

Walton by-election special
18 June 1991

SUPPORT MAHMOOD!

NEIL KINNOCK'S Labour Party is standing a candidate against the working class people of Liverpool. Peter Kilfoyle is standing for parliament on a programme of cutting Council services, destroying Council workers' jobs and hounding socialists out of the Labour Party.

Lesley Mahmood is one of 29 Liverpool Labour Councillors suspended for voting against the poll tax and against massive redundancies planned by the Council's Labour leaders. She supports Liverpool Council workers fighting a planned 1000 redundancies. She stands for defying the Tory laws which say Labour Councils have to attack local services. She has promised to draw the same wages as an ordinary worker if elected to parliament.

Struggle

Lesley Mahmood is standing as a candidate of struggle - against the Tories and the labour leaders who do the Tories' dirty work. That is why every voter in Walton and every working class person in the country should support her.

If you are a member of a Labour Party ward or constituency you should immediately move a resolution of support and send money and canvassers to the election campaign.

Raise support for Lesley in your trade union or workplace. This is not just a campaign about Liverpool: all over the country Labour councils have given in to the Tories. They are slashing jobs and

closing vital services. Meanwhile Labour is supporting the Tories in spending millions of pounds to bail out the the super rich who have lost money backing the Lloyds insurance market!

Refuse

Now is the time for all those Labour MPs who talk left to act left. It is scandalous that self proclaimed left MPs like Eddie Loyden and even so-called "Militant" Terry Fields refuse to come out and back Lesley Mahmood. Benn, Skinner, Jeremy Corbyn and all the others who like to make a big show of opposing Kinnock in parliament and on television programmes should get out in the streets to build support for Lesley Mahmood's campaign.

But simply campaigning for and voting for Mahmood won't solve the problems workers face in Liverpool and in towns and cities everywhere. In Liverpool council workers are waging a bitter struggle against the redundancies through limited strike action. The Labour Council has threatened to bring in slave labour to empty the bins and run the council services.

Council workers in Liverpool should launch an immediate all out strike until the Council withdraws all redundancies and all cuts in services. If the Tories send in government commissioners to run the

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Council (they have been planning such moves for years) every worker in the city should stop work until they retreat back to their Whitehall offices.

Many Labour supporters will be asking: is it worth challenging Kinnock's man? Shouldn't we be concentrating on the fight against the Tories? And what happens if Mahmood splits the vote and lets the Liberals win?

Millions

It is worth challenging Kinnock. In the next twelve months there will be a general election. Millions of people, sick of the Tory attacks on the NHS, sick of rising unemployment, sick of decaying housing, transport and amenities will vote for Labour.

But if Kinnock is elected he will implement a political programme essentially no different to John Major's. He will leave the privatised industries in the hands of the profiteers, he will leave most of the anti-union laws on the statute books. He will not promise to spend a single penny on the NHS, schools and local services until the country "generates wealth". That means he will not improve the services workers rely upon until the bosses' ability to make profits is restored.

Kinnock and the trade union leaders who support him are trying to sell this deal on the basis that there's no alternative. Kinnock has spent the last five years not fighting the Tories but fighting those who stood in the way of turning Labour into a pale pink version of Thatcherism.

Voting for Lesley Mahmood will show millions of voters there is an alternative: being prepared to fight back, to break the law where the law is designed to break us. It will send a clear message to Neil Kinnock: he can expect a rough ride from organised workers once in office if he tries to carry on the Thatcher and Major legacy of attacking jobs, services and living standards.

Shouldn't we be uniting to fight the Tories? It is the Labour leadership which is refusing to do that. When the miners fought the Tories Kinnock condemned

them for resisting the police occupation of their villages and for protecting their right to picket. When Liverpool Council fought the Tories Labour expelled those who led the fight. When over 100,000 marched to defy the poll tax, and up to 8 million refused to pay it, Labour's leadership could only condemn the struggles and dissociate themselves.

Of course, in the general election, where there is no class struggle candidate we should continue to support Labour. Millions of workers think Labour will be better than the Tories. Those who know anything about the history of Labour in power know that this is a myth. We say: put Labour to the test of office and organise to fight every attack Labour carries out on behalf of the bosses. But in Liverpool, where Labour is in office and workers are fighting back already we say support the candidate who stands with the workers against the Tories and against the Labour traitors.

Liberals

What if voting Mahmood lets the Liberal in? There is no guarantee that this will happen. Broad Left candidates won five out of six council seats in the May Council elections in Liverpool. The best way of keeping the Liberals out is to vote for Mahmood. But if the confusion sown by the Labour leaders, and the extremely short time they have allowed for the election campaign means that the Labour vote is split we say it's a lesser evil than refusing to challenge Labour's betrayals.

Lesley Mahmood is standing as the "real Labour" candidate. Unfortunately many workers have learnt by bitter experience that the "real" Labour Party is the party of sell outs, of spending cuts, of cringing before the bosses and international bankers, of sending working class youth off to do the killing for British imperialism.

Neither do we agree that Lesley Mahmood's programme is an adequate socialist platform. She stands for the nationalisation of the big monopolies, workers' control of industry, for the eradica-

tion of all forms of discrimination, and other socialist goals we share. But she ignores the vital question of how these can be achieved.

In Liverpool Lesley Mahmood has been arguing that the present struggle of the council workers can be solved through an alternative legal budget. Even if it can this will only be a short term solution. The Tories, and Labour, are putting the screws on every council. Councillors who say they stand for the interests of the working class will have to fight back, time and again, by setting budgets, whether they are legal or not, that defend the interests of the working class.

Even a parliament full of Lesley

Mahmoods could not legislate socialism. The minute the bosses' privileges and property came under threat they would wind up the parliamentary talking shop. The lesson of Chile in the 1970s is that socialism will only come through a revolution which smashes the bosses' state and puts in its place a new kind of state based on workers' councils and a workers' militia.

Despite these criticisms we urge every worker, every socialist, to support Mahmood, fight to reverse Kinnock's victories in the Labour Party and join Liverpool Council workers in the struggle to stop Council and government spending cuts. ■

Militant, the left and Lesley Mahmood . . .

FOR YEARS *Militant* has claimed that it is possible for the Labour Party to be transformed into a genuine socialist party. While *Workers Power* agrees that it is necessary for Marxists to fight the right wing inside the party, we have always warned that any idea of turning Labour into a real force for socialism is an illusion. Now we are being proved right.

Militant used to argue that the left in the party would go from strength to strength, that their experience in winning the majority of the LPYS to their policies would be repeated in the adult party in the future. They claimed that 'the ideas of Marxism cannot be defeated by organisational measures' such as witch-hunts and bans.

But in fact the leadership of the Labour Party moved dramatically to the right, marginalising the old left, expelling so-

cialists, overruling the exercise of democratic rights such as the selection of candidates and effectively closing down the LPYS.

Every victory of the witch-hunters has been handed to them by the cowardice of the left.

Time and again in the 1980's, the leadership has overturned democratically selected candidates and has imposed Kinnockite stooges. *Workers Power* argued that the properly selected left wing candidate should have refused to give in and should have stood, against Kinnock's impostors. Our arguments were rejected by Labour lefts who were afraid of the consequences of such a direct challenge to Kinnock. In those days that included *Militant* supporters.

The labour left is full of self proclaimed "revolutionaries" who support papers like

Socialist Organiser, *Socialist Action* and *Socialist Outlook*. Scandalously they have all condemned *Militant's* turn to supporting candidates against the official stooges like Kilfoyle. On 4 July they will all cast their votes for Kilfoyle.

They argue that Mahmood's candidacy is 'sectarian', that it splits the vote, that it plays into the hands of the right wing.

These arguments miss the point. The right wing have shown that they don't give a damn about unity. They are quite prepared to split local parties and disaffiliate whole constituencies if necessary in order to defeat the left. By rolling over and playing dead in the name of unity, the left allowed Kinnock to get away with it more easily.

Abandon

You could argue that in refusing to fight the left at least got to stay in the party. But for socialists, the very idea of being tolerated only when we abandon a fight should be anathema. The only unity preserved in that way is the unity of silence and submission, not the unity of working class struggle. The right wing will always be able to present socialists with a choice: stop fighting for your ideas in the class struggle, or be excluded from the party.

Even some *Militant* supporters have opposed the tactic of standing Lesley Mahmood. They are wrong, but it is understandable. After all, they draw their arguments from *Militant's* old position.

During each successive wave of witch-hunts, Workers Power supporters in the Labour Party demanded that wards and constituencies should uphold expelled members' rights, even in the face of threats to disaffiliate the constituency. When the leadership reduced the age limit of the LPYS and banned its conference we called for a national unofficial conference to organise defiance of Kinnock and to win the widest possible support from local parties and unions. Where democratically selected candidates for Councillor or MP were overruled by Kinnock we argued

they should rally their local parties to stand against the stooge candidate. *Militant* was against all this because, they claimed, we were 'playing into the hands of the right wing', we were 'sectarian' etc.

But we were right. *Militant* should have realised the necessity of defying the right-wing's organisational dictatorship sooner.

Militant could have led defiance of the witch-hunt before Kinnock had inflicted such powerful defeats on the Labour left. A challenge in the mid 1980s, when the witch-hunts and expulsions began could have laid the basis for winning whole wards and constituencies to the fight for a new political party on a revolutionary socialist programme.

But *Militant's* whole perspective prevented it from seeing this. *Militant* believed, and incredibly still believes, that Labour can be transformed wholly into a socialist party by a mass influx of workers. For decades *Militant* supporters subordinated everything to remaining in the party in order to be there to stand at the head of that working class influx.

Now that perspective is in tatters. The prospect of a socialist labour party peacefully legislating socialism through the bosses' parliament has never been further away.

With that perspective falsified *Militant's* leadership has begun flailing around for solutions in exactly the manner Trotsky described as centrist. It is no secret that *Militant* Councillors initially opposed the Broad Left tactic of standing Council candidates.

Tactic

The tactic of standing Lesley Mahmood is correct, but to reap the maximum benefits *Militant's* supporters will have to throw everything into the campaign and therefore risk every position they have won in the Labour Party. So far the record of *Militant's* MPs suggests they are not willing to do this. As Kinnock pours his Gucci-socialist front benchers into Walton where are Fields and Nellist?

To stand Mahmood means to face the possibility of a mass split. If we are serious about winning support for Mahmood it means moving resolutions in wards and CLPs and risking their closure. It means demanding left MPs support the campaign and risk withdrawal of the whip. It means convincing Council workers in Liverpool not just to launch an all out strike, but to become an army of agitators for Mahmood on the doorsteps and in Liverpool workplaces. This could assemble the forces which would make a split from the Labour Party a force to be reckoned with.

But *Militant's* leadership has done nothing to prepare for this situation. In fact it has always condemned those outside the Party as "sectarians on the fringes of the labour movement". And in the current election Lesley Mahmood has stressed the strictly local aspect of her struggle. There is a danger that this will lull many supporters of *Militant* and others on the left to ignore the national implications of this struggle against Kinnock, a struggle that must be extended nationally.

Emergence

Whatever the outcome of the by-election the danger is that *Militant's* leadership will emerge from the campaign like "hangover revellers" saying "never again". Others may try to repeat the experience of Gerry Healy's Socialist Labour League in the 1960s and provoke a split, setting up a carbon copy of Healy's sectarian organisation on the basis of the economic catastrophism which has always been a feature of *Militant's* perspectives.

Instead of these twin dead ends we say to all *Militant* supporters: join us in the fight for a new perspective, a new set of tactics for work in and outside the Labour Party. Fight for a programme which refuses to hide what should be ABC for Marxists: we need a *revolution* to get socialism in Britain and a revolutionary party to organise it. ■

We need a revolutionary party!

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constitution.

Clause 4, with its socialist sounding commitment to common ownership was designed, in the words of its author Sydney Webb, to mean just what any Labour leader wanted it to mean. Today for Kinnock it means a commitment to wider share ownership!

Labour's commitment to socialism has only ever been a ploy to fool the workers and harness them to the profit system. In office Labour has always attacked the workers.

Instead of pretending that revolutionaries are the "real" Labour supporters we should be fighting to convince working class fighters to make a clean break with the traditions of Labourism left and right.

To do that is not primarily an organisational task, it is a political one.

The reason we need a separate revolutionary organisation from the Labour Party is because socialism cannot come through parliament. *Militant* has, for decades, told workers that there can be a peaceful transition to socialism in Britain if only a left Labour government is backed up by mass mobilisations of the workers. Real, revolutionary Marxism says more than this: we will have to smash the bosses' state and institute working class power through a revolution, through workers' councils, factory committees, armed workers militias.

To get to that stage will need years of patient work by a combat party. Even the most left wing Labour ward or CLP,

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with its unaccountable MPs and Councillors, its mass of passive members cannot carry out this work.

A completely different type of party needs to be built, a party with maximum internal democracy and maximum unity in action. A party which stands for parliament and local Councils on the clear basis that it will defy the law if necessary - not one that suddenly springs the need for struggle on the workers. And it will have to be a party where the Councillors and MPs are strictly under the discipline of the mass of members.

That was the problem in Liverpool in 1984-5. That was why the councillors found themselves unable to win mass strike action at the crucial moment, because they had emphasised the class struggle in the council chamber and the DLP over the struggle in the workplaces. That is why mavericks like Hatton ended up using disastrous tactics - doing deals with the Tories during the miners' strike which took out Liverpool as a second front against the Tories, then issuing the redundancy notices which allowed the right wing to have a field day.

The programme of a revolutionary party is the tool it uses to bring workers from their day to day struggles towards the necessity of a struggle against capitalism itself.

Neither *Militant* nor the SWP sees revolutionary programme in this way. For *Militant* the revolutionary programme is reduced to a series of demands on a Labour government, not immediate demands for today's struggles.

The SWP reject the very idea of a programme. They are content to tail behind whatever workers in struggle themselves argue for. That is why they say:

"To be effective these socialists need to be members of an organisation that enables them to pool their efforts in struggling for solidarity between groups of workers and in fighting every aspect of this rotten system"

This view of the revolutionary party - a

solidarity network plus educational meetings - is a million miles from the tradition of Lenin and Trotsky. A revolutionary party exists to give leadership, to stand ahead of the working class and criticise not just the leaders but the wrong ideas and the wrong tactics workers often adopt in struggle.

Because the SWP poses the need only for an "independent organisation" and fails to address the political basis it has nothing to say about the struggles in the Labour Party that will arise as a result of the Mahmood campaign.

Victimised

Those who support the campaign will inevitably be victimised, expelled, disaffiliated. Do we simply say to them "give up and leave"? No. As long as the Labour Party remains a party with millions of affiliated members through union political levies we have to fight within it for revolutionary politics.

We do not need to sow the illusion that it can be transformed into a vehicle for revolutionary struggle - it can never be that. But we do need to organise all those who see themselves as consistent fighters against capitalism into a revolutionary tendency in the Labour Party.

Of course such a tendency could not co-exist for long with the Labour leaders. It would find itself the repeated target of expulsions and witch hunts. But the fight to place demands on the labour leaders, through whatever remains of the democratic structure of the Party, will remain an important tactic for revolutionaries for as long as masses of workers continue to hold illusions in Labour.

For decades the British working class has lacked a real revolutionary party. That is why every one of its major struggles has been defeated or derailed, from the General Strike to the Miners' Strike. If the Mahmood campaign leads to a massive split in Labour's ranks we must make sure the politics on offer from *Militant* and the SWP do not squander, yet again, the chance to build a revolutionary alternative to Labour. ■

Where we stand

Workers Power is a revolutionary communist organisation. We base our programme and policies on the works of Marx, Engels, Lenin and Trotsky, on the documents of the first four congresses of the Third (Communist) International and on the Transitional Programme of the Fourth International.

Capitalism is an anarchic and crisis-ridden economic system based on production for profit. We are for the expropriation of the capitalist class and the abolition of capitalism. We are for its replacement by socialist production planned to satisfy human need.

Only the socialist revolution and the smashing of the capitalist state can achieve this goal. Only the working class, led by a revolutionary vanguard party and organised into workers' councils and workers' militia can lead such a revolution to victory and establish the dictatorship of the proletariat. There is no peaceful, parliamentary road to socialism.

The Labour Party is not a socialist party. It is a bourgeois workers' party—bourgeois in its politics and its practice, but based on the working class via the trade unions and supported by the mass of workers at the polls. We are for the building of a revolutionary tendency in the Labour Party, in order to win workers within those organisations away from reformism and to the revolutionary party.

The misnamed Communist Parties are really Stalinist parties—reformist, like the Labour Party, but tied to the bureaucracy that rules in the USSR. Their strategy of alliances with the bourgeoisie (popular fronts) inflicts terrible defeats on the working class worldwide.

In the USSR and the other degenerate workers' states, Stalinist bureaucracies rule over the working class. Capitalism has ceased to exist but the workers do not hold political power. To open the road to socialism, a political revolution to smash bureaucratic tyranny is needed. Nevertheless we unconditionally defend these states against the attacks of imperialism and against internal capitalist restoration in order to defend the post-capitalist property relations.

In the trade unions we fight for a rank and file movement to oust the reformist bureaucrats, to democratise the unions and win them to a revolutionary action programme based on a system of transitional demands which serve

as a bridge between today's struggles and the socialist revolution. Central to this is the fight for workers' control of production.

We are for the building of fighting organisations of the working class—factory committees, industrial unions and councils of action.

We fight against the oppression that capitalist society inflicts on people because of their race, age, sex, or sexual orientation. We are for the liberation of women and for the building of a working class women's movement, not an "all class" autonomous movement. We are for the liberation of all of the oppressed. We fight racism and fascism. We oppose all immigration controls. We are for no platform for fascists and for driving them out of the unions.

We support the struggles of oppressed nationalities or countries against imperialism. We unconditionally support the Irish Republicans fighting to drive British troops out of Ireland. We politically oppose the nationalists (bourgeois and petit bourgeois) who lead the struggles of the oppressed nations. To their strategy we counterpose the strategy of permanent revolution, that is the leadership of the anti-imperialist struggle by the working class with a programme of socialist revolution and internationalism.

In conflicts between imperialist countries and semi-colonial countries, we are for the defeat of "our own" army and the victory of the country oppressed and exploited by imperialism. We are for the immediate and unconditional withdrawal of British troops from Ireland. We fight imperialist war not with pacifist pleas but with militant class struggle methods including the forcible disarmament of "our own" bosses.

Workers Power is the British Section of the League for a Revolutionary Communist International. The last revolutionary International (Fourth) collapsed in the years 1948-51.

The LRCI is pledged to fight the centrism of the degenerate fragments of the Fourth International and to refound a Leninist Trotskyist International and build a new world party of socialist revolution. We combine the struggle for a re-elaborated transitional programme with active involvement in the struggles of the working class—fighting for revolutionary leadership.

If you are a class conscious fighter against capitalism; if you are an internationalist—join us!

We need a revolutionary party!

"NOW A genuine workers' party is in the making. It may be that the bulk of the activists will be expelled. The six Broad Left candidates and their supporters are being expelled. The six ward parties have been formally suspended. But the official party is withering on the vine. It will have no activists and declining support. The real Labour Party will rest with the rank and file"

That is how *Militant's* Dave Cotterill explained the possibilities arising from the Mahmood campaign. (*Militant* 14 June).

The Socialist Workers Party (SWP), in its *Open Letter to the Left*, spelled out a similar perspective:

"We have to make it clear we are out to build a national organisation, independent of Kinnock's party, that will go on fighting whatever he might say or do." (*Socialist Worker* 15 June)

Split

The prospect of a left wing split from the Labour Party containing real working class forces is clearly one of the most important events in the recent history of the labour movement. But such splits have happened before. The Independent Labour Party in the 1930s squandered its potential by failing to break from the gradualist reformist politics of its leaders. The Socialist Labour League (later the WRP), which split from labour in the early 1960s adopted a sectarian and triumphalist perspective, ignoring the

task of building unity in action with millions of workers who still supported Labour and trusted the trade union leaders.

If a "genuine workers party" is on the cards, a "national organisation independent of Kinnock's party", we have to make sure that it is a revolutionary organisation: absolutely solid in its commitment to revolutionary politics, a party of activists and class fighters. At the same time we have to make sure it is a party which sets itself the task of patiently fighting alongside the mass of workers in their unions, workplaces and where possible in the Labour Party.

Neither *Militant* nor *Socialist Worker* address the need for revolutionary politics in such a party.

Useless

It is useless to continually pose a revolutionary workers' party as the "real Labour party".

The real Labour Party is the party which has always betrayed the workers. Eric Heffer fought all his life on the basis that Labour had to "get back to its socialist roots", but Labour never had any socialist roots. It was created by the trade union bureaucrats to make sure they had a voice in parliament. After the first world war, when revolutionary socialism was growing, it adopted a structure which allowed individual members to join and instituted the famous "Clause 4" in its

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