THE POLITICAL CHARACTER OF THE 2017 GENERAL ELECTION

It has become a platitude to recognise that the general election is being utilised by the Conservatives in order to seriously weaken the influence of the Labour Party. But there is an even more important reason why the election is taking place at this time. Theresa May has recognised that it is possible to develop the opposition between nation and class. This election has the implicit agenda of support for either the continued BREXIT standpoint of popular nationalism, or alternatively it is possible to support the Labour Party policy of upholding the interests of the 'Many and Not the Few'. May has understood that one of the major reasons for the electorate rejecting the UK's membership within the EU in the recent referendum was because of the influence of popular nationalism. Thus she wants to exploit this ideological viewpoint to the advantage of the Conservatives in the forthcoming election. This perspective means undermining the alternative ideological approach of the interests of the working class which has been generally, if poorly, expressed by the recent version of the Labour party. The Labour Party (LP) under Corbyn's leadership will utilise the election in order to voice concerns about how the UK has become a society polarised between the privileges of the rich, in comparison to the related decreasing material standards of the majority of people. May understands that this message could become popular, and so she articulates the opposite view of support for nation before the interests of class. Hence working people have a direct choice in the forthcoming election, to either support the deceptive ideology of nation, which actually disguises the continued interests of capital, or instead defend some sense of their own class interest, and related opposition to Tory policies.

The prospects for the success of the LP in the election are very slim, if not virtually non-existent. This is because of the popular appeal of a form of reactionary nationalism when compared to the weak and often confused conception of class interest. This situation is because the symbols and expressions of nationalism are very powerful and are part of the daily existence of people, such as the role of the monarchy, a vulgarised history of the nation, sporting events, and a sense of identity and belonging to the nation. Furthermore, the present exploitative economic system is considered to be a daily feature and aspect of people's activity. In comparison, trade unionism, which is considered to be the major expression of the class interest of working people, is held to be disruptive, and often only achieves publicity in situations like strikes. But, most importantly people do not know what it means for their class interests to be realised in terms of an alternative to the role of capitalism and the conservative character of the 'destiny of the nation'. This is because the conception of an alternative to capitalism in terms of socialism is not articulated in a popular manner. People do not know what could replace capitalism, and so they accept the present system despite its limitations like low wages. In comparison the ideology of the Labour Party is limited in a crude manner to expressing the standpoint of the 'Many and not the Few'. This standpoint is defined in terms of the aim of higher wages for NHS staff and building more affordable homes. This limited programme seems to have little appeal when compared to the rival ideological claims of 'making Britain Great', and of the 'nation' being able to define its own destiny outside the EU.

The irony of this situation is that the Conservatives are in real crisis because of the problems involved in the attempt to implement BREXIT. They have been told by the leaders of the EU that a painless process of BREXIT is not possible, and that many of the demands of the EU have to be realised if BREXIT is to be achieved. Therefore the future implies that the UK will still be subordinated to the EU without having any of its previous trading advantages, and indeed the UK will be plunged into a profound economic crisis because of the end of these trading links. Hence in order to try and disguise the ramifications of this possible adverse situation, the Conservatives attempt to make a chauvinist appeal to the claims of nation. This ideological approach is even at the expense of the interests of capital which aims to realise a 'soft' BREXIT. The tragedy of this situation is that it is possible that the working class will not realise the dire consequences of leaving the EU because of the influence of the appeal of popular nationalism. The Conservatives may be able to utilise the appeal of nation in order to gloss over the implications of the uncertain character of a hard BREXIT. The irrationalism of popular nationalism may be able to deny the fact that peoples interests are being undermined by the economic limitations of a hard BREXIT. The appeal of nation may prove to be more successful than the opposing claims of class and material interest.

However, this reactionary possibility could only arise because there are serious limitations in the LP's message of defending the 'Many and Not the Few', and in relation generally to the theory and ideology of the revolutionary left. The point is we know that we are against Tory policies, but this message is not generally convincing because the Conservatives monopolise the strong ideological attraction of the claims of nation. The view that the UK should control its own government and borders seems to be a message that undermines all opposing views. In other words we know what we are against, which is Conservatism and capitalism, but what are we in favour of? This negative message has only limited appeal when contrasted to the apparently opposite standpoint of national greatness. Hence the LP seems to be comfortable in opposition because it can constantly criticise Conservative policy with regards to the NHS, austerity, and the lack of house building, but it has no programme for government. This limitation is perceived by the electorate who continue to vote for the Conservatives because of its greater ideological appeal. Thus criticism combined with a limited programme of reforms will not convince people to vote for the LP, or the revolutionary Left. The success of the 1945 Labour government was that they had a cohesive programme of reforms that meant they were determined to introduce in order to improve the economic situation. The realisation of this programme implied the promise of socialism in the future. But since 1945, the LP has become more reactionary and reached its nadir under Tony Blair when it had a programme of mild reform, or the so-called Third Way. Capitalism was entirely safe with this Labour government. This administration would be voted out of office because the appeal of Conservatism versus bureaucratic elitism proved to have a stronger appeal. The result of the EU referendum has enabled the Conservatives to intensify its message of nationalism in order to promote its electoral victories. This has meant a situation of Bonapartism in which the Conservatives rule on behalf of capital instead of being its direct instrument. The forces of opposition should be able to take advantage of this situation, but they have their own ideological limitations. Primarily the Left reformism of Jeremy Corbyn has inferior appeal when compared to the adaptation to popular nationalism by the Conservatives. There is only one doctrine that can rival that of nationalism, and that is socialism, or the systematic appeal to a vision of a different society.

People may contend that this view is irrelevent and is unable to address the actual limitations of Tory policy, such as the effects of austerity. But the point is that without the influence of socialism, the LP and the left in general, are merely critics of the Tories. In this context the appeal of popular nationalism will prove to be more influential than this criticism of the government. The practical role of nationalism will prove to be capable of glossing over the importance of the criticism of Conservative policies. This is why we should suggest openly and intransigently that the appeal of nationalism is inferior when compared to that of socialism. Nationalism is historically limited by its relationship to the exploitative system of capitalism, and is the promoter of antiquated political structures that result in tensions between competing nations and the possibility of war. We should also argue that the monarchy is an antiquated and elite institution that is a relic of the past, and has no place in a modern and innovative society. However, this opposition to nationalism will remain limited and inadequate unless it is connected to the promotion of an alternative perspective, which is socialism. This is a system that has the promise that the exploitation and low wages of capitalism will be ended and instead working people will be able to define their own economic affairs. This system does not mean that neglect of the consumer or shortages of goods will be characteristic, because goods will be created for an innovative market. Workers co-operatives will produce in specialised terms items for the market. The role of supply and demand will establish the levels of goods produced. The political system will not be based on one party rule. Instead there will be representative democracy based on annual parliaments and recallable delegates. This multi-party system will allow the right to restore capitalism in voting terms. However, it is hoped that the success of socialism, and its ability to promote the formation of a classless society, will mean that people democratically support its continuation. The success of socialism will also be advanced by the development of a world system of socialist states which means that the causes of war and poverty will be overcome. This international system will be able to tackle the ecological situation in the most serious manner.

It will be argued by the Conservatives that socialism is not realistic and goes against the traditions of British society and the character of human nature. But what this defensive standpoint amounts to is the view that only with the role of private capitalists is it possible to develop an effective economy. This viewpoint has never been successfully opposed because the issue of what we mean by socialism has not been systematically elaborated. Instead people have accepted Marx's view that history has a tendency towards socialism, and so this means that revolutionaries do not have the task of elaborating what we mean by socialism and communism before its actual realisation. The problem with this view is ideological, if we do not elaborate what we mean by socialism, why should people support it? In this context, the apparent superiority of capitalism is that we know it is a system already in existence, and so because of that apparently permanent condition, it appears to be superior and unassailable. Therefore the most effective manner in which we can promote the credentials of socialism is to continually provide elaborate and refined versions of what we mean by this aim. Only when people understand what is meant by socialism, and consider that it is a convincing perspective, will they begin to consciously act in order to realise this standpoint. Part of the problem is that people have considered that a Leninist party will arise that will lead us towards the realisation of socialism. Obviously political organisation is important, but this will be ineffective unless it is possible to convince people of the validity and significance of socialism. But, if we do not know what socialism is for various reasons, the alternative will occur which is continued mass support for capitalism because of its superior ideological appeal, which is often expressed by the role of nationalism.

But if a situation is established in which mass support for socialism is created, then the possibility seriously emerges that capitalism can be challenged by a mass offensive for the emancipatory alternative. This mass movement cannot be created unless significant support for the perspective of socialism has been realised. Without this development the various struggles will be limited to the question of reform. In this context the problem that nationalism has greater ideological appeal than reformism becomes a relevant issue. Consequently the greater ideological possibility of socialism when compared to reformism is that the former represents an alternative society whereas reforms occur within the exploitative limitations of capitalism. Only socialism has the promise that society which will be based on overcoming the disadvantages of capitalism whilst retaining its advantages such as technological efficiency and the role of the market. But the most important aspect that justifies socialism is that it has become the viewpoint of a possible mass movement that will strive to consciously realise this aim. The very popularity of socialism, which is already expressed in emerging workers control of production, will indicate that it is no longer a good idea and instead is become practically feasible. However, this situation will only emerge if left wing people intensify their efforts to convince others about the validity of socialism. This process in turn will only be promoted if the theoretical attempt to elaborate what socialism is actually occurs. In this manner, the development of theory encourages the practice of the striving to realise socialism. If the promotion of socialism occurs in the form of a mass movement then the class struggle will take the form of the issue of capitalism versus socialism. Hopefully in this instance the appeal of popular nationalism will be undermined. The attraction of socialism will mean that working people have begun to bestow a primacy on class interest as opposed to popular nationalism. However, this situation will not occur if the Labour movement does not develop the concept of socialism as an alternative to the policies of Conservatism. Reformism will not undermine the Conservatives. Only the elaboration of the aim of socialism can successfully realise the task of ending the rule of the Conservatives and so creating the basis to replace capitalism with socialism.