Shop Stewards Network (NSSN) organised the first national demo against cuts with its lobby and march at the recent TUC conference, demanding that the



Barnet council workers protest at plans to cut services and run a 'no frills' council.
photo Suzanne Beishon

TUC calls a massive national demonstration.

23 October was the day named by the PCS civil service union in the resolution to the TUC. Under pressure to do something, the TUC has called for a week of action in the regions.

So the London RMT (rail workers), FBU (firefighters), PCS (civil servants), NUT (teachers) and NSSN have called a London demonstration to march to a South East Region TUC rally at Congress House.

The RMT and FBU in London are currently at the front of fighting vicious cuts. The RMT has already had one successful day of strike action against massive job cuts, and is preparing for another day on 3-4 October; the FBU is balloting for strike action against the attempted im-

position of new shift patterns and the threat to sack the entire workforce.

The London region of the university and college lecturers union, UCU, has also backed the demo. The demo will be addressed by Bob Crow, general secretary of the RMT, and Matt Wrack, general secretary of the FBU, as well as representatives of other unions, the NSSN and Youth Fight for Jobs.

23 October is an opportunity to express the rage felt by public sector workers and service users. But it is more than that. It is an important step in building up a movement of organised working class people against the cuts, which can draw to it anti-cuts unions and community campaigns in a massive unstoppable force.

Anti-cuts demonstrations planned so far

- **Cardiff** All-Wales demo 23 October. Assemble Cardiff City Hall at noon.
- **London** 23 October. Assemble 11am, RMT HQ, 39 Chalton Street, NW1 1JD. March to Bedford Square for a rally, then to the SERTUC rally in Congress House at noon.
- Also on 23 October: demos in **Lincoln, Wigan and Bristol**.
- **Leicestershire** Against Cuts in Services demo 30 October

For more details see www.socialistparty.org.uk
To publicise action in your area email editors@socialistparty.org.uk



Socialism 2010 – a weekend of discussion and debate

Hosted by the Socialist Party

Saturday 6 and Sunday 7 November
Rallies: Friends Meeting House, 173 Euston Road, NW1 2BJ

Rally speakers include:

Matt Wrack, FBU general secretary
Cindy Sheehan, US anti-war activist
Andros Payiatos, general secretary, CWI Greece
Peter Taaffe, Socialist Party general secretary

Sessions: ULU, Malet Street, London, WC1E 7HY
Weekend: £25/£12 concession. One day: £15/£7 concession. Saturday night accommodation available.

For more information and to buy tickets online go to www.socialism2010.net or phone 020 8988 8777