

4 CHEEKY REASONS TO JOIN THE LABOUR PARTY

by James McAsh

Socialists in the UK who want to join a political party should join Labour. They should not be uncritical, nor have false expectations, but they should join nonetheless. Here are four arguments for this, starting with the least important and ending with the most:

TACTICS

First Past the Post is rubbish, but we cannot just pretend that it does not exist. A moderate national swing from Labour to, for instance, the Greens could result in no more Green MPs, but dozens of Labour seats lost to the Tories.

Disaster!

EFFICIENCY

As far as efficiency is concerned activists who want to elect a left-wing MP will have greater success for the expenditure of less time and energy in Labour. The task of the Labour left is simply to influence the few hundred voters involved in each constituency selection process. To achieve the same in a left-of-Labour party the left must recruit 10,000-20,000 Labour voters to win the seat. Electing the next Kate Osamor, Clive Lewis or Cat Smith (all elected in 2015) will be much easier than electing the next Caroline Lucas.

SURE THE LABOUR LEADERSHIP IS RIGHT-WING, BUT CAN YOU TRUST THE OTHERS

TO STAY LEFT WHEN IN POWER?

Green and Left Unity manifestos are obviously to the left of Labour. But this is not a like-for-like comparison. Small parties like these face far fewer right-wing pressures. What is to stop them moving to the right as they get bigger? The only thing is their members, but as their membership grows, the more radical members will surely find themselves in an ever-shrinking minority.

This is not mere speculation. The Greens' record speaks for itself. The two most successful Green Parties in Europe are in Ireland and Germany. The former implemented austerity and the latter took the country to war in Afghanistan. Closer to home, the only Green-led council in the UK, Brighton, has slashed jobs and public services. A common rejoinder to this is that the Labour Party fares no better in government. I agree: the left should be critical and put pressure on the Labour leadership. But if a Green administration is not substantially to the left of Labour then why waste the energy needed to elect it?

WHAT ABOUT CLASS STRUGGLE?

Despite its many weaknesses, Labour remains the collective expression of the

trade unions. The unions hold just under 50% of votes at party conference, and provide the great bulk of the party's income. The problem is that they don't use this power!

A defeat of the Labour Party would be a serious blow for working-class political expression. Joining a left-of-Labour party is a tempting option. You are surrounded by people with fairly left-wing politics and you will not be embarrassed by an unpleasant record in government. By contrast, the work in the Labour Party is often not rewarding. You have to engage with unpleasant ideas like dog-whistle immigration policies, the 'deserving' and 'undeserving' poor, and military adventures overseas. But these reactionary ideas are current amongst the population in general and socialists must challenge them.

If you think that bourgeois democracy can work and that the job of the left is simply to win ideological battles, then join the Greens. But if you are a socialist, and believe that class-struggle is central, then participation in the Labour Party should be a crucial, if uncomfortable, part of your political activity.



JOIN LCFE ON JUNE 20

by Rida Vaquas,
Young Labour U19's Officer

Young Labour has officially voted unanimously to endorse and organise a bloc for the "End Austerity Now" demonstration on June 20th.

The motion was proposed by an LCFE activist and was met with surprisingly little opposition, showing the strength of left-winged organisation recently. Now it's time to take that strength to the streets.

LCFE will be marching there and you should join us. We cannot passively stand by and let a party founded by workers become opposed to their interests by parroting the Tory line. It's our job to make it into an opposition that fights and resists.

We're not marching simply to end austerity, we're marching as a way to disseminate a socialist political message. A strong LCFE presence there will raise the profile of free education struggle within Young Labour, a site that the Left has been making strong inroads into, and help build links between Young Labour and the broader free education movement. (Interestingly our old friends NOLS voted against supporting the demo at NUS Exec but for it at Young Labour National Committee. Why the change of heart?)

Find the LCFE Bloc on Facebook:
on.fb.me/1dOQJGy



"U wot m8?" - Liz Kendall

LIZ KENDALL IS WRONG

by Rida Vaquas

Liz Kendall, in a speech setting out her stall for Labour leader, stated that "early years will be my priority as leader, not cutting university tuition fees". So concerned is Kendall about early years that she backs the benefit cap, despite it plunging 40,000 children into poverty.

Kendall is wrong to counterpose the two; the struggle for free education cannot be separated from the struggle against an unequal education system. You could even say such a message is anti-aspirational. Abolishing fees is a priority because it makes university financially

possible for many, including part time students whose numbers have dropped since the fee increase. Abolition of fees goes beyond students, it marks an end to a marketised education system which exploits the workers Labour is meant to represent, where workers are paid under Living Wage and are on zero hour contracts. Its end will be a victory of labour over capital, it is an aspect of building a society where everyone can fulfil their potential. Free education and not free schools is what could show Labour to be the party of the future. LCFE will continue to agitate within the party for our education pledge.

A BRITISH SYRIZA?

by Liam McNulty, Unite member & LCFE

Since the exciting rise of SYRIZA in Greece, and other left-of-social democratic forces across Europe, some socialists in the UK have been agitating for the formation of a "British SYRIZA".

A vigorous left-wing party would be welcome in politics but all too often, discussions about the (greatly exaggerated) "death of social democracy" rest on over-simplistic comparisons between the structure of the labour movement here and in countries such as Greece. SYRIZA was not just "declared" overnight to fill a political "space" but came from long and patient preparation, grouped around a core with deep roots in the country's labour movement.

There has been a flurry of agitation in recent years along the lines that if only the unions disaffiliate from the Labour Party, a new left party could be built.

Much of this is wishful thinking which ignores the reality of our current labour movement. The problem with the unions is not that they are linked to the Labour Party, but that they

do not use their political leverage (50% of the votes at party conference, representation in branches, constituency parties and bodies such as the National Policy Forum) to fight for their own policies. Unite was given the opportunity at the last National Policy Forum to vote for an emergency anti-austerity budget against Ed Balls' proposals for austerity-lite. Did it vote for its own anti-austerity policies? No, it voted with Balls!

The problem with the unions is the lack of democratic members' control over their political structures. Without greater trade union democracy, and an organised grassroots counterweight to the union leaders, these problems will simply be reproduced in any relationship between the unions and political parties - Labour, a "new left party", or otherwise. Getting real, if the Unite leadership continues to back Andy Burnham over Jeremy Corbyn, how on earth can such a leadership be expected to break from Labour and found a "British Syzira" or anything like it? We need to demand our unions stop posturing and start fighting, including in politics - not limited to, but including in, the Labour Party.



Follow us on Twitter (@Labour4FreeEd) and Facebook (search Labour Campaign for Free Education)