

# Chamberlain and the November Elections

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THE GRAVE WAR tension in Europe will hang like a dark shadow over all the activities in preparation for the November municipal elections this year, but it will not hide the fact that the foreign and home policy of the Chamberlain Government are of the same pattern, threatening the lives and interests of the British people. The dominant group behind Chamberlain, and in particular the Beaverbrook press, is not slow to recognise that it is comparatively easy to persuade the "man in the street" to keep clear of foreign events and devote attention rather to his "own business."

Faced with the prospect of a further slump and a new threat to attack the social services, the campaign for the November elections will raise issues which can make clear the fact that it is precisely on the backs of the British people that Chamberlain aims to place the burdens and consequences of his pro-Fascist foreign policy. The immense cost of increased armaments, brought about by this ruinous foreign policy, will not fall on the rich capitalists and landlords. Chamberlain aims to impose this burden on the shoulders of working men and women and people of small means. At a time when speed up in the factories and long periods of unemployment calls for an extension of the social services, the Chamberlain group intends to cut down the budgets of the local authorities.

### *Social Services*

Two-thirds of the national budget goes towards financing measures for war. The main bulk of the money expended by local authorities is for social services. The Chamberlain Government is now out to rob the local authorities in order to provide more money for war, and by doing so strikes a blow against every working class home and the hard-pressed middle class.

The main issue for the Labour Movement and all progressive people for the November elections is the maintenance and extension of the social services. More school children need to be fed in the schools, better facilities for education and increased maintenance grants, more maternity hospitals and nursery schools, more parks and swimming pools, and better provision for public health.

### *Air Raid Precautions*

The foreign policy of the Chamberlain Government is provoking

war, but while there is no limit to the new financial estimates to provide arms, it refuses to provide adequate protection to civilians from air raids and is crippling the efforts of local authorities to plan effective schemes for the protection of the people. It aims, not to protect the people, but to get military control of the civilian population.

The people want adequate protection against the dangerous menace of air raids which the ruinous policy of Chamberlain has brought to the homes of the British people. They want proper bomb-proof shelters, the best gas masks that science can provide, adequate preparation for evacuation from densely populated areas, and democratic control of all schemes for air raid precaution.

#### *Public Works*

Even in face of the prospect of a new slump the Chamberlain Government is not only preventing the development of public works but actually bringing pressure on local authorities to slow down on the existing plans, on the plea that money is needed for more armaments. The assistance to the Distressed Areas is a tragic farce, and the number of men taken on in the new industries in these areas does not compensate for one-third of the increase in unemployment since last year.

The people demand a big increase in public work schemes, not only because this would provide work for the unemployed, but also because it would improve social amenities, safeguard public health, and help to lighten the lot of the working people as a whole.

#### *Housing*

Working-class housing is one of the biggest scandals of British civilisation. The most recent survey of housing conditions, though limited by the low standards set by a reactionary Government, reveals that no less than 341,554 working-class dwellings in England and Wales are overcrowded. In Scotland no less than one-fourth of the total dwellings examined, 258,987 out of 1,146,534, were overcrowded.

Government housing schemes are not able to keep pace with the increased overcrowding, still less with the need for new housing development. The slum clearance schemes are proceeding at a snail's pace, and even so provide almost as much loot for the land profiteers as they do in assisting working people in getting better houses.

The people want more houses at lower rents. Instead of reducing housing grants to local authorities and forcing them to abandon their schemes or restrict their scope, the people want more and bigger housing schemes. They want to maintain the restrictions on rent increases and demand more power to local authorities to put a stop to the rent racketeers.

#### *Poor Law Relief*

Apart from nearly two million registered unemployed, over one million are on poor law relief. The latest official figures (Municipal Year

Book, 1938) reveal that while the number on poor law relief was 7 per cent. less in 1937 than the previous year, the amount paid out was reduced by 30 per cent.

No matter what aspect of local government work is examined, the one obstacle to progress and advancement is the policy of the Chamberlain Government. Through the Derating Act which gives 75 per cent. exemption to industry and total exemption to agriculture, millions have been put into the pockets of rich landlords and big capitalists. It is the working people and the hard-pressed middle class who have to foot the bill.

Local authorities all over the country are finding from their own experience that the National Government is the main barrier to the expansion of the social services and the betterment of the people. And this is not confined to Labour authorities. Through the system of block grants, centralised control, etc., the Chamberlain policy is a menace to the democratic independence of all local authorities.

#### *Make the Rich Pay*

Unity of Communists and Labour in the November elections to win more Labour majorities, and joint action to return Labour and Communist candidates, can be a big step forward to bring about the defeat of the Chamberlain Government. Labour can lead the fight to make the rich pay for increased social services, better housing, increased scales of poor law relief, and to ensure more effective air raid precautions.

The fight for this minimum programme will bring out to the light of day the policy of those who are the agents of the Chamberlain Government within the local authorities and those who are really fighting in the best interests of the people.

Labour can win hundreds of new seats. But this is not enough. There are scores upon scores of local authorities not yet won for Labour which can be brought into a mighty movement of resistance to the policy of the National Government.

Labour can win new majorities in scores of places. But the pressure of events and the menace of the British people makes it a race against time, and the time is too short to wait for Labour majorities on every local authority. Labour can give the lead to bring even the non-Labour local authorities into action in defence of the people.