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VOICE LABOR AND PREPARE TO FIGHT!

We are calling for a Labor vote for May 18 but not for the reasons put forward either by hard-core 'Go Ahead' reformist Labor supporters or by the majority of lefties. A realistic look at the nature of the ALP is needed.

The campaign of the last two weeks has been conspicuous by the lack of fundamental issues taken up by both major parties. The ALP has been the most guilty. At first, the Labor machine tried to play personality electoral politics and 'go to the people on its record'. Then when it saw it was losing the initiative it was forced to answer on inflation but in the vaguest and most unspecified terms. Of course, because no government within the capitalist framework has a real answer to inflation, a congenital disease of the workings of the system. Labor's record (of which it is so proud) is basically one of servile cringing before big business together with timid moves to increase the weight of the public sector; a record of 'justifying' all time high price rises in goods such as steel; of allowing inflation to chew into workers' living standards.

All this is no accident. The ALP as a party is committed to administering the capitalist system more efficiently than the traditional parties of capital, and it says so. Whitlam: 'The sins of capitalism in Australia today are ones of omission rather than commission and of not being sufficiently enterprising and independent'. The ALP does not seek to reform but to streamline the system. The four main features of its outlook are: 1. Not nationalisation and opposition to the free market but rather a tighter capitalist integration between private and public sectors of the economy. 2. Not egalitarianism but a meritocratic view of social justice, i.e. equality of opportunity to compete for the most privileged positions in society. 3. No wealth taxes but more subsidies to the middle groups to allow better access to education. 4. No general consolidated revenue fund built up from progressive income taxes aimed at the rich but a series of funds (health, superannuation, education etc) to be paid by the workers themselves.

So in our opinion in this election we are dealing with two parties which accept the capitalist system. So, why bother to vote at all, why not abstain? Because in their relation to class forces the two parties are still not identical. Labor has a mass electoral base in the working class (at the moment). This is not to be confused with a mass worker membership. Labor's links with the working class are primarily organisational, i.e. bureaucratic Trade Unions affiliated, not individual membership. Therefore we characterise the ALP as a bourgeois party of the working class.

Thus we do not consider the leadership of the party willing or capable of espousing socialist policies even were it pressured to do so from within. We orient to the ALP only insofar as its reformist pretensions find any currency within the working class at this moment. And it is our job to shatter these illusions and clear away the debris of reformism in order to pose a real alternative to parliamentary democracy. Therefore to demand the full implementation of Labor's programme, even more, to talk of pressurizing the leadership to adopt socialist policies (as some left groups do) is to perpetuate the illusions. There is little to be gained by pressurizing from within since the ALP has little organised, working class mass base: in Victoria membership is barely 6000, the YLA has no links with unions and the SL remains controlled by union bureaucrats with little prospect of rank and file involvement. Far from 'exposing' Labor and reformism this approach serves to confuse the working class as to the nature of the ALP and spread illusions that the real business of politics actually takes place in the parliamentary arena.

We are not witnessing a mass movement involving hundreds of thousands of workers with a high level of commitment to the ALP who expect it to carry through a programme of transforming society. We are witnessing, at one level, support of progressive sections of the employer class, and, at another level, a continuing reaction by all sections of society to 23 years of unimaginative, reactionary Lib-CP politics. Experience has shown that so-called Social Democratic govts will minimally improve working class conditions.