

Hill, D. (2024). Elections, campaigns and the united front. *International Journal of Educational Policies*, Vol.18 (1), pp. 37-49.

ISSN: 1307 - 3842

## **Elections, Campaigns and the United Front**

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### **Introduction**

I want to talk about three different things. I want to talk about the 2024 General Election in the UK and the local campaign in Brighton and Hove; the Far Right and their targets; and the United Front, bringing together organised labour and the traditional left with the pro-Palestine/ Gaza anti-imperialist campaigners and activists in an inclusive, democratic and participatory local and national movement.

### **The General Election Campaign in Hove and Portslade**

I want to start off by talking about talking about the United Front that we built in the local Parliamentary election campaign in Hove and Portslade in the recent general election, where we got one of the best results for the Left in the country. We got 5.9% in an area with a very small Muslim population. This was one of the top four results nationally for a Left, anti-austerity, pro-Palestine, openly socialist Independent campaign in constituencies with less than 10% Muslim population. We did well. 3048 votes.

A small number of politically experienced candidates (variously experienced in the Labour Party and in Marxist groups and coalitions) got together in January and February 2024 to organise for a socialist challenge to Starmer's Labour at the (yet then unannounced) general election. We organised and held a Left hustings in March.

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We contacted about 20 different local Left WhatsApp groups. 145 people turned up to the hustings and they selected a candidate (from the two who put themselves forward).

We happened to be very lucky. We selected somebody - Tanushka Marah - who was not only a socialist but also a really good, committed, charismatic, extremely capable candidate. And she was / is well-connected, both nationally, with figures such as Andrew Feinstein and others, and locally, where she has been and is prominent in pro-Palestine marches, demonstrations, events. And locally connected as a Theatre Director specialising in theatre for underprivileged youth in the city.

And we were prepared for the election- just a little, but important detail- opening a bank account for the campaign before the election was announced. We ran a full and very well administered / organised election campaign in the constituency of Hove and Portslade. Most of the 45,000 households in the constituency received three of our leaflets for example, though, on another occasion we would hope for more supporters/activists to do a much fuller canvass and perhaps more leaflet deliveries. We spent just under the £17,000 maximum amount allowed under election law- on election literature, on posters of different sizes, paying a hugely committed and experienced / capable administrator, hiring a digital van, a travelling election truck, renting on a double-fronted shop as an office (in a busy shopping area, opposite the offices of the right-wing Labour MP, Peter Kyle) and incurring expenses in connection with various – and numerous - public events, such as the open-air launch complete with speeches, poetry, resistance/ liberation choir. And we had about 200 people involved, which is pretty phenomenal. On one of our 14 Campaign WhatsApp groups alone (the Canvassers WhatsApp Group) we had 121 supporters registered and in contact.

We had, and still - a month after the election - have a Core Group of around 25. This was not organised, recruited by bureaucratic 'invitation', it was for those most involved in the campaign, and obviously included key functions. Roles such as Candidate, Candidate's highly political and experienced) partner, main Administrator, Election Agent, Treasurer, and convenors/ facilitators of the various WhatsApp groups. Plus a couple of the highly experienced Left comrades as contributors, advisers. The WhatsApp groups 'sprang up' and were collaborative and inclusive. Nobody who wanted to join was excluded. Other Groups included Policy, Print and TV Press and

Media, Social Media, Events, Housing Issues, Healthcare Workers for Tanushka, Fundraising, Ward Organisers, Share Campaign Photos and Videos, Finance and Budget, and, post-election, Community Picnic Organisers!

We are continuing as a campaign and as a movement in the city of Brighton and Hove. We meet regularly, the Core Team, at the campaign HQ, the double fronted shop. since the election, planning our continuing actions and our links with other local and national developments.

### **Who Are We?**

Now what I want to focus on is Who were we? Who are we? Who was involved? Because we are continuing.

We had a number of people from the small Marxist parties. We had one or two comrades from most of the small parties- Socialist Workers Party, Socialist Party, Socialist Alternative, Anti-Capitalist Resistance (4th International), Communist Party of Britain, as well as former members of some of these groups. So, we had, in the campaign a number of comrades, people with experience in political organising, with experience in election and other campaigning.

The biggest group, I guess, other than the youth, the biggest group were/ are people who have been expelled from or actually left the Labour Party, comrades from such groups as Hove Socialists, the Withdean and Preston Park Socialist Supporters, local members of the Socialist Labour Network, as well as numerous experienced comrades from the Palestine Solidarity Campaign (many expelled from the Labour Party), Sussex Defend the NHS, Stop the War, Queers for Palestine, Extinction Rebellion, and other local activist groups.

As for 'the young', youth, the number of young people involved was remarkable- it was incredible, the vibe, the buzz, the social media, the youthfulness, the vibrancy of the campaign, the young, with their expertise. - for example, in social media., and in the events we held. And their creativity- and that of our Theatre Director candidate. Not constrained by 'traditional', more bureaucratic, stylised ways of 'doing things'.

Included in our campaign were supporters, friends, comrades, from the local Arab and Middle eastern communities, so devastated, like the rest of us, at the ongoing Israeli government slaughter, genocide, mass murder in Gaza. We were, on our street stalls,

in our canvassing, in our handing out leaflets, often greeted so warmly and emotionally by Palestinians, Muslims as well as by others so upset and angry about the genocide.

I want to make a crucial point here. Crucially, we also had the Trades Council - the local trade union organising body, supporting us. The Brighton, Hove and District Trades Council had about 15 candidates in Brighton to consider who to officially support. The one they selected to choose in Hove and Portslade constituency, after a hustings at the Trades Council, was our candidate. Tanushka Marah. And leading member of the Trades Council, leading local trade unionists also took part in campaign activities, in the Core meetings and WhatsApp organising groups. In a future campaign, and in our developing movement we will need to strengthen this support and to get support, sponsorship, from local trade union branches and members.

### **The Left of Labour Nationally and Bringing it Together**

So how did the Left do nationally? How did the other Left of Labour parties and candidates do? The socialist Left is, thus far, perennially split!

I often refer to Gramsci, Antonio Gramsci, the Italian Marxist. In particular, his quote about us needing 'Pessimism of the Intellect, Optimism of the Will' - a sober understanding of the current situation and its challenges, accompanied by hope and optimism and determination.

I'm an optimist. I'm a perennial optimist. And I see the possibility of the Left coming together. If we (Marxists and Socialists) play a part in it, if we, the 60-70 people present at our Campaign for a Mass Workers Party (CMWP) zooms, together with Trades Councils and Trade Unions - local branches - and community organisations, and campaigns across the country such as the one we developed in Brighton and Hove, come together as a United Front, then I do foresee the possibility of the left coming together more than in the past.

Most Marxists have been through the working in, with, coalitions or groups that tried to bring various parts of the Socialist and Marxist Left together. The Socialist Alliance, Respect, TUSC (I fought two Parliamentary and various Council elections for TUSC, as well as previously - in the last century! - two Parliamentary and numerous local elections for the Labour Party). It is so important that we do come together. *Not* as a fan club, not as a fan club for George Galloway, Jeremy Corbyn or Andrew Feinstein,

etc. etc. The working class will throw up its/ our own leaders and it must, we must, develop its/ our own programme (though not from scratch! We have socialist principles), but no desire to impose a 30 - point, 10 - page programme!

### **The Far Right**

I want to talk a bit about the United Front, which is even more necessary, in view of the fact that actually, in France and in the UK, the Right got more votes than the Left, a higher percentage of votes. In France, which is unremarked upon, the Rassemblement Nationale (RN), the Far-Right of Marine Le Pen, polled a lot more votes in the First Round of the July Parliamentary elections in France than did either the Centrists/ Macron group, or the Left coalition, the New Popular Front (Nouvel Front Populaire, NFP). It is worth pointing out that in the Second Round of those elections the RN came third in terms of votes).

And in England the right-wing parties- the Conservatives and Reform together, received more votes than Labour- 38% of the vote. That's Conservatives plus Reform. Labour only got 34%. Less votes under Starmer at this 2024 election - 9.70 - million than under the hugely demonised and vilified (by the right-wing Press and by pro-Zionists in both major parties) Jeremy Corbyn 's Labour received - 10.26 million - in 2019. (Corbyn's 2019 result was damned by Keir Starmer and by the Capitalist Media as one of the worst for Labour in history. To repeat, the Corbyn-led Labour Party got more votes, support, than did Keir Starmer's Labour! And, more than Blair – 9.55 million- in 2005).

I have fought 13 elections as a candidate, parliamentary, council elections and never (except perhaps for Harold Wilson's Labour victory in 1964) have I seen a result greeted with such a lack of enthusiasm, a lack of hope, a shrug of the shoulders. Millions seeing little difference between Labour and the Conservatives, millions voting Labour simply to get rid of the Tories and their corruption, sleaze, self-enrichment. Hoping for the best. And millions staying at home abstaining or voting for other parties, including the Greens and for left of Labour Independent pro-Gaza candidates.

As for the Far Right, although some comrades will say that in the UK they are not a threat, they are indeed a threat.

And who, historically are the people they - the Fascists, the Nazis, the Far Right - come for first? It's not, historically, the minorities, it's not the Jews, it's not the Muslims, it's not the LGBTQ. It's the organisations and leaderships of working class, the trade unions, the working-class organisations. Look at Hitler, look at Mussolini with their murderous and murdering Blackshirts and Brownshirts ruling the streets.

It is not only historically. Recently and currently in Brazil and now in Argentina. Milei currently in Argentina, attacking workers' rights, restricting the right of assembly and the right to collective bargaining, cutting workers' healthcare provision and basic rights such as maternity leave, and attacking trade unions' financial standing, together with mass privatisations and brutal put-downs of protests. So far, in Argentina, since Milei's election in November 2023 no mass murders. For those we need to look at Franco's Fascist Spain in the 1930s, and Pinochet in Chile 1973-1990. Pinochet banned trade unions, engaged in mass murders of communists, leftists, community activists, trade unionists. The first people Fascists kill, the first people they expropriate, the first people they silence either through passing laws or through intimidation- or, usually, both- are the representatives of the working class.

As Joe Gill has pointed out in discussions, in France and the UK (and other countries, too, such as Ireland, Finland, Italy) the *current* primary target of the Far Right are the *mobilised* racial minorities e.g. in France and the UK, Muslims. Over the duration of the Gaza protests, the Far Right have mobilised several times to attack the marchers, to attack student encampments and also attacked/ defaced, glued up the lock on our Tanushka Marah campaign HQ in Hove. Joe suggests (private correspondence) they, the Far Right and the Right see the Palestine protests as the biggest threat of the current time. Rather like the 1930s, the current forces mobilised among Left and the anti-imperialist Black and brown postcolonial people are highlighted by Capitalist politicians and media as the major threat (to the status quo, capitalist imperialism). However, I would maintain that it is organised labour, and unorganised labour that potentially and actually organises, that is the primary concern of the capitalist class. Workers (from various levels/ strata/ sections of the working class) and Gaza protesters are often the same people.

It has been clear since the anti-BNP march of 1993 (with 50,000 on the march) and the anti-Iraq War demonstrations of 2002-2003 (with two million on the march) that

people are uniting around anti-racism, anti-imperialism, anti-colonialism. And, in connection with the contemporary slaughter and genocide in Gaza, it has been clear from the very first pro - Palestine, pro - Ceasefire, pro - Gaza marches in October 2023 that an entirely new constituency of radicalised, postcolonial youth were and are mobilised to take to the streets for Palestine, over the issue of a new Nazism, Israel and its western backers committing genocide, horrified and so angry at UK parties- all three major parties!- for support for Israel.

It is not enough to say that they, the Far Right, haven't got a street army. At the minute they've only got a small street army, street army being differentiated from supporters and people on Far-Right marches, for example those organised by Tommy Robinson and the English Defence league (EDL). But the Far-Right marches are growing in confidence and in size. The 27 July 2024 Far Right/ Tommy Robinson march in London was 15,000 strong- and opposed by an anti-racist counter-march of only 5,000. The only time I can remember in the last 50 years when a Far-Right march in the UK has outnumbered us anti-Fascist/ anti-racist protesters.

On the connection between the capitalist class and Fascism, the Far - Right always attract funding from rich, capitalist, backers when the Left threatens their profits, they can fund street armies, street thugs and violence. Historically and currently, major capitalist forces, under pressure from the Left throw in their lot with Fascists and Nazis - from von Papen supporting Hitler in 1933, to most of the capitalist class supporting Pinochet in Chile in 1973 to Bolsonaro in Brazil and Milei in Argentina in recent years. And, arguably, Elon Musk supporting Trump today in the USA, giving his campaign \$45 million a month.

In terms of repression, the British state has not been able to clamp down on pro-Palestine protests in the same way as in Germany, France, the US or even Australia, but the police brutality, the intimidatory speeches of right-wing politicians (for example onetime Conservative Home Secretary (Minister of the Interior) Suella Braverman typifying Pro-Palestine marches as 'hate marches'), the use of secret files and use of 'SpyCops' – police officers who inveigled their way into Left organisations and had relationships- and children- with their 'targets', in their state-sponsored mission to find incriminating evidence on Left activists, the harsh sentences in July 2024 on Just Oil protesters (the sentences described by the *Morning Star* as the

harshest ever imposed for civil disobedience offences (protesters given five and four year prison sentences) for disrupting traffic on the M25 motorway). The long-term (and recently ended) incarceration of Julian Assange under debilitating conditions testifies to the repressiveness of the British state.

We have to really be aware of both the growth of the Far Right and of state repression – more reasons reason to bring the left together.

### **The United Front**

I want to end up by looking at United Front. I happen to be hugely *anti* - sectarian. I spent many, many years, the last few decades trying to bring in my own minuscule way, trying to bring the left together, to get us all to work together, supporting, sequentially, The Socialist Alliance, RESPECT, Left Unity, TUSC- the Trade Union and Socialist Coalition. But these were coalitions of existing parties, or, in the case of Respect, coalitions of small Marxist groups with the popular and populist electoral formation of George Galloway's election success in Bethnal Green and Bow in 2005.

What we did in the Tanushka Campaign- how it developed, organically in the campaign in Hove and Portslade and the wider Brighton and Hove city, was to bring together political activists experienced in the small Marxist parties, expulsees and refugees from the Labour Party- and far greater numbers of those experienced in local campaigns (and national campaigns such as over Palestine) and those never before involved in political movements. Very different from a federal coalition of already existing groups and parties. This was new. Replicated in various other Left Independent pro-Gaza campaigns throughout the country. Resulting in the election of five pro-Gaza Left Independent MPs to parliament and a fair number of 'near-misses', with Left Independent pro-Gaza candidates narrowly missing out on defeating Labour MPs and candidates.

I happen to be a revolutionary Marxist, a Trotskyist and anti - capitalist. I went to see capitalism *replaced*, not just managed a bit more pleasantly. Once it replaced with socialism and communism as described by Marx. *In The German ideology*, in *Grundrisse* etc. etc.

We know from Trotsky that the United Front is a way of bringing the masses, together with us Marxists, together, working with other sections of the working class who we



might describe as 'reformist'. (By 'working class' I mean all the levels/ layers/ strata of the working class, from Unskilled through to Professional. and Supervisory workers, all of us who sell our labour power to capitalism- a wide and inclusive definition of 'working class').

The United Front is a means by which we Marxists join with workers belonging to other parties and groups- and unaligned workers- in a common struggle to defend the immediate, basic interests of the working class against the bourgeoisie'. What the United Front does is it allows a set of demands to be put together which are acceptable to revolutionaries and indeed to the section of the working class who are not yet revolutionary- people who want reforms, people who want a different foreign policy.

We must work in a United Front together. Without liquidating ourselves, without dissolving our organisations, parties, groups. Without indulging in 'liquidationism'. Without also engaging in 'tailism', tailing along more 'moderate' groups and demands, without restricting ourselves to 'tailing along' behind the modest demands of more 'reformist' parties or groups, without proclaiming our own longer-term aims, policies, analysis.

So, we should keep our own organisations together. But we work in that milieu trying to bring different groups, reformist groups with limited (but valuable) aims, and revolutionary groups, and demands, together. We work for reforms, at the local and national and global levels. Marx, Trotsky, Lenin, Rosa Luxemburg in *Reform and Revolution* make that clear- we Marxists support Reforms AND Revolution- We do not dismiss Reforms.

Of course, within a United Front there is contestation, we have arguments, we have debates. Some folk have not before not previously encountered, or have rejected Marxist, anti-capitalist, eco-socialist, anti-imperialist arguments. Some folk are fearful of using the word 'socialist' for example. And, as Marxists, we attempt to further develop class consciousness, of the working class becoming a 'class for itself' as opposed to simply being a 'class in itself' - that is, a class that recognises its /our common interests in a class society controlled by capitalists and acts on our own class interests. Different from, a development from a 'class in itself'- that is a group (of many millions) who occupy the labouring and managerial supervisory positions in the

economy and society, but who have no (or little) understanding of that commonality, little understanding- indeed, often, a rejection of- class struggle and class analysis.

We can see in the campaign in Brighton and Hove, a campaign, a movement, developing from the General Election Campaign, a campaign which is continuing, we see people's eyes being opened. Indeed, mine were opened - I learned a lot, working, organising, campaigning with folk, with comrades from very different experiences, often used to more horizontal forms of organisation.

As Marxists, we must address two aspects of the specificity of our historical moment.

Firstly- there is an international struggle against US imperialism and its client colonial state's war against the Palestinians.

Secondly are broader social struggles and trade union struggles for radical reforms of capitalism, recognising and fighting against the increasingly authoritarian and predatory capitalism, enriching the rich on the one hand, and degrading wages, the social wage, the health, the happiness, the lives of millions.

The capitalist system- and its client governments (of left or right) is indeed alert to the dangers from anti-imperialist forces within the imperial metropolises becoming a counter hegemonic force threatening the ruling class ideological consensus in favour of western capitalist supremacy.

Western capitalism and its governments can see - with alarm - the widespread disconnect between, disbelief in Western governments' and Western media coverage of Gaza and Palestine, the contrast between coverage of Ukraine and the coverage of Palestine/ Gaza. This clash of perspectives, of attitudes, of understandings, this deligitimisation of US led colonialism- imperialism is widespread in all the main (neo-) colonialist imperialist countries. Side by side are increasing hysteria, hypocrisy and repression, in the USA, UK, France, Germany and other states such as Canada, Australia - where the western ruling class has united around the US war machine, in Israel and Ukraine.

As in the 1930s, the battle against fascism and imperialism has become, *at this current time*, 2023-2024, the principal political struggle around which other struggles against capital are fought in parallel with or as part of a broader united struggle. Hence the

relative successes of Independent, pro-Gaza Left candidates and MPs in the British general election, and the huge, repeated, mass Solidarity with Gaza/ Sop the Genocide' rallies worldwide.

The major terrain of struggle, the major issue -about which mass resistance erupts, varies. In 2022-2023 the major resistance was the strike wave in the UK, the Gilets Jaunes in France, across Europe- protests over wage and welfare state reductions/ cuts, increases in the age of retirement, restrictions on trade union rights, cuts in living standards- class war by the capitalist class and its agents against workers.

Our United Front must include the incorporate and highlight the interconnections between these various national and international excrescences of capitalist imperialism. Our movement locally and nationally must be broad-based as a socialist movement of and for the working class, working with the anti-racist and decolonial forces that exist within our society. To varying degrees this has, of course, happened for decades – *some of* the same activists, in the Palestine Solidarity Campaign, Stand Up to Racism, etc. But one of the points of this article is that we must work with new layers of activists- those for example who flooded into the local (and national) campaigns in recent months. Our United Front must address bias, discrimination, oppression against the most impoverished and alienated sections of the working class, be they white, brown, Black, as well as against the working class as a whole. Our trajectory should be becoming emboldened and new counter-hegemonic forces challenging imperialism AND capitalism at home and globally.

We must be inclusive, inclusive of those not previously involved, of folk from different traditions, of those previously involved only in single issue campaigns such as Extinction rebellion, Palestine Solidarity, 'Me Too'. So, we have to be open. And inclusive, too, of comrades who have come through and are active in other traditional forms of working-class organisation such as in Marxist and left social democrat parties, in strike committees and actions and occupations, in class mobilisations. We must join, work, together with traditional forms of working-class organisation, the trade unions locally and nationally and internationally - never forgetting that the working class is Black, brown, white, multi-faith and none, male, female, LGBTQ for example.

And must be open to new people, forms of organisation, ways of campaigning and embrace. Our campaign in Brighton and Hove was joyous, kind, embracing, and effective.

### **About the Author**

Dave Hill is a veteran Marxist activist. From a poor working-class family, he has fought 13 elections in Brighton and Hove, firstly for Labour, then for TUSC, the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition. He is a former Labour Group Leader, NATFHE elected regional trade union chair, decade long trade union rep/`shop steward`. He has worked as a carpenter's labourer with his family, as a betting shop board marker, part-time international political photojournalist, teacher in schools and prison, and latterly, as a professor, writer, editor, organiser. There is a wiki on him at [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dave\\_Hill\\_\(politician\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dave_Hill_(politician)).

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*International Journal of Educational Policies*

ISSN: 1307-3842

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