



Workers' Liberty

For international working class solidarity and socialism

AWL election campaign: why we are standing and our policies

For a working-class voice in Parliament! For a workers' MP on a worker's wage!

These are demands which the workers' movement and left can fight for now, policies for working-class political representatives to put forward and a program for a workers' government to put into practice.

Jobs, homes and services for all

Create jobs for all by cutting work hours with no loss of pay, and creating millions of jobs in public services. Open the bosses' books: nationalise companies which cut jobs, under workers' control. Stop and reverse cuts and privatisations. Restore the NHS. Nationalise the drug industry. No to Academies, a good local secular comprehensive school for every child. Free education from nursery to university. Living student grants.

An urgent mass programme of council house building and repairs.

A decent income for all, attack poverty and inequality

No to wage cuts, for wages that rise at least in line with inflation. A minimum wage of two-thirds median male earnings (£9 an hour) without exceptions.

Shift the tax burden from workers to the rich and business, abolish tax for the least well off. Tax the rich!

Benefits should be enough to live on and rise in line with earnings or prices, whichever is higher.

Oppose New Labour's attacks on the unemployed, disabled and long-term sick.

For the right to retire at maximum 60 on a decent pension. Level up private sector pensions to the best public sector provision. Restore the link between the basic state pension and earnings now.

Take over the banks

Nationalise all the banks and sack their bosses to create single, publicly-owned, democratically-controlled banking, pensions, and mortgage service.

Workers' rights

Scrap the Tory anti-union laws so workers can defend themselves. For legal rights to organise, to strike, to take solidarity action, and to picket. Full equal rights for part-time, temporary and agency workers. 100 percent support for workers' struggles.

Equality for all

Women's rights: extend social provision instead of making cuts which put social burdens back on "caring" women. Trade union and political action for equal pay. Defend and extend abortion rights and provisions. For abortion on demand.

Fight homophobia and transphobia. For 100% legal equality for LGBT people.

Against fascism, racism and communalism. Unite workers – black and white; Muslim, Christian, all religions and none; migrant and British-born; "legal" and "illegal" – to fight for jobs, housing and services for all. Fight for asylum and immigration rights – no one is illegal!

Protect the environment

Achieve the necessary cuts in carbon emissions and create a million green jobs through a democratically-controlled programme of converting energy industries, transport, and housing.

For publicly-owned, expanded, integrated and free/cheap public transport. For massive public investment in renewable energy.

International solidarity

British bosses are our enemies, workers in other countries are our allies. Unite with workers across Europe and the world; fight to level up wages, conditions, services and rights.

On the evidence, sending troops to Afghanistan does more harm than good; they should be withdrawn. Cut arms spending; scrap the Trident replacement.

Fight for democracy

The expenses' scandal shows that the democracy we have serves the bosses, not the working class. We need to fight for better, starting by putting all MPs on a worker's wage, with properly-vetted expenses. Abolish the monarchy and the House of Lords.

Defend civil liberties and the right to protest. Measures to weaken the police as a bosses' assault force, including local democratic accountability.

General Election: why we need a socialist campaign to stop the Tories and fascists

"We are not getting excited about the election." (Duncan Hallas, a central leader of the Socialist Workers Party, in *Socialist Worker*, on the eve of the 1979 general election which gave power to Thatcher's Tories.)

One of two things. Either the outcome — the new government — of a May 2010 general election, is a matter of little or no consequence to the working class and to the labour movement and therefore a matter of indifference to socialists. Or it is of consequence, perhaps of great consequence, to the working class and therefore of great importance to socialists. We think it is important.

Only a fool will believe that the Tories are now a “benign party”. At the very least, the Tories in power will drive with special energy to cut working-class living standards. Their commitment to a speedy liquidation of the debt incurred by the government to bail out the bankers implies that.

As the election looms, the Tories are coyly fudging, mudging and backtracking from their bold talk at the height of the economic crisis of 2008-9. They don't want to play Gordon Brown's game in the election and let themselves be branded as a party of super-cutters. Don't believe them! They have said openly that they will consider extending the anti-union laws to ban public service strikes.

They will target the public sector unions, the conditions they have won, and try to smash them up. In the narrowest sense they will use government power to cosset the rich. They now have a bizarre international political affiliation: in the European Parliament they are linked with a small cluster of right and far-right parties.

In Northern Ireland, the Tory party is negotiating behind the scenes to create a “pan-Unionist bloc”, that would include the Paisleyite DUP. Though that party has many features peculiar to itself and to Northern Ireland, it would not be too inaccurate to bracket it loosely with the British BNP. A Tory victory may pour petrol on the still-glowing embers of sectarian-national-communal conflict in Northern Ireland.

And therefore, what follows for the working class and for socialists? Hostility to the Tories, certainly. And therefore? Organise to fight them in the election? Apart from a small smattering of socialist candidates, there will be no socialist alternative in the election — no possible socialist government on offer. What follows as the New Labour government seemingly heads for defeat in the general election is a question about New Labour now. This is posed more urgently now than for many years.

Can we regard the Labour Party in any sense as a desirable alternative to the Tories and a new Tory, or Tory-Lib Dem, government? We believe we can and that we must. There are two main reasons for that conclusion.

Political differences

For the first time in many years there are now significant differences in policy and intent between New Labour and the Tory party — between the Labour Party and the traditional party of the British capitalist class.

Shallow, essentially demagogic, “anti-Toryism” has played a malign role in the labour movement in modern times, licensing virtually anything that was calculated to defeat the Tories. In the 1980s and 90s, the Labour Party inched slowly towards neo-Thatcherism under the banner of “anti-Toryism”. Even so, the Tories remain the fundamental party of the British ruling-class.

As ex-Prime Minister John Major once said of his organisation, the Tory party is “one of the greatest fighting political machines” in Europe. It is the “fighting machine” of the British capitalist class. It would be foolish to underestimate it.

Certainly, New Labour in power has, for a dozen years, also acted as a party of the ruling-class, a neo-Thatcherite government of the ruling-class and of the rich. To take one of many notorious

examples, it has kept the working class locked in the Thatcher-imposed anti-union laws, which — by banning solidarity strikes — outlaw much that makes for effective trade union action. If the Tories in power go on to ban public service strikes, they will be building on what the Labour government has preserved of the old Tory anti-working class enactments of the 1980s. But the Labour government has also brought in important limited reforms such as tax credits. It has raised taxes for the rich in response to the economic crisis.

Symptomatically — though this is now, like everything else in the run-up to the general election, fudged — the Tories have advocated tax cuts for the rich.

They opposed the emergency — pro-capitalist — actions of the government in 2009 to prevent the social catastrophe of a collapse of the banks.

In short, there are now significant political differences between the two parties, one of which will form the government after May 2010. Do these differences matter to the working class? Yes they do! They do not make New Labour anything other than a boss-serving government and a shackled, trussed-up remnant of the old Labour Party, but nevertheless there are significant differences. These things should matter to socialists. They matter to *Solidarity*.

That, in part, is the reason we say vote Labour in the general election wherever there is not a credible socialist candidate.

But the fundamental difference between Labour and the Tories is, however, not one of policy. There are important differences in policy between the Democrats and Republicans in the USA; we do not therefore back the Democrats.

Trade union links

The difference is that the big trade unions are affiliated to the Labour Party and finance it. Even now, despite massive structural changes, the unions retain a considerable degree of power in the Labour Party — power, if they use it, to affect policy and power, to impose structural changes that would put into reverse the quasi-abolition of the old Labour Party over the last fifteen years by the Blair-Brown gang.

The union-Labour link, though altered, and despite a couple of trade union disaffiliations, has survived the grim years of New Labour government. There is now talk — it may be no more than talk — amongst union leaders of restoring like the old Labour Party conference. An all-shaping fact of the New Labour years is that the unions either haven't used their power or, in the early Blair years, used it to help Blair-Brown-Mandelson destroy the old Labour Party structures.

The tragedy has been that, because of the quietude of the rank-and-file, initiative here has lain entirely with the union bureaucrats, who have chosen to play the role of donkey to rider with the New Labour gang. Socialists must up the fight to change that, to bring the rank-and-file of the unions into the equation.

Even so, in the general election, the Labour Party will be backed and financed by the unions as their contender to form the next government. Make any qualifications you like — and the qualifications are massive — the Labour Party will be the party of the unions in the general election.

If the link between the unions and Labour is the fundamental reason why socialists will say "vote Labour" in the general election, there is an additional reason: the aching lack of any half-way credible alternative on the left of the Labour Party. It is important to assess how this came about.

Weakness of the left

The years of New Labour government — and before the British war with Iraq and the economic crisis and its aftershocks, it looked like New Labour would go on and on — were years in which, as working-class ties to the government party were stretched and snapped, a serviceable socialist left might have been created. The AWL took part in efforts to create it, notably the Socialist Alliance (which had a sizeable presence in the 2001 general election).

The SA did badly in that general election. *Workers' Liberty* magazine summed up the results thus: "The Socialist Alliance has little... to congratulate itself for. With very few exceptions our impact on the electorate was not noticeably greater than that which any half-way presentable socialist candidate would have made in any suitable constituency at any time in the last hundred years."

Any hope of developing from the limited advances won in the 2001 election were destroyed by the SWP and its political satellites. Together with George Galloway MP, they created "Respect-George Galloway" (that was its registered name). Galloway was never more than a self-serving, wealth-chasing, middle-left Labour politician (and in addition one with odious hard-Stalinist opinions). "Respect-George Galloway" linked itself to Islamic clerical-fascists in Britain, the Muslim Brotherhood offshoot Muslim Association of Britain, and in Iraq, Palestine and the rest of the Middle East. They celebrated the victory of Hamas in the Palestinian election of 2006!

In a Britain in which the BNP was growing alarmingly, exploiting working-class dissatisfaction with the New Labour government, "Respect-George Galloway" branded themselves as Muslim communalists — "the best fighters for Muslims" — and thus sealed themselves off from the white working class, for whom "black and white, unite and fight" made sense, but adoptive Muslim communalism never could. All possibility of developing a working-class alternative to the left of the New Labour party and government was thus squandered in reactionary — that is what the alliance with Muslim clerical-fascism was and is: reactionary — political foolishness, rooted in a muddled and reactionary "anti-imperialism".

They allied the British left not with working-class (or even bourgeois) democrats in Iraq, Afghanistan and Palestine, but with clerical-fascists, Sunni supremacists, the Taliban and al-Qaeda. For its part, the Socialist Party has a disablingly black-and-white, over-simplified view of the labour movement, asserting that there is nothing at all left of the old Labour Party.

In an earlier incarnation, they had a no less simple-mindedly black-and-white — and wrong — view in which they saw the Labour Party as a pure emanation of working-class politics. In office in Liverpool in the mid-80s, the Socialist Party under its present leaders disgraced itself by self-serving timidity in face of the Tory government .

The SWP has said they want to stand a few candidates in the election. The Socialist Party will stand a handful. It will be a marginal activity in the general election. These candidates will be about building support for these organisations not about building genuine left unity and certainly not about offering an alternative government to the Tories.

In short, there is no credible socialist alternative to the Labour Party in the election. How unpalatable a choice New Labour is, is shown by the fact that Brown too stands for cuts — different cuts, perhaps lesser cuts, at a different rate and tempo, but cuts nonetheless.

But the choice the working class, and socialists who look to the working class and the labour movement, face is either abstention and a vote here and there for socialist candidates, or a vote for Labour. Cynical abstention is a rotten option for workers. We need an alternative political campaign which cuts across that cynicism.

The bulk of the labour movement will rightly call for a Labour vote. Labour movement militants — many “with gritted teeth” — will vote Labour, and call on their workmates to do the same. We say: “vote Labour and prepare to fight, whoever wins — Tory or Labour.”

Vote Labour, prepare to fight

There may be some anti-Labour socialist candidates who should be voted for. The Alliance for Workers' Liberty is standing one such candidate, Jill Mountford, for the purpose of making essential socialist propaganda (and of course, of building the AWL). But in most places, in general, we say: vote Labour!

Yet, saying “vote Labour” with all the reservations listed here raises a further question for socialists: do we just shrug and say “vote Labour”, and between now and the election, passively accept the politics of the Brown Labour Party and the New Labour government? That is the easy option, but we should not do that!

We cannot do that on pain of political self-betrayal. We need a campaign to stop the Tories and fascists, and for a Labour vote, a campaign that simultaneously advocates and organises labour movement people and socialist and anti-capitalist activists around anti-Brown, anti-New Labour policies.

We need not an indolent, passive “vote Labour” posture, but an active socialist campaign that combines stopping the Tories and fascists now with a simultaneous fight against Brown and New Labour — now, and after the election, whether Brown loses or wins. Such a campaign should base itself on a class struggle programme of demands: for jobs, against cuts and privatisations, in defence of public services.

There is a precedent for such a campaign. Faced in 1979 with a terrible choice between the Callaghan Labour government and the Thatcher Tories, a choice comparable with our choice in 2010, socialists organised a “Socialist Campaign for a Labour Victory”. Its purpose was to campaign actively for a Labour vote and for anti-Callaghan government policies. It organised militants to continue the fight for those policies against the Callaghan Labour leadership, in and out of government. Many important things are different now. There was then a mass Labour Party which on a rank-and-file level was bitterly opposed to the Callaghan government. There is nothing like that now. But we are where we are.

As the American Trotskyist James P Cannon used to say: the cardinal question in politics is “what to do next”. Politics is always about now. Socialists relate to the “now”, decide what to do next, always with an eye to what best serves the tomorrow we work to shape, what best serves the longer term interests of the working class and of socialism.

Nevertheless we must relate to the political issues now, if we are not to accept relegation to the realm of general, abstract, socialist high-propaganda.

Events — especially the political decrepitude of the would-be left — have for a long time forced the AWL into a heavy emphasis on propaganda, into polemics with the kitsch left. That was necessary but it was not from free choice. Other possibilities are, or may be, now opening up.

The general election will, most likely, one way or another bring to a close the chapter of labour movement political history we have been living through for the last 15 and more years. A new chapter will, perhaps — we say no more than most likely will — open. Many things may become possible that were impossible for a long time. Now, in the run up to the General Election, it is not a matter only of speculation but of action, of doing what can be done here and now, to prepare.

That is why in the run-up to the May 2010 general election, we will be supporting the exploratory efforts to organise a Socialist Campaign to Stop the Tories and Fascists.

A workers' plan for the crisis

The New Labour and Tory politicians who once shouted loudest in favour of "free markets" now accept that the government must take over many of the big banks, and exercise some kind of economic control. Only they want that control in the interests of the bosses and the rich; they want to manage the coming slump in the best way for their class and return to "free markets" as soon as possible.

We want democratic control in the interests of the working-class majority, by a *workers' government* based on and accountable to the labour movement. The labour movement should wage every battle, even the smallest defensive struggle, so as to maximise working-class self-confidence and self-assertion, and bring the goal of a workers' government nearer. We demand:

1. Take control of the banks

Nationalise, without compensation for the bosses, the entire system of banks, pension funds and other financial institutions, to create a single, public, democratically-controlled banking, mortgage and pensions service whose resources can be used to protect the jobs, pensions and homes of working-class people, and provide for social need.

2. Rebuild public services

Reverse all forms of privatisation, contracting out, PFI etc; tax the rich to revive, rebuild and expand the NHS, education etc as public services under workers' and service-users' control. Scrap nuclear weapons, cut military spending and end subsidies to the arms trade, with a programme to convert arms industries to peaceful purposes. A single comprehensive school system; abolish all fees in education, introduce a living grant for every student over 16.

3. Jobs for all

Resist the job cuts: a shorter working week, maximum 35 hours, without loss of pay; ban overtime, with wage rises to compensate those workers who lose out; nationalise under workers' control firms declaring mass redundancies; expand public services to create decent, socially useful jobs for all (eg more teachers, more nurses, more building workers).

4. Inflation-proof wages, pensions and benefits; attack inequality

The labour movement should calculate its own, realistic, figure for inflation as it affects the working class and organise industrial and political action for, as a minimum, that wages are made inflation-proof (wages to rise automatically as prices rise). Pensions, benefits and the minimum wage should rise in line with inflation or earnings, whichever is higher. Oppose New Labour's reactionary "welfare reforms". Benefits should be enough to live on; the minimum wage, at least 2/3 median male earnings, currently £8.80 an hour, with no exceptions. Attack inequality: shift the tax burden off the working class by phasing out VAT and most indirect taxes; cut taxes for the least well off; tax the rich.

5. Decent homes for all

No evictions; every home-owner facing repossession should have the option of converting their property into rented social housing so they can stay. A massive programme of council house building, under tenants' and housing workers' control, and the confiscation and conversion of empty/unused

properties (90% of which are currently privately owned), to guarantee quality housing for all at cheap rents.

6. Open the books! Fight for workers' control!

We need access to all company accounts so we can challenge the bosses' version of what is and is not "affordable" and determine who is responsible for the crisis. Crack down on tax evasion by the rich. Fight for workers' control at every level, from the smallest workplace to the biggest multinational corporation. Nationalise the giant industrial and service companies, and use their resources for a programme of social reconstruction.

7. Nationalise energy and transport; for a sustainable economy

The gas and electricity companies have been making huge profits at the expense of working-class people and the environment; they should be nationalised and run as public services, with a drastic reduction in bills. Public transport must also be taken into public ownership; local journeys should be made free and all fares reduced. Major investment in public transport, energy efficiency and renewable energy, and a conversion programme for polluting industries, as part of a worker-led "just transition" to a sustainable, low-carbon economy.

8. Workers' rights and democracy

Scrap the anti-trade union laws. A positive charter of workers' rights – to organise, win union recognition, strike, picket, take solidarity action. Support for workers taking action in defiance of the anti-union laws. Fight for democracy: abolish the monarchy and the House of Lords, reorganise Britain as a federal republic, put the government under the control of recallable representatives. No official should be paid more than a worker's wage. Restore and expand civil liberties. Trade union rights in the police and armed services; abolish officers' privileges; elected local authorities should be given control over the police.

9. Fight racism and the roots of racism

The labour movement must seek to organise all workers regardless of immigration status as part of the fight for open borders; anything else means allowing the bosses to divide us. Fight for mass mobilisation and self-defence by the working class and oppressed groups against the BNP and other far-right organisations, and for socialist answers to the social decay on which they feed.

10. Women's liberation

Increased pressure on household budgets, cuts in services and the growth in domestic violence which often accompanies recessions all mean the crisis will affect women with particular sharpness. We need a labour movement which fights for women's liberation, and a working-class women's movement, demanding equal pay without compromise, defending and extending abortion rights and reproductive freedoms, and fighting for free, universal childcare, well-funded services and other demands to make equality real.

11. Workers of the world unite

Workers everywhere have more in common with each other than with their capitalist or Stalinist rulers. The British labour movement must unite with workers across Europe and the world to coordinate our struggles and fight for a levelling up of wages, conditions and rights. Fight to reorganise the European Union on a democratic basis; for a Workers' United Europe.

12. Rebuild the labour movement! Organise the unorganised!

Organise the unorganised, including migrant, young, contracted out and precarious workers. Organise the unemployed to demand jobs and decent benefits. Democratise the unions: union officials should be subject to annual elections and paid a worker's wage; decisions on industrial action should be made by elected strike committees at the level of the dispute. Rebuild Trades Councils as organising centres for the working class, both industrial and political.

The unions must fight to impose their policies, against privatisation, for workers' rights, etc., on the Labour government - not advise or lobby Brown, but confront him politically! Rally the activists to build – through the trade unions, Trades Councils and other working-class organisations – a movement for independent working-class representation in politics, as the basis for a new *workers' party*. Its aim should be a *workers' government*, based on mass working-class mobilisation and accountable to the labour movement - a government which serves our class as the Tories and New Labour in power have served the rich, and reshapes society in the interests of people, not profit.

The government offers "bankers' socialism". Fight for workers' socialism!

New Labour, the Lib Dems and the Tories want government intervention in the economy in the interests of the bosses and the rich; we want democratic control in the interests of the working class, by a *workers' government*. The labour movement should fight every battle so as to maximise working-class self-assertion and bring the goal of a workers' government nearer. We demand:

1. Nationalise the entire system of banks and financial institutions, without compensation for the bosses and under democratic control.
2. Reverse cuts and privatisation; tax the rich to rebuild the NHS, education etc as public services under workers' and service-users' control.
3. Resist the job cuts. Jobs for all: a shorter working week, maximum 35 hours, without loss of pay; expand public services; nationalise firms declaring mass redundancies.
4. The labour movement should calculate its own, realistic, inflation figure and demand, as a minimum, that wages, pensions and benefits are inflation-protected; benefits that are enough to live on; a minimum wage of £8.80 an hour without exemptions. Phase out VAT etc; cut taxes for the least well off; tax the rich.
5. No evictions; every home-owner facing repossession should have the option of converting their property to rented social housing so they can stay. A big programme of council house building and confiscation of empty/unused properties to provide cheap, quality housing for all.
6. Open the books of the corporations! Fight for workers' control at every level of the economy. Nationalise the giant industrial and service companies.
7. Nationalise energy and transport; use their profits to bring down energy bills; make local transport free and reduce other fares; invest in public transport and renewables and convert polluting industries as part of a worker-led transition to a sustainable, low-carbon economy.
8. Scrap the anti-union laws; a positive charter of workers' rights. Support workers defying the law. Fight for civil liberties and democracy: abolish the monarchy and the House of Lords, all representatives should be recallable and paid a worker's wage.
9. Organise workers regardless of immigration status, as part of the fight for open borders. Mass mobilisation against the far right and the social decay on which it feeds.

10. Fight for women's liberation: demand equal pay without compromise; expanded abortion rights; free, universal childcare, well-funded services and other demands to make equality real.

11. Unite with workers across Europe and the world to fight for a levelling up of wages, conditions and rights; for a Workers' United Europe.

12. Organise the unorganised, including young, contracted out and precarious workers. Organise the unemployed. Union officials should be elected annually and paid a worker's wage; decisions on industrial action made by elected strike committees. Rebuild Trades Councils.

The unions must fight to impose their demands on the Labour government - not advise or lobby Brown, but confront him politically! Rally the activists to build a movement for independent working-class representation, as the basis for a new *workers' party*. Its aim should be a *workers' government* – a government based on mass working-class mobilisation and accountable to the labour movement, which serves our class as the Tories and New Labour have served the rich, and reshapes society in the interests of people, not profit.