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March 2014 ★ Donation – £1 suggested ★ Issue 377

Monthly paper of the British section of the League for the Fifth International

New world disorder



Right Sektor in show of strength



Right wing protesters in Caracas prepare to overthrow Chavista government in Venezuela

By Dave Stockton

THE TECTONIC PLATES of the world order, established after the collapse of the USSR in 1991, are shifting again, producing the political equivalents of earthquakes and tsunamis.

Across the globe there are threats of economic sanctions between major powers which our rulers admit could make a train crash of the fragile economic recovery. There are threats of civil wars – even a new cold war.

And let's not forget the inevitable result of such a period – revolutions and counter-revolutions.

Recent events in the Middle East, East and South East Asia, in sub-Saharan Africa and in Latin America show that the

era of the single superpower and self-appointed world policeman is over. A new period of sharpening global inter-imperialist conflict has opened up. It represents the beginnings of an attempted re-division of the world.

This re-division can only take place at the expense of the old and overfed powers: the USA, the Franco-German led European Union, Britain and Japan. It can only benefit the younger imperialist powers emerging from the downfall of Communism: China, Russia and the aspiring powers like Brazil and India.

This does not mean that aggression comes only or mainly from the lean and hungry powers – though our rulers here in the West, and their media pres-

ent it thus. Quite the opposite in fact. The USA and Europe fear the “peaceful” penetration of China into areas long reserved for their plunder - South Asia, Africa and Latin America.

Rising tensions

They are “getting their retaliation in first” by trying to surround Russia and China. Part of this is the USA’s “pivot to the Pacific” and its attempts to reduce its commitments in the Middle East and Afghanistan. The humiliating snub it received in Syria in 2013, the anti-US left populist regimes in Latin America, China’s courting of various African states have made the world policeman mad as hell.

So much so that in Ukraine it has blatantly aided the break-

ing and entering of a sovereign state, using fascist gangs as its agents. In doing so it uncereemoniously rubbished an EU-brokered compromise because it would have insufficiently excluded and humiliated Putin.

But the coup has precisely given the Russian President a pretext to make an unjustified grab for the Crimea. Certainly Putin’s imperialism is no better than Obama’s, Cameron’s or Merkel’s, as his massive support for the bloody Assad regime in Syria shows.

But at the same time as Obama and Kerry are waxing righteous about Putin’s aggression and threatening him with sanctions, they are fomenting violent right wing demonstrations in Venezuela and remain silent about Egyptian coup

maker, Field Marshal Abdel Fattah el-Sisi’s killing of well over a thousand Muslim Brotherhood demonstrators.

The working class is an international class – one which cannot fight for its own emancipation if it subordinates itself to either bloc, or any of the imperialist powers, or for that matter the capitalist ruling classes of the smaller nations.

Class independence is critical. It is also critical to recognise that in times like these we are not decades away from wars and revolutions; we cannot sink into the comfy armchairs of reformism or “broad” electoralist parties. Revolutionary times demand revolutionary parties.

We face a new period of renewed economic crises and inter-imperialist clashes, and

inevitably of wars and revolutions. We cannot delude ourselves that they will stop short at the channel and allow Britain to maintain a splendid isolation. However senile, British imperialism is a world exploiter and a world warmonger.

Above all revolutionaries will have to warn the working class to learn how to tell the difference between legitimate democratic uprisings against tyrannical regimes like those of the Arab Spring in 2011 and in Syria today, and counter-revolutions masquerading as revolutions, like that in the Ukraine.

We will have to remember that our main enemy is at home and to thwart its calls for sanctions that lead inexorably to trade wars, cold wars and eventually hot wars.

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Where we stand

The capitalists' property must be expropriated, with not a penny paid in compensation.

Capitalism must be abolished across the globe and a world without class division, state repression or the oppression of women, subject races and nations, must be created. That is what revolutionary socialists call communism.

All power must pass from the capitalist elite into the hands of democratic councils of delegates from the working class, the peasantry and the poor directly elected by the masses and subject to instant recall. These councils must be supported by the armed working class and its allies.

The resistance of the exploiters must be broken by the force of millions acting together in a social revolution. Armed workers must forcibly break up the police and army that exist to support the rule of private property.

All production and distribution must be organised democratically and sustainably, without private ownership and the blind and brutal dictatorship of market forces.

Social inequality and the underdevelopment of whole continents must be overcome through the planned allocation of humanity's resources: raw materials, means of transportation, communication, technology and labour.

Imperialism, the highest and most violent stage of capitalism, means the exploitation of billions in all countries, it means blockades, invasions and occupations.

We support all resistance to imperialism and its agents and demand an end to the occupation of Afghanistan and Iraq. We demand the withdrawal of all British troops from abroad

including from Northern Ireland. We demand the dissolution of Nato and all imperialist pacts.

We support the Palestinians' struggle to free their homeland from Zionist occupation and to create a single country "from the river to the sea", in which Arabic and Hebrew speaking citizens can live in freedom and equality.

There is only one road to this freedom. It is the road of class struggle and revolution, the fight against all forms of exploitation and oppression.

We demand equal rights for minorities, an end to all racist discrimination and an end to the lies of the racists in the mass media, which whip up violence against black people and other oppressed communities and ethnic groups. We fight against all immigration controls: they are inherently racist.

We fight for women's liberation: from the burden of childcare and domestic labour, which must be socialised; from rape, physical and mental abuse, from unequal pay and discrimination at work.

Women alone must control when and whether they have children, not the state or the churches. This includes defending and extending the right to free abortion and contraception on demand.

Lesbians, gay men and transgender people must be defended against harassment on the streets, at work and in the schools. They must have equal legal rights to marry and bring up children.

We fight the oppression of young people and demand an end to their harassment by the police, the government and the press. Young workers should have equal pay and equal rights with other workers.

We fight for free, universal education, under the control of students, teachers and other education workers themselves.

We fight for an autonomous, revolutionary socialist youth movement.

We fight the catastrophe of climate change, resisting corporations which pollute the earth, governments that refuse to take action against the emission of greenhouse gases, and policies which put the profits of big oil, the auto industry and the power generators before the very survival of our species.

We oppose reformism and the pro-capitalist policies of the Labour Party. Capitalism cannot be reformed via elections and peaceful parliamentary means; it must be overthrown by the masses through force.

We oppose the control of the trade unions by unaccountable bureaucrats. Union members should have full democratic control. All officials must be regularly elected, and subject to instant recall; they must earn the average pay of the members they claim to represent. A rank and file movement to carry out this transformation.

In the fight against austerity, we call for a united anti-austerity movement pledged to oppose every cut, for local councils of action, and for mass industrial and direct action, up to and including a general strike to halt the assault on the NHS, the welfare state and education and to kick out the coalition.

We fight for a workers' government based on the fighting organisations of the working class and the socially oppressed.

We propose the unity of all revolutionary forces in Britain to build a new working class revolutionary party. Workers Power is the British section of the League for a Fifth International. It fights for a world party organised across national boundaries on a programme for world revolution.

Stop the 'hospital closure clause'

By Dara O'Cogaidhin

THE SAVE LEWISHAM Hospital Campaign brought about one of the most significant defeats for this government to date – a judicial review in July ruled the government's decision to close the hospital as unlawful. This was following months of mass protests and campaigning work within the community.

But before the appeal could even be heard, the Tories tabled an amendment to the Care Bill in the House of Lords that would legitimise the decision to close Lewisham Hospital. A new clause was inserted by Health Secretary Jeremy Hunt after he was deemed to have acted beyond his powers in trying to cut the hospital A&E and maternity services.

Clause 119 (renumbered from Clause 118) of the Health and Social Care Bill, dubbed the "Hospital Closure Clause" by campaigners, would give the Health Secretary unprecedented powers to impose fast-track closures and downgrade any hospital, regardless of how well it is performing and even if local people and staff disagree. The clause would strip away protections that allowed Lewisham Hospital campaigners to overturn the closure.

The new legislation would allow the government-appointed Trust Special Administrator (TSA), who takes over a financially failing NHS trust, to make recommendations to reconfigure services that affect providers across the whole region. Under the TSA regime, recommendations can be made and submitted to the Health Secretary for agreement through a deliberately speeded up process with minimal consultation with commissioners, staff, patients or the wider community.

The usual requirement for plans to go through local authority panels will be scrapped, as is the commitment for Clinical Commissioning Groups (CCGs) to consult the population they serve.

One reason why NHS campaigners are so fearful of these new powers is that there is a very real chance that increasing numbers of hospitals may come under its remit, as financial pressures on trusts increase. In its last Quarterly Monitoring Report, the King's Fund found that 30



per cent of non-foundation trusts and 11 per cent of foundation trusts are planning a deficit for this financial year. These NHS trusts are deemed to be "failing" due to unaffordable private finance initiative (PFI) debts.

Dr David Wrigley from the British Medical Association is no doubt about Clause 119's menacing potential: "It means no hospital in England is safe. It allows the closures of hospitals if it suits the higher powers and the main reasons may well be financial when it should be a clinically based decision. It's effectively a hospital closure clause; it's an affront to democracy."

Privatisation

Clause 119 amounts to privatisation via the backdoor and threatens the provision of medical services. The fundamental principles of the NHS, as a public provider of free universal healthcare, are under sustained attack. In the past two years £11 billion worth of the NHS has been put up for sale, a third of NHS walk-in centres have been closed, 10 per cent of A&E units have been shut and over 35,000 staff has been axed.

The Health and Social Care Act has given foundation trusts the "freedom" to expand their private patient services to as much as 50 per cent of their income; one in eight has already opened up new private treatment facilities since the legislation was passed.

By opening every corner of the NHS to "any qualified provider", private consortia will cherry-pick hospitals services in search of profits. Clinical commissioning groups are forced to

tender for services, with contracts going to private companies that undercut the NHS and provide services as "loss leaders" to get a foothold in the healthcare market. Control of the health service is being handed to unaccountable private firms whose modus operandi is to maximise profit, not serve patients.

The Labour Party, which aggressively pimped PFI projects and foundation trusts to encourage "competition" while in power, has pledged its opposition to Clause 119. It has also promised to repeal the Health and Social Care Act if returned to power. However, the EU has just passed new rules on public sector procurement. The launch of the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP) last year will give the Act international legal backing and set the shift to privatisation in stone. Once it is made law, privatisation will be irreversible.

Scrap Clause 119

Roughly 150 people attended a demonstration against Clause 119 outside Parliament on 27 February and over 130,000 people have signed an online petition calling for it to be scrapped from the Care Bill. While this opposition is welcome, we can't rely on lobbying to knock the government back. Trade unions and NHS campaigners need to draw the necessary lessons from the successful struggle to keep open Lewisham Hospital. An organised campaign, including strike action, is needed to stop the dismantling and privatisation of the NHS.

The leadership of the unions has so far refused to initiate any industrial or direct action to save what remains of the NHS. Both Labour and Tory parties have played their part in undermining the NHS, but the union leadership remains committed to a strategy of "waiting for Labour".

We can't afford to wait. We need to organise the rank and file across the unions to take control and deliver action with the union leaders where possible, but without them where necessary. The TTIP, which outlaws any reversal of policy in privatisation, underlines why the left also needs to develop a consistent international socialist alternative to the pervading ideology of the market in our healthcare systems.

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Labour closes door to collective working class participation

A special conference in London voted by 86 per cent to approve constitutional changes that will massively reduce the number of union affiliated members in the party and curtail their rights in favour of more privileges for MPs. **Jeremy Dewar** asks, what will the changes mean for working class political representation?

ED MILIBAND has achieved his "Clause Four Moment", a rite of passage expected of every Labour leader, to gain the confidence of the capitalist class and the all-important billionaire media. Astonishingly, for all their bluff and bluster last autumn, union leaders voted by an even bigger margin, 96 per cent, to support the changes, with only the bakers' union BFAWU objecting.

Until now, unions affiliated to the party have paid a fee to subscribe a portion of their membership at £3 a head. Each union decided on the size of that portion and, through its conferences and executive committees, also decided which policies, candidates and elected representatives to support inside the party.

While the union bureaucracies controlled this process very tightly for the most part, it represented, nevertheless, one of the few remaining things linking Labour to the organised working class.

Although it was theoretically possible for workers to debate politics and fight for changes within the party, in practice, affiliation meant that individual members of the union did not regard themselves as members of the party. They never really discussed party policy or voted on it. This was the prerogative of their union leaders. That is why it was so difficult for the general secretaries to drum up opposition to Miliband's "reform".

Now, even this tenuous collective link has been severed and replaced with a much reduced and as yet untried

individual one for union members.

First, the decision over how many members to affiliate has been removed from the unions. Now, individual union members will have to agree to "opt in" to party membership. Everyone recognises that, after the last Labour government backed illegal wars, promoted privatisation and made cuts at local and national level, the number of affiliated members will fall dramatically as a result.

The GMB had already announced its decision to cut its affiliation fees from £1.2 million to £150,000 in anticipation of the change. Unite immediately followed suit, halving its contribution to £1.5 million.

Conservatives and Liberals alike, including those covert liberals who support and control the Labour Party, claim this is more democratic. Shouldn't an individual make his or her own decision? This might have some semblance of sense if all individuals were equal and disposed of equal resources. In fact, a tiny number of people have vast riches, which they can turn into political influence.

Billionaires and newspaper barons can and do manipulate party politics, often by merely hinting at where their donations may go. Some are brazen (and rich) enough to hedge their bets and donate to one, two, even three, parties. This represents their social weight, as owners of the proceeds of exploited labour, that is, capital.

Workers can only fight for their

interests by combining, as a class. Over the generations, workers have done this through their unions. But they have also realised that strikes and negotiations with their own bosses are insufficient to protect all their interests as a class.

They have had to enter the field of politics to establish things like the right of all, including women, to vote, to equal pay, to end overt racial discrimination, to create social housing, the NHS, universal free education, the right to organise in unions, to win health and safety at work, the right to abortion and to end legal punishment of gays.

That is why, over a century ago, the unions, under pressure from their socialist wing, created the Labour Party. Generation after generation they collected workers' hard earned money to pay for it. Without this, Labour could never have won majorities in parliament and local councils or achieved major social reforms and progressive political measures.

However, despite the famous Clause IV, which promised to establish common ownership of the means of production distribution and exchange, Labour has never been clearly and consistently committed to abolishing capitalism nor has it ever attempted to do so. In this sense, it has remained a bourgeois party, defending capitalism. But it has also been a working class reformist party, largely because of its collective ties to the unions.

Who benefits?

Miliband told the conference, "I don't want to break our links with the working people and the trade unions" and insisted he wanted to "bring people back into politics". Unite's Len McCluskey said the reforms would "start to take us down the road of involving more trade unionists in the business of the party".

In reality, the opposite is true.

First, affiliated members will not be expected to attend or listen to political debates in their unions. They will be atomised individuals, inevitably influenced more by the propaganda of the billionaire press and state-run broadcasting.

Second, they will not even be full members and will have no say in the selection of parliamentary candidates.

Third, the quota of MPs needed to back a leadership candidate has been increased from 12.5 per cent to 15 per cent; Miliband wanted it to be 20 per cent.

Fourth, any member of the public, whatever their political ideas, can become a "registered supporter" for £3 and take part in the election of the Leader of the Party. This dilution of membership will give even more influence to right wing media and "celebrities".

The whole package will mean that union members, and trade unions as a whole, will be unable to play a role in selecting MPs, and MPs loyal to the unions will be increasingly unable to

challenge for the leadership. As a result, the leadership will be even more immune from working class pressure than it has been since Blair began his attempt to undo what he called the "tragedy" of the formation of the Labour Party in 1900.

Finally, there is the question of money. Miliband boasted, "I took a risk, not least with the party finances". That risk could be all smoke and mirrors given the rank cowardice of the union leaders and their willingness to hand over their members' money in return for regular ritual public humiliation.

Union leaders, like McCluskey and the GMB's Paul Kenny, may have reduced affiliation fees, but they have made it clear that huge one-off donations will fill any financial black hole.

Also, Labour's disgraced, right wing have come running back. Lord Owen, one of the Gang of Four, who split the party in 1981 to form the SDLP, thereby ensuring Thatcher a second term, immediately donated £7,500. According to the New Statesman, Tony Blair is to make a "large donation" out of the £75 million he has acquired since leaving office seven years ago.

Our job now, as it has been for over a decade, is to get the unions to mobilise their members democratically to build a socialist alternative to Labour and to turn off the cash taps on Miliband and his middle class sponsors.

Police spy on Stephen Lawrence family

By Andy Yorke

REVELATIONS ABOUT police spying on the family of the murdered black teenager Stephen Lawrence have backed the Tory-led coalition government into a corner, forcing Home Secretary Theresa May to agree to a public inquiry, admitting that the "full truth has yet to emerge".

Stephen was murdered by a racist gang in 1993 in Eltham, London while waiting for a bus. His parents, Doreen and Neville Lawrence, had to campaign to force the Met to

investigate seriously, facing police indifference and outright racism all the way. Ultimately the family forced the 1998 Macpherson Inquiry into the police investigation, finding the Met "institutionally racist".

Spying on marriage

Now, evidence has emerged that Met Commander Richard Walton was involved in planting a spy in the family's campaign during that Inquiry, gathering "fascinating and valuable" evidence on their marriage.

The fake Independent Police



Complaints Commission has been forced to apologise for its 2006 report that the police had not withheld information on police corruption from Macpherson.

This is the latest in a series of revelations of police dirty tricks and infiltration, including climate change campaigns, the McLibel Two, the Hillsborough disaster, and the framing of miners during the "Battle of Orgreave". Spies even fostered fake relationships and fathered children with their targets.

The Tory-Lib Dem coalition, the Crown Prosecution Service, the Lon-

don Met and other police forces have done everything they can to block freedom of information requests, slow down investigations and reduce the issue to individual allegations of wrongdoing.

Workers' inquiry

That's why anti-racist organisations, justice campaigns like those of the Lawrence family, Hillsborough and around deaths in custody, and the labour movement as a whole should come together and mount a working class inquiry into the police so we get justice, not a whitewash.

Is independent rank and file organisation the key to unlocking trade union potential?

In the last issue of *Workers Power*, Tim Nelson of the International Socialist Network (ISN) wrote an article in favour of building a rank and file movement. Andrew Bebbington, also of the ISN, has provided a thought-provoking response. This is just the sort of debate on vital questions of revolutionary programme and tactics that we need. **Jeremy Dewar** takes up some of his points

ANDREW BEBBINGTON makes some very interesting points in his article. Bureaucrats, resistance networks and struggle in post-industrial capitalism: a further comment on “rank and file” strategies (available at <http://bit.ly/P9p1YU>). While I would agree with a number of his positions, his overall conclusions are, in my view, flawed.

Working class today

Andrew characterises 21st century British capitalism as “post-industrial”, counterposing it to “the classic industrial ‘Fordist’ period up to the 1970s [where] workers could bring production to a grinding halt, at enormous cost to capitalist profitability”. The key to their victories is said to have been “a mass industrial, surplus-value producing workforce in Britain”.

By contrast, most workers in Britain today are either employed in “reproducing the system” or in “circulating commodities”, in “health, education, retail store work and social care”. An additional problem is the bosses’ ability to export production to countries with cheaper labour.

These trends are, of course, real and have been analysed many times before. However, industrial workers have never formed a majority of the British working class. Their highpoint was at 38 per cent of the workforce in the 1850s and 1860s, and service workers have outnumbered them since the 1870s. What is incontestable is the decline of British manufacturing industry, which has steadily reduced the number of industrial workers by about 70 per cent since the 1960s to just one in 10 workers today.

Other factors that compound these changes, not mentioned in Andrew’s article, are the growth of part-time workers (up from 5.1 million to 6.7 million since 1992), temporary workers (up from 1.3 million to 1.6 million) and self-employed and in reality “self-exploiting” workers (up from 3.5 million to 4.4 million). The Department for Business, Innovation & Skills estimates that about 2.3 million workers are in “precarious employment”, that is low-pay, low-status, low-security



jobs, of which one million are on the infamous zero hours contracts.

Unionisation

Socialists and trade unionists need to turn to these workers if they are to revive the unions. But who will make this turn? Despite isolated examples of trade union officials (the “bureaucracy”) providing resources, like the fast food workers’ campaigns underway in the USA and now here, it is rank and file trade unionists that staff the campaigns and take the risks.

The massive leap in trade union membership in Britain during the 1970s was not simply down to huge, set-piece strikes by miners, car workers and builders. It was also because these “big battalions” inspired millions of unorganised workers to join unions and take action themselves. These were often women workers, often acting without regard to “officialdom”, and adopting the most militant tactics, like the flying picket, that they had seen their more male, more secure and better paid counterparts

in more traditional industries use to good effect.

It was due also to an informal and only partly “organised” shop stewards’ movement, inspired by syndicalists and by members of the Communist Party, and also of the three or four main far left groups. This helped to spread the shop steward model, dominant amongst production line workers, to white collar and public sector workers – teachers, civil servants, health workers, town hall staff – in the process driving union membership up to over 13 million, twice its present level.

Thus the great union membership surge of that decade was not due to the “left” union leaders, but primarily to what Labour leader Harold Wilson once infamously denounced as a “tightly knit group of politically motivated men” (and women!). Analogous conditions explain other great “forward marches by labour” in the 1890s, the 1910s and 1920s, etc.

Like so many tasks facing the working class in its historic struggle to over-

throw capitalism, we face this one again and again. Should we cede leadership of it this time around to the well-paid and barely accountable officials of the Service Employees International Union in the USA, or Unite the Union in the UK? Or should we take it on ourselves, like our parents’ and grandparents’ generations before us?

The Justice for Janitors and Cleaners campaigns of the 2000s notoriously made a dramatic splash and then quickly withered, largely because the workers were organised bureaucratically and undemocratically, their demands ignored once they were paying union dues. That is what we must avoid this time around. Unionisation drives must go on to educate and organise the new sectors in rank and file trade unionism, in militant tactics and crucially, in the struggle for their independence from the bureaucracy.

Workers’ strength

Andrew’s article associates the decline of manufacturing with a diminution of the ability of strikes to

hit the capitalists. He claims that, when it comes to service workers or the public sector, “dynamic of struggle is much less explosive, because it is not possible to “generalise the particular” in the hoped-for fashion”. Is this true though?

There may be fewer manufacturing and other “productive” workers than before, but they still play a crucial role in generating profits for UK plc. Grangemouth’s workers, for example, could have cut off the oil, gas and petrol supply for Scotland, the north-east of Ireland and northern England, even though there were only 1,370 of them (plus 2,000 contractors). That they didn’t was because they were poorly led, not because they lacked the capacity.

There are still 2.6 million factory workers in the UK, about the same number as the precarious. To them we can add 2.1 million construction workers, 4.9 million in hotel, retail and repair, 1.5 million in transport and storage, 2 million in accommodation and food services, and 1.1 million in financial services (all figures from the Office for National Statistics).

And it is wrong to suggest that workers involved in the “circulation of commodities” do not produce surplus value, let alone profit. To be realised as profit, surplus value must first be transferred from the sphere of production to that of exchange. How much would a pint of milk cost if you had to travel to a dairy farm in the country to buy it, instead of having an army of workers to deliver it to your high street? Capitalists derive a profit from this service; and interrupting this chain by withdrawing one’s labour interrupts their profit making.

It is also a mistake to downplay the effect on capital of strikes by teachers, hospital staff and transport workers. They are all essential for the reproduction of the labour of the working class, getting them to the workplace on time, healthy and educated enough to work. If they didn’t perform a vital role, why would the capitalists deduct so much from their profits through their state to keep them functioning? These workers too can force a “break

in the surplus-value flow that capital needs for profit-making" in a way comparable to the factory workers that Andrew agrees already do.

Public sector workers can also become a focal point for broader anticapitalist struggle. The fact that up to 2 million public service workers struck on 30 November 2011 should not be completely overshadowed by their leaders' dismal betrayals in the days, weeks and months that followed. Their strike was hugely popular and gave hope to millions beyond, linking up with the Sparks, students and the Occupy movement.

If this strike had been called on a more overtly political basis against austerity, poverty and job cuts, it could have mobilised far beyond its own ranks. If it had lasted more than a day, it could have slipped the control of the officials. In short, it could have brought down the govern-

ment. The problem was not the nature of the striking workers' function within capitalism, but of their misleadership; of their leaders' failure to turn this enormous potential into actual strength in struggle.

This is not to say that a ready-made vanguard of trade union militants already exists, held back only by a thin layer of bureaucrats. The low level of union membership (26 per cent), especially in the private sector (14 per cent) is one reason, as is the low level of strikes (363,000 days lost last year, and just 198,000 in 2012). At least as important is the weakening of the trade unions inside the Labour Party, of the Labour Party as however limited a vehicle for working class political demands, and finally of the far left.

A vanguard has to be politically conscious of its role within the working class, not just of its

industrial strength. To be victorious, it has to fuse its struggle with that of a revolutionary party. And as Andrew says, "we are as far away as ever" from this. But if it would be wrong to equate the trade union militants with the political vanguard, equally we cannot get away from the fact that the 6.2 million union members in Britain today are a key starting point for that fusion – and that the trade union bureaucracy is a major obstacle in our path.

The IS tradition

Andrew argues that "the pre-Thatcher concepts" of the rank and file movement cannot "guide our practice sufficiently on their own now – if they ever could". He counterposes a mixture of Broad Leftism, a rank and file approach where appropriate, working with the officials where possible and "social movement unionism". That

Andrew believes that this is an argument against the idea of a rank and file movement says much about the IS tradition's legacy in that sphere.

In the late 1970s, Tony Cliff's International Socialists (IS) took what Lenin would have called an economistic line when it came to work in the trade unions. They argued strongly against raising political slogans in the National Rank and File Movement, claiming that it would frighten off industrial militants. And this was despite all their banging on about building the revolutionary party, which in practice just meant joining IS and its successor, the Socialist Workers Party. The idea of involving the wider working class ("the community") at the heart of a strike movement, in debating its direction and in prosecuting its actions, was anathema to Cliffism and the IS tradition.

But not, however, to the Marxist tradition. The National Minority Movement, which was born in a period of retreat in the early 1920s, prepared trade union militants for an explicitly political general strike, led by political bodies in the form of councils of action, and warned that the official leadership of the TUC would have to be removed to achieve victory.

What does this mean today? It means that even in a period of retreat, and especially when activists are questioning how we got into this state, it is still both possible and necessary to agitate for and to take the first steps towards an independent rank and file movement. Independence of the union bureaucracy, an agency of compromise with capitalism within the workers' movement, is essential to achieving class independence and fighting class unity. As such it can contribute mightily

to solving the problem of the absence of a revolutionary party: that is, its emergence is one very important step towards one.

As with the young Communist Party of the 1920s, this will involve working with the officials wherever possible, and without them where necessary, but always warning that they have interests distinct from their members, and therefore that they will buckle at the vital moment.

Most importantly, the trade unions must be won to a political programme for the overthrow of the system, and not just for reforms. They must become fighting organisations for the whole class, not just of a section of workers. And for this reason the rank and file need to dissolve the bureaucracy and run the unions democratically, with no privileges for the officials.

Teachers: everyone out on 26 March

The National Union of Teachers has called a national strike in a continuing campaign to defend pay, pensions and conditions. NUT member **Bernie McAdam** argues that it needs to lead to harder hitting action

TEACHERS ARE right to feel angry. That's why thousands of schools will be closed on 26 March across England and Wales.

Our aim must be to use this one-day protest strike as a springboard for the extended strike action that is needed to stop the attacks on education workers and on the state schools system.

Pay and conditions

Teachers' pay has declined 15 per cent in real terms since the Tories came to power. Even the School Teachers' Review Body acknowledged this when it rebuffed Gove's recommendations for further attacks on pay and conditions.

Workload is excessive. Two out of five teachers leave in the first five years. According to a recent survey, a primary school teacher's average working week is 60 hours, while in secondary schools it is 56 hours.

In our strike over pensions two years ago, the union did ensure that teachers already over 50 could retire on a full pension at 60. However, this apparent concession (of something we already had!) came out of a major defeat. We now pay more in, get less when we retire and will retire later – at 68 for those just starting their



careers. And there are further increases in teachers' contributions this April.

Rolling back all these attacks will require the full force of the union's strength, and not puny concessions.

Academies

However, the attacks on pay, the divisive performance related pay schemes and opening the door to non-qualified teachers all have a purpose.

Education secretary Michael Gove is doing this to break the teaching unions, in order to transform comprehensive state education into a restored two

or three-tier system. Middle class parents who cannot afford private school fees will be able to send their kids to a selective academy, while the rest of us have to make do with bog standard schools based on the detested Secondary Moderns of the 1950s.

There are now 3,444 academies, including well over half the secondary schools in Britain. There were just 203 when the Coalition came to power. While previously it was Birmingham council that had the most schools to monitor with 450, the Department for Education, with its tiny and diminished work-

force, is supposed to keep tabs on thousands.

Profit

It cannot be done. So they, like the free schools, are effectively unsupervised. Nepotism, poor standards, selective practices that disadvantage working class students and profiteering all go unchallenged. Hundreds of thousands in taxpayers' money has been siphoned off to private companies like Mosaica Education, Shoreline and Subaru UK Ltd.

Action over pay, pensions and conditions must be seen in this wider context of defending

the universal right to a free, comprehensive and equal education for all, regardless of class, race or gender.

Action not talk

The NUT's last national strike was back in 2011. Nearly six months have flown by since the last regional action. This time the leadership of the National Association of Schoolmasters Union of Women Teachers (NASUWT) has backed down.

The NUT has quite rightly refused to wait for NASUWT, but we are still dragging our heels. The NUT had originally announced a national strike before Christmas, only to call it off on the promise of talks with Gove. Then we were promised a date before 13 February. Finally we have 26 March.

These delays are undermining our chances of victory. Gove has been perfectly frank that these "talks" are only to discuss the implementation of these changes.

The time for talking has gone: time now to escalate action beyond 26 March.

Rank and file

Gove will not concede on the government's strategic attack on state education. Making him do so will clearly mean

more than protest strikes every six months.

Rank and file teachers should demand that their leaders adopt a fighting strategy. Rapidly escalating action, up to and including an indefinite all out strike is what is needed.

Are the union leaders up for this course of action? No signs of that, so the rank and file need to fight for this from below. Joint strike committees that reach out to parents, students and other education workers should be formed in every school right away. They should link up on a district-wide basis and assert their democratic control of the strike. A rank and file network could then begin to challenge the stop-start tactics and offer a new, fighting lead.

Better to go down fighting than meekly watch our education service being smashed to smithereens. Sustained strike action could be a rallying point for teachers and all workers. Our whole class has a stake in a properly funded comprehensive system.

If we as teachers are seen as deadly serious about defending our pay and conditions and linking that to a fight to stop the break up of our comprehensive education system, then other workers and young people will rally to our banner too.

Next steps for the People's Assembly

By Dave Stockton

THE PEOPLE'S Assembly – founded on 22 June 2013 at a 4,000 strong rally in London – has, it seems, finally succeeded in establishing unity between the hitherto scandalously divided national anti-cuts movements.

Alongside the union leaders' craven refusal to mount any united prolonged and decisive industrial action, this had made resistance to the Con-Dem onslaught so ineffective that a period of demoralisation and retreat set in.

The People's Assembly contained the potential to stop this farce turning into the tragedy of the destruction of the welfare state.

However, the 2013 conference still showed most of the defects of its predecessors, having overcome only the organisational disunity.

It was a completely top-down – or rather top table – event, replete with assorted celebrities and with the “delegates” there only to provide the applause and whoops for the general secretaries, journalists, comedians and so on.

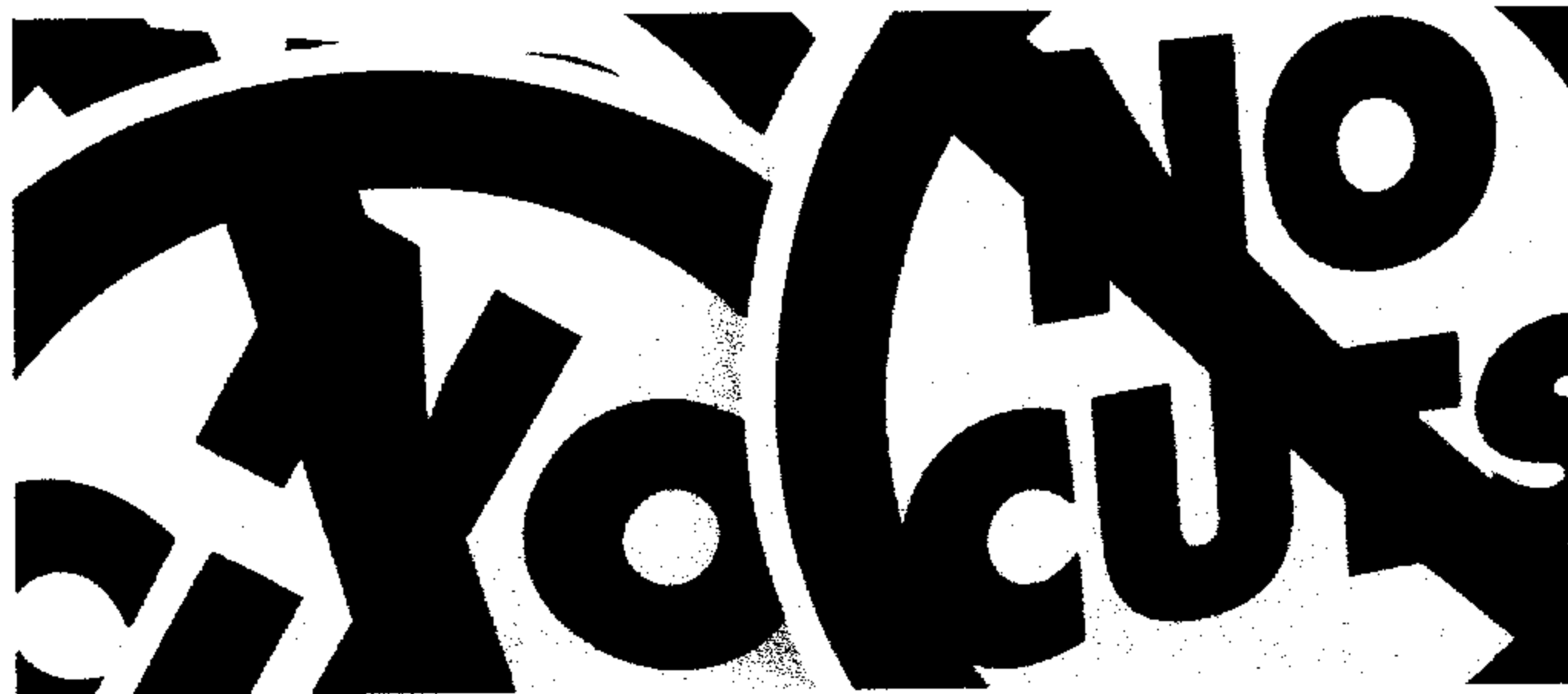
At the trade union session the organisers – the Communist Party of Britain, Socialist

Action and Counterfire – even removed the sole union militant, blacklisted construction worker Frank Morris from the speakers at the last minute. As Frank told me on the day, “They didn't want to risk hearing what I might say!”

Likewise, Ken Loach was taken off the final plenary for fear that he might call for a fighting alternative to Labour and promote Left Unity – which he did, but in a smaller venue away from the main hall.

Indeed no strategy emerged for overcoming the disunity and delays in action to halt the merciless onslaught from Osborne and Cameron, apart from a march past the Conservative Party conference in Manchester on 29 September and desultory acts of civil disobedience on 5 November.

Since then, the People's Assembly has organised a series of local and regional assemblies, in Glasgow, Manchester, Newcastle, Brighton, Bristol and elsewhere, some attracting substantial audiences, others less so, but all in the same format. “Team PA” is now sponsoring a series of demonstrations, stretching from Budget Day (19 March) in various cities and towns to a



national demonstration and festival on 21 June in London.

Clearly Stop the War is the model, hardly surprising given the political figures that gave us that (John Rees, Lindsey German and Andrew Murray) are all big players behind the scenes.

The problem is that while the People's Assembly has achieved a major branding success, it has not yet developed a strategy for halting the cuts or forcing out the government. In that respect it is also like Stop the War.

The unions, especially Unite, the political groups and the assorted celebrities who constitute its leadership do however have an unspoken alternative to mass action to drive out the Tories or frustrate their plans.

Keep on protesting, rallying, marching and then... vote Labour in 2015.

Meanwhile the cuts keep coming. Schools are “freed” from democratic local control; hospitals are trustified and forced by approaching bankruptcy to make savage cuts; the welfare system becomes a new Poor Law. And Labour weakens to breaking point its organic links with the unions, and pledges to act as a ratchet mechanism to preserve the Tory “reforms”, just as Blair did with Thatcher's in 1997.

Is this really the best we can do? Hold assemblies, rallies, marches and carnivals as we approach the tipping point where the destruction of the 1945 welfare state is complete?

Workers Power thinks not. But to abandon this fatally complacent strategy and adopt a course of action to stop the cuts, we need to debate the various alternative strategies. And then we need to decide what we are going to do.

A start would be if the People's Assembly adopted Lambeth Unison's proposal, stated here:

Conference notes

1. That Osborne has pledged £60 billion cuts over four years, on top of £50 billion cuts already implemented
2. That Cameron says he wants austerity “not just now, but permanently”
3. That the Labour Party is committed to keeping to the

Tories' spending plans for its first two years in office.

4. That these policies have resulted in a crisis of living standards

Conference believes

5. That the cuts can be stopped only by a campaign of sustained, mass strike action

6. That millions have already taken strike action

7. That sustained and escalating strike action, e.g. Hovis, has led to victories

8. That the TUC has voted for co-ordinated strikes and all a mid-week day of action against cuts

Conference resolves

9. To support every strike against cuts or to recover lost wages

10. To call on trade unionists, including and especially those union leaders who support the People's Assembly, to campaign for co-ordinated strike action up to and including a general strike

11. To hold special People's Assemblies across Britain to support this campaign with a view to drawing in representatives from neighbourhoods and workplaces who can spread the campaign and implement actions.

London Underground: strike forces management climb-down

By Peter Main

THE PROSPECT of a second two-day strike was enough to force London Underground (LU) to back down. Previously, they had intended to impose their “Fit for the Future” plan to close all ticket offices and cut nearly 1,000 jobs, without even the pretence of negotiation with the unions.

All the same, this is only a change of tactics by LU, and for the Rail, Maritime and Transport union (RMT) to claim “victory” is dangerously misleading. Worse, General Secretary Bob Crow made it clear that, for the union leadership, the purpose of the strikes was not to force the tube managers to drop the plan, but only to “look again in detail at all of the concerns we have raised about the impact of the cuts on our members and the services that they provide to Londoners”.

The following day Crow

made his priorities even clearer:

“There's nothing unusual about job losses. They happen from time to time with all types of different industries that we deal with as well. It's the nature of how you handle it.”

In other words, the bottom line for the union's leadership is defence of its role as a negotiator, not the defence of all its members' jobs.

Lost momentum

Agreeing to seven weeks of detailed, station-by-station talks is ultimately a very minor concession. Management may even conclude that a few of the very busiest stations do need ticket offices but, meanwhile, all their preparations for the implementation of “Fit for the Future” will carry on in the background.

The ultimate threat, of driverless trains has not been derailed in the slightest.

In return for this, the RMT has lost all the momentum from



the two-day strike at the beginning of February that clearly had a much greater impact than management had expected. In particular, the hoped-for public hostility to the strike did not materialize. Even the ever-loyal BBC found it difficult to find

“angry commuters” willing to side with LU and Mayor Boris Johnson.

Seven weeks of meetings with management allows them redouble their efforts to train scabs and prepare “public opinion”. It effectively leaves union

members in the dark, wondering if there will be a serious fight. Inevitably some will think the changes are unavoidable and that they would do better to take voluntary redundancy.

Compromise?

Nor is there any guarantee that seven weeks will be enough to complete negotiations. In an interim report, Bob Crow explained, “a station by station review of ticket offices is being undertaken, but it is doubtful whether the seven weeks will prove sufficient to fully enable this.”

He also indicated a possible basis for a compromise:

“The company has gone as far to accept that the existing grading structure can facilitate the introduction of new technology.”

Although the same report says, “the seven weeks of talks should not be considered as some kind of rest or “cooling

off” period”, it also makes clear that the trigger for further strike action will not be job losses, but “any further attempt to impose change from above”.

No job cuts

Fears that LU has a strategy to break the unions are not a conspiracy theory. The attempt to impose “Fit for the Future” shows what management wants. As we go to press, reports that they are about to commission driverless trains shows the scale of their plans.

Measured against that, suspending strike action in return for “talks” is dangerous misleadership. To regain the initiative and mobilise all LU workers, whether they are members of RMT, ASLEF (which scabbed on the February strike), or TSSA, militants must organise themselves independently to insist that strike action will be resumed unless any threat to jobs is dropped.

Kyiv: regime rules under fascist whip

UKRAINE

By KD Tait

POWER COMES from the barrel of a gun. The counterrevolutionary regime composed of thieves, fascists and hypocrites in Kyiv has secured the temporary loyalty of the fascist militias by conceding key levers of state power to Svoboda ("Freedom") and Pravy Sektor (the "Right Sector").

For the first time since the Second World War, fascists have come to power through an insurrectionary movement. The posts now occupied by unreconstructed fascists were claimed as their reward for their vanguard role in the armed overthrow of the government of President Viktor Yanukovich.

The armed and well-organised fascists operating under the umbrella of the Right Sector acted as the shock troops of the Euromaidan "revolution". It was these forces that rejected the EU-sponsored "peace" deal.

Instead they summoned reinforcements from their police allies in Lviv, surrounded the parliament in Kyiv and ensured the appointment of a government that locked out the liberals in favour of a stitch up between ultranationalists and open fascists.

This was the result of the USA's successful efforts to frustrate the plans of German imperialism and its Ukrainian client Vitali Klitschko, whose Ukrainian Democratic Alliance for Reform received nothing in the anti-democratic distribution of spoils. The US imperialists would rather have "their" people in power – even if that means getting into bed with the fascists of Svoboda.

The fascist ministers include Andriy Parubiy, commander of the Maidan self-defence forces and a founding member of Svoboda. He was appointed Secretary of the National Security and Defence Council, which presides over the defence ministry and the armed forces.

His deputy secretary is Dmytro Yarosh, leader of the Right Sector coalition and a former mercenary who fought alongside the Chechen resistance.

Key posts have been granted to Svoboda members Oleksandr Sych (deputy prime minister), Ihor Tenyukh (defence), Serhiy Kvit (education), Oleh Makhnitsky (Prosecutor General), Ihor Shvaika (agriculture) and Andriy Mokhnyk (ecology).

Right Sector commandant Stepan Kubiv is the new chairman of the National Bank of Ukraine. Dmytro Bulatov and Tetiana Chornovol, both linked to the anti-Semitic and ultranationalist paramilitary organisation Ukrainian National Assembly – Ukrainian National Self Defence have been rewarded with the Youth and Sports ministry and the government's new "anti-corruption committee" respectively.

The social crisis in Ukraine has

allowed the two wings of Ukrainian fascism – the street fighters and the politicians – to capture key levers of state power.

The government has committed to elections by 25 May. The fascists, however, have not wasted a single day in driving through as much of their agenda as possible.

In their first hours in office they released dozens of their imprisoned comrades and tabled motions to terminate the official status of Russian and other minority languages, to rescind Crimean autonomy and to outlaw the Communist Party of Ukraine (KPU). With these actions they must bear a heavy responsibility for provoking a wave of pro-Russian chauvinism in the East and particularly in the Crimea.

The presence of so many fascists in the self-appointed "transitional government" is no accident. The growing desperation of millions impoverished by the economic crisis, the leading role played by the fascists during the Maidan protests and the manoeuvring between the rival EU and US imperialists has catapulted them into a position where their demands for a share of state power could not be ignored.

Their further advance, either within the state machine or by a further surge in the elections, casts the shadow of social catastrophe over the country. Already it has created the prospect of civil war.

Maidan's fascist vanguard

From the outset, the Euromaidan movement mobilised support on the basis of a reactionary appeal to chauvinist and nationalist ideas among the Ukrainian-speaking population concentrated in the west of the country.

With the Neo-Nazi "14/88" and White Power icons emblazoned on their shields, flying the red and black flag of Stepan Bandera's Nazi-collaborationist Ukrainian Insurgent Army, the fascists emerged as the most powerful force within the Euromaidan movement.

While it was possible to mobilise generalised opposition to the deeply unpopular Yanukovich regime, the influence of the far right and its identification with nationalist icons like Stepan Bandera immediately alienated much of the Russian-speaking East of the country.

It should not be forgotten that far more Ukrainians fought in the Soviet Army and partisan formations than in Bandera's pro-Nazi auxiliaries, and that however gross and repulsive were Stalinism's crimes in Ukraine (the famine, the purges, the NKVD's slaughter of nationalist prisoners in 1941 and the mass deportation of Tatars), those of the Nazi occupiers will never be erased from their consciousness.

The discipline of the fascists and the

absence of an equally disciplined left allowed the fascists to drive organised progressive activists out of the Maidan demonstrations, attacking feminists, trade unionists and anarchists and ensuring their physical and political hegemony over the movement in the west and centre of the country.

The fascist militias of Svoboda (whose leader Oleh Tyahnybok was one of the three main speakers of the Euromaidan movement) and the Right Sector formed the vanguard of the uprising. Also prominent were Spilna Sprava ("Common Cause") and the so-called Afghantsy (Afghan veterans).

The fascists consolidated their position within Euromaidan. They used their combative armed gangs, first to defend the square, and then to go onto the offensive, seizing government buildings to use as bases for further advances, then seizing police stations and barracks, and then attacking Communist Party and trade union offices. In short, they used their position to arm themselves and to prepare their supporters for the seizure of power.

They soon conquered a place in the top echelons of the protest leadership. Tyahnybok shared the platform in Independence Square alongside opposition leaders Vitali Klitschko and Arseniy Yatsenyuk. He received the embrace of US Senator and Republican Presidential candidate John McCain.

Imperialists play with fire

The EU-brokered peace deal collapsed when the fascists and the mutinous police refused to accept a government of national salvation, seeing their own militias as a living embodiment of salvation from Russian imperialism.

The EU's attempt to bring about this compromise was intended to stymie the USA and achieve an outcome favourable to German imperialism. It had of course an element of sound political calculation: to keep Ukraine together as a state requires a regime that does not completely exclude or alienate the 30 to 40 per cent of the country's population who are Russian speakers.

But the deal, which included disarmament of both the police and the militias, came too late, after the shootings of protesters. Opposition leaders were booed off when they appeared on the stage to announce it. The militias refused to hand over their weapons; instead they bussed in reinforcements Lviv, which had already declared independence from the Kyiv government.

The deal, which aimed to undermine the influence of the organised far right in the transition by promoting Klitschko as an alternative "clean pair of hands", collapsed because the fascist influence, backed up by guns distributed or seized from police depots, had grown too big. Their supporters were

demanding Yanukovich's head, in some cases literally, not his or his party's cooperation in putting together a coalition that would carry out the EU Association Agreement.

Svoboda and its "respectable" nationalist partners found that their interests coincided while they were mobilising to oust Yanukovich, but when it came to an armed struggle for power the latter discovered that they faced a monster with ambitions of its own.

Even if they wanted to, the US-backed Ukrainian nationalists will have difficulty stopping their fascist junior partners from settling accounts with leftists, Jews and working class people opposed to their agenda.

However, far from being powerless in the economic sphere, the USA's agenda will be to drive through measures that will allow Western companies to come in, strip the country of its assets and complete a counter-revolution that will destroy the last vestiges of the jobs and services that the working class built with its own hands in the pre- and post-war years.

Thus we can see that the fascists in Ukraine are being courted and cultivated by competing capitalist oligarchs and by competing blocs of Western imperialists (the Franco-German and the Anglo-American blocs).

The EU, who tolerated the fascists' presence for as long as they were a useful tool with which to threaten Yanukovich, wanted Klitschko in the driving seat or at least as a strong check on Yulia Tymoshenko's Batkivshchyna ("Fatherland"). But they were outmanoeuvred by the USA, which was prepared to tolerate a fascist presence in government in order to sideline the EU.

US Assistant Secretary of State Victoria Nuland's now infamous intercepted telephone call revealed the extent of the USA's role in determining the composition of the transitional government. She insisted that "Yats" (Yatsenyuk) not Klitschko should be prime minister, and conceded that Svoboda could have several ministries as long as Tyahnybok did not receive a major post. Her comment "fuck the EU" left little doubt about the USA's attitude toward its erstwhile allies in Berlin.

With the EU sidelined, the USA faces a new problem. While it recognises that the fascists will be a useful and necessary tool in order to fulfil the functions of class repression left vacant by the collapse of the police during the coming "readjustments", the fascists' methods risk destabilising the government and provoking working class resistance.

Some argue that this is not possible because the Right Sector is marginal and because Svoboda are not "real" fascists. Let us examine these specious claims more closely.

Svoboda: suits today

By KD Tait

THE CRISIS in Ukraine has catapulted Svoboda from obscurity to international notoriety. By the time Yanukovich fled, its blue flags bearing the three-fingered Tryzub (trident) flew from occupied town halls and government building from Lviv to Kyiv.

With 15,000 members and 37 MPs, Svoboda is the largest far-right organisation in Ukraine. It shares a European Parliament affiliation with Hungary's Jobbik, the British National Party, France's Front National (FN) and several other European fascist parties.

It was founded in 1991 as the Social-National Party of Ukraine (SNPU). Its name and Wolfsangel (wolf-hook) logo were adopted to express its identification with Hitler's Nazis. In its early years it struggled to differentiate itself from the morass of fascist sects that spawned in western Ukraine following the collapse of the Soviet Union.

In 1999 the SNPU founded Patriots of Ukraine, a paramilitary group responsible for attacks on leftists and trade unionists.

Patriots of Ukraine was disbanded in 2004, when the party elected "reformer" Oleh Tyahnybok as its leader. At its party congress that year, the SNPU embarked on the process of reforming its public image, heeding the advice of FN leader Jean-Marie Le Pen who had led his own organisation from obscurity to third party status.

Its first step was to change its name and to replace the swastika-like Wolfsangel with the three-fingered Tryzub, a symbol associated with Ukrainian nationalism. Furthermore, it declared plans to form a single rightist political party jointly with the Congress of Ukrainian Nationalists and the Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists (OUN). This transformed it into a sizeable organisation on the streets, even if electoral success would continue to elude them for several years.

To publicise its re-orientation, it announced its support for mainstream anti-Russian politician Viktor Yushchenko's presidential candidature.

Through a combination of purges and an emphasis on "social" questions, Tyahnybok succeeded in shaking off the party's overt identification with neo-Nazism. Nevertheless the words and actions of Svoboda leaders since expose this shift as the cynical opportunism it is.

Speaking that year at a memorial to Stepan Bandera, he called for Ukrainians to fight the "Muscovite-Jewish mafia" that he claimed controlled the country. He praised Bandera's organisation, the original OUN, for having fought the Russians, Germans, Jews and "other scum who wanted to take away our Ukrainian state." Bandera's OUN had been responsible for the

Svoboda supporters commemorate Nazi collaborator Stepan Bandera



extermination of tens of thousands of ethnic Poles and Jews during the Second World War.

A year later Tyahnybok signed an open letter denouncing the "criminal activities" of "organised Jewry" who he claimed wanted to commit "genocide" against the Ukrainian people.

These speeches were publicised heavily in the state media, exposure that did nothing to hinder Tyahnybok's rise to national prominence in the years to come.

Tyahnybok has never renounced these views, indeed saying recently that he had not repented and could quite happily repeat what he had said. Re-elected as leader of the party several times, and a member of the Verkhovna Rada, the Ukrainian parliament, Tyahnybok clearly represents the fascist core of the party, whose antisemitism and ideas of racial superiority are merely given a façade of supposedly more respectable Banderism.

Svoboda's political breakthrough in the 2009 regional elections in Ternopil oblast, where it came first place with 35 per cent, capitalising on the common ruin of the Yulia Tymoshenko's bloc and Yushchenko's Our Ukraine, former allies

who had fallen out.

In the 2010 regional elections, Svoboda took seats in seven more regional councils and won control of three. In the 2012 general election it won 37 seats in the Rada and 10 per cent of the vote. While in the rural western regions it took nearly 40 per cent of the vote, in the industrialised east it polled under 5 per cent and in some regions just 1 per cent.

That year Svoboda joined the Dictatorship Resistance Committee, a front created to protest against Tymoshenko's criminal conviction, and pledged to work with the United Opposition coalition composed of Tymoshenko's Fatherland and Arseniy Yatsenyuk "Front for Change" if the opposition won the election. This was the genesis of the "triple alliance" that toppled Yanukovich by force in 2014.

Svoboda exploited popular disillusion with the rule of Tymoshenko and Yushchenko. It took part in numerous protests promoting populist slogans on social issues and opposing "unpatriotic" (that is, pro-EU) policies, deflecting attention away from the reactionary, pro-fascist politics of its members and leaders, politics that are an insurmountable barrier to its

growth in the eastern and southern parts of the country.

Under Yushchenko's presidency, Svoboda benefitted from Yushchenko's rehabilitation of Nazi collaborator Stepan Bandera and his promotion of Ukrainian nationalism. However a key part of Svoboda's popularity undoubtedly stems from the fact that it is seen as being untainted by association with the oligarchs whose competition has brought the country to the brink of economic ruin.

Just as Hitler did not shout about his funding by industrialists Thyssen and Krupp, Svoboda makes much of its claim that it rejects all funding from the oligarchs, insisting that it is primarily small and medium sized businesses owners that finance it.

After Yanukovich's Party of Regions won the 2010 presidential elections, Svoboda began to receive heavy publicity in Yanukovich-controlled television stations. This was a calculated move designed to establish Svoboda as the party of opposition, allowing Yanukovich to denounce his opponents as nationalists, Banderites and fascists. These terms are a political death sentence in the Russian-speaking regions,

y, boots tomorrow?



scum floats to the top.

Still, it is true that vicious racism and a publicly expressed desire to ban abortion even in the case of rape do not alone a fascist party make. But anyone who is deceived by this white-wash will be in for a nasty surprise.

Inasmuch as every particular fascist party has to develop its own ideology by combining whatever nationally dominant reactionary trends suit their purpose, Svoboda's ideology is drawn from the "Two Revolutions" doctrine, developed by former OUN leader Yaroslav Stetsko.

The essence of this doctrine is that "the revolution will not end with the establishment of the Ukrainian state, but will go on to establish equal opportunities for all people to create and share material and spiritual values and in this respect the national revolution is also a social one".

In other words, once the political revolution overthrows the ruling political regime, a "social" revolution will proceed. This social demagoguery, borrowing from the working class movement its language while giving it a non-class racial meaning, is typical of fascism.

An examination of Svoboda's political programme reveals the ideology underpinning this national and social revolution: state control over banking and major industry, nationalisation of farmland under hereditary ownership, promotion of the family and church, restrictions on the social and economic rights of women, subordination of national minorities to "Ukrainian culture" and so on. This is nothing less than a political programme intended to bind the exploited classes to their exploiters through the imposition of a common "national community".

None so blind

There are some on the left who point to the gradual moderation of the party's extremism to win votes as evidence of a shift away from its neo-Nazi roots. There is no doubt that Svoboda's leaders have made a political calculation to follow the road of some western European fascist parties (the FN in France and the Alleanza Nazionale in Italy). These had generally come to the conclusion that the classical fascist strategy, of opening the struggle for power through winning physical control of the streets, was counter-productive in their countries' circumstances, abandoning this in favour of a strategy of capturing key state and ideological positions by electoral means.

However, the conditions that gave rise to the most successful of these "fascist front" projects, Jean-Marie Le

Pen's FN, are not the conditions prevailing in Ukraine, where fascists have already secured physical control of the streets, and where the question of power is squarely on the agenda.

In Ukraine, the social conditions exist for the nourishment of a viable domestic fascist street movement. That this is true is evidenced by the leading role of fascists in the Maidan movement. It is simply wrong to argue that this "cannot be fascism" because fascism develops only in response to a revolutionary threat from the working class. Trotsky's writing on fascism in Germany and Italy make it clear that it is the failure of working class movement parties and unions to present a viable solution to a deep social crisis that turns the desperate petit bourgeois masses, the students, the unemployed and so on towards a fascist "revolution".

The fact that a working class alternative, the expropriation of capital and the overthrow of the capitalist state, is not immediately on the agenda will not stop a section of the capitalist class from turning towards fascism, should they deem it necessary.

The EU-facing west Ukrainian capitalists may come to realise, if they have not already done so, that formal democracy is unsuitable for bringing about the practical conditions needed to force through a further and even more destructive phase of neoliberalism. This, in turn, is needed if they are to achieve their aspirations of moving Ukraine firmly into EU and US imperialism's orbit as a cheap labour semicolony, from its current position of floating between Russian and Western imperialism.

Fascism can be useful to the capitalist class long before it has to face a revolutionary working class. Factions of the capitalist class back fascist formations hoping to gain a privileged position for themselves, while sacrificing their competitors and perhaps hoping to exert some greater regional or national influence.

In the revolutionary situation opened by the movement against and the overthrow of Yanukovich we have seen the crystallisation and effectiveness of a functional division of labour in the fascist movement.

Svoboda concentrates on the penetration of the state machine, especially the police and army. Adopting the minimum necessary veneer of bourgeois-democratic respectability, it outsources the mobilisation of a fighting street movement to the Right Sector and other groups, who in turn are stigmatised by their constant conflict with the police and the "rule of law".



Svoboda chief
Oleh Tyahnybok

Undoubtedly this creates a constant internal and external tension. The more a fascist front party has to exist in "normal" conditions of bourgeois state-imposed social peace, the more it is driven to moderate its more extremist ideas and thus undermine its own activist base, while still being unable to distance itself entirely from them and so to attract the social base of the reactionary but more respectably "constitutional" nationalist parties.

Likewise a fascist front party comes into conflict with the street based militants who attack it for its concessions, for not being sufficiently "patriotic" or for being unwilling to use physical force to defend its ideals, and so on.

The Ukrainian fascists' particular success is that Svoboda provided a large part of the political credibility for the unpopular Fatherland, while the Right Sector won their credibility by their organised defence of the Maidan movement. In other words, Fatherland is only in power thanks to the fascists.

The fascists presented their cheque for their services rendered – and got their positions in government.

In many ways the presence of so many fascists in government is not ideal for Tymoshenko or the USA, which is preparing to bankroll her regime. It creates an inbuilt instability in the form of a conflict between Svoboda's need to respond to its mass base in the impoverished petit bourgeoisie, and the big capitalists' desire to extend their monopolies, by making the urban and rural poor bear the brunt of any IMF restructuring or debt payments.

Nevertheless, the big oligarchs have no particular loyalty to Fatherland or

to Tymoshenko. This much is evidenced by the fact that many previously supported Yanukovich. Should they find the policy of Fatherland to their dislike, they may bankroll and encourage Svoboda to mobilise its petty bourgeois base, apparently against this or that wing of the capitalist class or international finance capital, but in reality securing the pre-eminence of whichever oligarch happens to have been the fascists' most consistent backer.

The character of the transitional government is absolutely undemocratic. It was a carve up between the oligarchic factions, and the decision to allow Svoboda control over the state's repressive apparatus would have been taken only with the consent of a considerable section of the capitalist class. This means at the very least that a significant section of the Ukrainian capitalists are putting in place the means to wage civil war, over and above what the "regular" state apparatus is capable of. That is why the fascists have been allowed to purge the police.

The reason is simple

When the measures of economic reckoning really take hold, whether through an IMF and US-sponsored restructuring, or as "collateral damage" in an inter-imperialist trade war, it will become necessary to crush working class resistance, and the ruling class is readying and arming itself for this grim task.

The experience of Svoboda, as an anti-establishment party that can deploy a façade of legitimacy while outsourcing street fighting to peripheral groups specialising in physical confrontation, will be keenly observed by the capitalists across Europe, but especially in Greece and Hungary.

where there remains a strong collective cultural identification with the Soviet Army and partisans' struggle against the Nazis.

Given Svoboda's annual processions by torchlight commemorating the anniversary of Bandera's death, such accusations cannot be dismissed.

While Svoboda denies that it is racist, deploying the common fascist defence that it is not "against" anyone but simply "pro-Ukrainian", it continues to restrict membership to ethnic Ukrainians.

An idea of its leaders' attitudes to ethnic minorities is given by Svoboda deputy leader Ihor Miroshnychenko's comment that actress Mila Kupis is not Ukrainian, but "a Jewess" ("zhydivka").

Leaving aside the Svoboda member who founded a "Josef Goebbels Political Research Centre", objections that Svoboda's policy documents and official manifesto don't contain outright racism are purely academic. Many, if not all of its leading cadres are conscious racists, open antisemites and ethnic Ukrainian chauvinists. The

For a united socialist Ukraine

By KD Tait

The new government, headed by oligarchs from Tymoshenko's Fatherland, with the support of a various oligarchs appointed as regional governors, will now seek to consolidate its power. It can expect to receive the political and financial support of the US imperialists who engineered its victory.

The fascists will be the shock troops of any offensive launched by the new government against the working class, especially in any takeover of the eastern region where Russian speakers are a majority. Whether or not Tymoshenko and the leaders of Fatherland openly support them, the fascists are now strong enough to mobilise independently, and take the initiative if they feel the new government shows weakness or indecision.

The fight to destroy the fascist threat is an urgent one, but the working class must not wait for the nationalists and the fascist gangs to take the offensive. Now, while both sides are regrouping and preparing their next moves is the time for the working class to rouse itself. Nor should workers in the Crimea await salvation from Putin, let alone cede the field to Russian chauvinists and even fascist militias, who are no better on their side than the Right Sector are on the ethnic Ukrainian chauvinist side.

The working class, which has largely remained on the sidelines since the outbreak of the Maidan protests in December must act, and act decisively. It is the only social force with the power and an interest in checking the virulent growth of inter-communal hatred.

Where attempts to organise generalised strike action in support of either side of the struggle have failed, the working class must now act to paralyse this illegitimate government, and impose its own agenda.

Otherwise, and as we have seen, Crimea's demand for independence, understandable given the threats issued by the reactionary Kyiv government, could only be guaranteed by its military annexation to Russian imperialism.

Now is the time for the working class to mobilise the most powerful weapon in its arsenal, the general strike, which will paralyse the bosses' profit machine and open up the question of power once again.

This would ensure that the choice this time will not be between this or that faction of the oligarchic ruling class, but between capital and labour, between those who produce all of society's material and cultural wealth, and those who plunder it for their own gain.

What is to be done?

It is plain that the new regime presents extreme dangers to the working class as a whole – both Ukrainian and Russian speakers, as well as the various minorities. Its non-fascist component will set out to implement roughly the same sort of neoliberal reforms that the EU and IMF have ruined the lives of Greek workers with. But

it will also prove a just as bitter a foe of the democratic and libertarian elements who supported the early phases of the Maidan demonstrations.

As the government's fascist components try to fuse with and extend their control over the repressive and security forces of the state, they will strike at the students and the workers regardless of what language they speak or where they live.

If the fascists receive a big boost to their electoral fortunes in May, with more members in the Rada and hence more ministers, then a real "fascisation" of the state could occur. It will only be stopped to the extent that it is resisted in the workplaces, on the streets and in the universities. Stopping it will neither be a peaceful process nor a "legal" one, since these illegitimate forces have in part already made their "national revolution."

Effective resistance to the new regime must be rooted where the working class is potentially most powerful and organised: in production, transport and commerce. Here workers have the potential to bring the source of the oligarchs' wealth, their labour, grinding to a halt. Forming workers' committees in the factories and neighbourhoods can provide the foundation for local and citywide councils of action, which could also draw in delegates from the unemployed, the youth, students and pensioners.

Workers' councils should be linked up as much as possible between East and West, making common cause for the defence of a united Ukraine, and against the intervention of all the imperialist powers: not just the EU, which undoubtedly has the upper hand at present, but also Russia.

If they are made up of delegates directly accountable to mass assemblies of their electors, if they are recallable whenever necessary, if they organise collective self-defence that does not rely on Russian or Ukrainian police or troops, then they can empower working class resistance and marginalise the far right and the fascists in both major language communities.

Working class self-organisation based in the sphere of production, expressed in the collective political decisions of workers' councils, will put the workers' main economic and social demands onto the agenda, and indeed raise the question of who should run the country, and in whose interests. The formation of such democratic assemblies and workers' councils is the only way in which the workers themselves can win the power to act independently in their own interests, and to debate and adopt a coherent and strategy of resistance.

In a country where the government is highly unstable, with equilibrium between its bourgeois neoliberal and its fascist components unlikely for long, with territorial dual power between the east and the south on one side and the centre and the west on the other, workers must fight to create their own forms of governance and self-defence.

They should not accept the power of the

remaining regional oligarchs in the east that have not yet gone over to the Kyiv regime any more than of those in the west who have rallied to it. The workers must acquire the weapons to defend themselves. They must do what the fascists have done, and open up the armouries of the police stations and barracks. They must win over sections of the regional state forces and fight alongside them if they help them defend their communities. The working class in the industrial heartlands should agitate for the army to hand over their weapons to the people, and should elect workers' councils in workplaces and neighbourhoods. Soldiers' committees should be organised in the army to win rank and file soldiers to the cause of working class power.

It can be seen in the Ukraine that there is not necessarily strong antagonism between those in the Ukrainian army and the Russian soldiers and sailors. Revolutionaries should encourage the opposed armed forces to fraternise with one another, to resist all provocations and orders to take action against one another. Indeed the soldiers and sailors should be urged to form their own councils of delegates and elect as their officers and commanders people who will not give the order to shoot on each other or on civilians, whether these orders come from Moscow or Kyiv.

Soldiers' assemblies could become an obstacle to fascist provocations or to Russian imperialist intervention, especially if they set as one of their key tasks the defence of minorities: Tatars and Greeks in Crimea, Romanians and Hungarians in the west, Russians in the centre and west, and Jews. Any attempt to create a monolingual and mono-ethnic Ukraine will only produce a terrible disaster along the lines of the wars in Croatia, Bosnia and Kosovo in the 1990s.

It is possible that Russian "volunteers" from the far right, or even Putin's special forces, may start to arrive in significant numbers. Of course, it is permissible for revolutionary volunteers to go to the aid of their brothers and sisters in Ukraine, but to do so under the flags of Great Russian chauvinism, let alone fascism, will not aid but will in fact harm their cause irreparably. It will make it more difficult to achieve class unity, and therefore to win over Ukrainian workers from the west of the country.

The workers of Poland, the other EU countries and Russia should support a struggle to maintain an independent and united Ukraine without privileges for any ethnicity. That struggle should start with a fight to disarm and destroy the fascist organisations. Its slogan must be a united socialist Ukraine as part of a socialist united states of Europe.

The people's only security lies in a struggle for a Ukraine in which the economic and military resources of the whole country are under the control and at the service of the working class. It lies in a struggle for a society that serves the material, social and

cultural needs of those who work, and that fights tooth and claw against the reactionary imperialist powers East and West. These powers will, if threatened from below, drop their conflict and collaborate to crush any independent workers' actions.

This means that the defence of workers' action in Ukraine must come primarily from workers in Russia, Germany and the rest of Europe, who have absolutely no interest in seeing either of the competing imperialist camps exploiting the Ukrainian workers as cheap labour or looting their country's natural resources.

Against the politics of despair, the answer and inspiration is the genuinely democratic and internationalist spirit of the Bosnian protests. "Down with nationalism!" is the slogan on the streets there, as they fight for all nationalities in their country against austerity and inequality. Unity of the workers and poor of all nationalities against national hatreds, austerity, and capital: that's where the hope for Ukraine lies.

- No recognition of the illegitimate government, imposed by a fascist-led coup and supported by a violently purged Rada. No to the neoliberal policies of privatisation and closures imposed by the EU. End corruption by expropriating all the oligarchs.
- Down with the fascist gangs that are infesting the state apparatus: for workers' self defence. Protect all national, ethnic and linguistic minorities. No to Great Russian chauvinist or fascist "volunteers" entering Ukraine.
- No to a Russian invasion or occupation of any part of Ukraine. No to any NATO sanctions, intervention or ultimatums. Imperialists – west or east – keep your hands off Ukraine!
- For the right of any part of the Ukraine, and Crimea in particular, to democratic self-determination, exercised free of any occupying forces whether from Kyiv or Moscow.
- For workers' councils in the factories, soldiers' councils in the barracks, and farmers' councils in the countryside, all with democratically controlled militias pledged to protect all ethnicities.
- For a workers' and farmers' government to create the basis for a united and independent socialist Ukraine as part of a socialist united states of Europe
- For a movement of international solidarity with resistance to fascism, and to all imperialist pressure and intervention, whether from the EU or from Russia.
- For a new revolutionary party of the Ukrainian working class, to take its inspiration from the original Bolsheviks, unfalsified by Stalinism.

The forgotten uprising

By KD Tait

IN EARLY FEBRUARY thousands workers and young people took to the streets in towns and cities across Bosnia–Herzegovina (BiH): Tuzla, Sarajevo, Zenica, Bihac, Mostar and others.

Sparked by protests against the privatisation and asset-stripping of five previously state-owned factories in Tuzla, the movement spread like wild-fire across much of the country. Capitalist robbery, corruption and divisive nationalism were the common enemy.

The workers and youth were mobilising not just in protest against the harsh conditions of life, but with the aim of overthrowing the rule of the nationalist parties who have governed since the end of the 1992-95 civil war.

But when the people in Bosnia occupied government buildings and armed themselves with Molotov cocktails to protest against sky-high unemployment, endemic corruption and mass impoverishment, they were left to fight alone.

There were no visits from US secretaries of state or French philosophers, no threats of economic sanctions against Bosnian government officials or bankers.

The reasons are clear: unlike Ukraine, the political class and system in Bosnia is one of the western imperialists' own making – and entirely under their thumb.

The US-sponsored Dayton Agreement, imposed after the civil war, far from ensuring the promised accountability, protection and autonomy for Bosniaks, Croats and Serbs, has in fact subordinated them to a corrupt self-serving bureaucracy, which facilitates the legalised, divide and rule plundering carried on by the bosses, the catalyst of a month of protests.

The Agreement is overseen by the European Union. And the EU's writ is enforced by EUFOR – an occupation force of 2,500 soldiers under an Austrian general. The High Representative for Bosnia and Herzegovina, appointed by the EU, has the power to impose binding decisions and dismiss elected officials – powers it has used frequently and without scrutiny for over a decade.

Faced with a popular uprising, the European imperialists will no doubt attempt to shore up the political system that they themselves created. While the workers of Tuzla understandably demand the institution of education, healthcare and employment practices that match European norms, they rightly reject any idea that the European powers should intervene in their struggle.

As if they needed any further lessons in the cynical policy of the European ruling class, they need only observe



Ukraine, where Germany supports the Euromaidan movement, despite its violence and fascist components, but insists that in Bosnia order must prevail. Indeed, the first response of the Austrian High Representative was to threaten the protesters with the use of foreign soldiers to restore order if the government and police could not.

People's democracy

People who set themselves the goal of bringing down a government immediately face the question of what should replace it. When, as in Bosnia-Herzegovina, almost the entire political class and all the parties are discredited as corrupt, self-serving parasites, the task of creating a democratic government out of the chaos was one workers and youth tried to seize with their own hands. The instrument they chose was the plenum – an institution derived from student struggles of recent years.

In an interview on Al-Jazeera, Tuzla University teacher Damir Arsenijevi answers the question – what is a plenum?

“A plenum is an assembly of all the members of a group. It is a public space for debate. It has no leaders or prohibitions. Decisions are made through a public vote. A plenum is not a political party, or an NGO, or a one-person association. A plenum is the real, and the only democracy. A plenum makes and adopts demands on all the institutions of state power by its own declaration. People vote for or against. Decisions are made on a majority

basis.”

Through the medium of the plenum, the workers and students of Tuzla developed a whole series of demands. These included more equalisation of wages, investigation of corrupt privatisation deals, renationalisation of industries under workers' control, an end to police violence and for the creation of a government of experts accountable to the citizens' plenums.

The holding of plenums rapidly spread from Tuzla to Sarajevo and other major towns and cities. They have demanded the resignation of the cantonal, i.e. county governments, as has already been achieved in Tuzla, and try to exert popular control over the activities of the official Cantonal Assemblies.

Over the last three years we have witnessed various attempts at direct democracy. These include the Indignados movement in Spain and the Synagma and other square occupations in Greece, and the US #Occupy movement. From the beginning these encumbered themselves with the problem that they could hardly make any decisions let alone implement them because they demanded consensus or unanimity.

The prioritisation of individual expression over efficient mass participation was a serious obstacle to working class involvement. They could not incorporate the viewpoint of that part of the population capable of using its economic power to advance the political decisions of the assemblies.

In contrast the Bosnian plenums aspired to be effective in action and maybe because of the militant mass mobilisations, initiated by the workers in Tuzla, they initially were more decisive, voting by majority, not seeking to ban political parties as such.

However, the plenums need to develop into revolutionary councils of delegates from the workplaces and the working class communities, like the Russian soviets of 1905 and 1917. Under the influence of liberal and libertarian ideas, they are currently contenting themselves with discussions and trying to implement immediate, piecemeal changes, while leaving the powers that be – including the Dayton High Representative – in control.

Taking the power

The demand for a government composed of politically unaligned “experts” obviously reflected the deep contempt of the people for the parasitic political elite. Their anger at the corrupt politicians and their political parties was fully justified. But there simply are no “neutral experts” who can be called in to do the governing.

Where would you find them? They will never be provided by the business community, by the state bureaucracy or the professors, let alone by the European Union. The governments of bankers and technocrats appointed in Italy simply pressed ahead with privatisations and austerity – i.e. they were composed by the political and financial institutions of the ruling class and

imposed on the people to carry out the imperialists' policies, when parliamentary democracy proved incapable of doing so.

Of course the plenums should have done all in their power to exercise control over the cantonal assemblies and federal government but their aim should have been to replace them with a government made up of delegates elected by and accountable to the working people, students and the unemployed.

Only then would the workers, youth and poor farmers be able to reorganise production to meet the needs of the people. But above all this required the working class to take the initiative once more and to form a workers' government – to take power.

But clearly in a small state like Bosnia, workers' power could hardly survive in isolation – indeed for Bosnian workers to achieve unity among themselves they will need to reach out to the progressive forces in Serbia and Croatia.

Solidarity in a common struggle against the same sort of rotten regimes can prove to all sectors of workers the need for class unity. The Bosnian uprising clearly showed that this can be achieved, where solidarity demonstrations in Belgrade and the Republika Srpska, though repressed, spontaneously sprung up.

Likewise, recent mass movements against austerity and misery in Slovenia and Bulgaria indicate that this can be done.

International solidarity

The rulers of Western Europe and North America played a reactionary role in the break up of Yugoslavia, interfering in and prolonging the war, then maintaining the disastrous Dayton system. Even after this, they pressed for privatisations and neoliberal “reforms”. So workers and students in these countries need to do all in their power to bring solidarity to their brothers and sisters in Bosnia and the other Balkan countries.

The resistance of the workers and youth to neoliberalism and capitalist austerity encompasses the globe. From Damascus to Sarajevo via Gezi Park, people are rising up against a system which cannot provide even the minimum necessary to survive.

Across Europe workers and young people should organise solidarity and defend the right of the peoples of Bosnia and other Balkan countries under EU domination to determine their own destiny – a right to political and economic self-determination that ultimately can only be defended with force against those who would crush movements like that in Bosnia and frogmarch them back into nationalist ghettos and capitalist wage slavery.

Balochi Long March reaches Islamabad

By Shahzad Arshad

ON FRIDAY 28 February, after 2,500 kilometres the Long March of the Voice for Baloch Missing Persons, VBMP, finally reached its destination of Islamabad, the capital city of Pakistan. The 20 marchers are relatives of just some of the 18,400 people who are missing and believed to have been abducted by Pakistan's security forces in Baluchistan.

The march was the culmination of their campaign demanding that the government release information on who is being held captive by the army and publicising the extra-judicial killing of Baloch people. According to Human Rights Watch, 300 bodies of Balochi activists have been found dumped by roadsides over the past three years.

Mama Abdul Qadeer Baloch, 70, and Banuk Farzana Majeed are leading the march, and it is the longest political campaign march in Pakistan's history. In November 2011, Mama was handed the mutilated body of his son, who was the information secretary of the Baloch Republican Party, Jalil Reiki.

The courageous Banuk is a sister of Zakir Majeed, a student leader who has been missing since 2009. The rest of the small group consists of other women and children whose brothers, fathers and husbands are "guilty" of struggling for their rights and standing up against the state. Balochi are systematically marginalised by the Pakistan state in order to make their suppression easier and the exploitation of their resources justifiable.

The marchers left Quetta, the capital of Balochistan, in October and crossed the mountains to the coast near Karachi before making their way across the vast province of Sindh to the Punjab. Their march has angered those in power because this small group of Balochi have shone a spotlight on the oppression of Balochistan for the whole country to see, and especially in Punjab, the home province of the ruling elite of Pakistan.

Their refusal to be silenced has made the establishment nervous and the marchers were repeatedly subjected to threats and intimidation en route. For example, on 8 February, two marchers, Shahshan Baloch



and Irfan Ali, a member of the Communist Mazdoor Kissan Party, were injured when a truck ploughed into them – later explained away as a result of brake failure.

Similar bullying tactics have been used against those who had the courage to host the marchers – or even greet them – in the towns along their route. In Lahore, death threats were made against members of the Awami Workers' Party, who organised support for the Long March on its arrival. Mama was told to expect "the worst consequences" if the march attempted to continue on to Islamabad.

For several days the marchers' progress was physically prevented but they refused to be intimidated and their determination attracted increasing support, particularly from students. In the end, they were allowed to proceed.

Missing persons and mass graves

On 25 January, a shepherd discovered a mass grave in Tootak (Khuzdar district) after which the locals converged there to recover the bodies. According to the "progressive and nationalist" government representatives, 13 bodies were found, but the truth is over 100. The Asian Human Rights Commission has counted 103 dead bodies,

whereas local people estimate the body count is 169 and believe there are more graves in the area. The security forces have cordoned off the gravesite and are not allowing anyone in.

The Long March has become even more important with the discovery of the mass graves. The participants' determination was doubly strengthened by this horrific discovery. Their march is an entirely new dawn in the struggle of the Baloch people and other oppressed and working class people for their rights and against the injustices of capitalism and the Pakistan state. A newly imposed law, the Protection of Pakistan Ordinance (PPO), shows exactly how the policy of repression undermines the country's claim to the rule of law. The PPO sanctions enforced disappearances by removing the legal requirement to produce detainees before a court of law within 48 hours of arrest – and now extends this period to 90 days.

The War on Terror and Baluchistan

The "War on Terror" is used to justify destruction and state operations in Balochistan. Former military ruler Pervez Musharraf launched military operations in 2005 and the preceding governments of the Pakistan People's Party and now

of Nawaz continued them. Their current offensives in the Panjgur, Khuzdar and Mastung districts of Balochistan began after an attack on Hazara Shia in Mastung, for which Lashkar-e-Jhangvi (LeJ) claimed responsibility. Yet, military attacks have been launched against the strongholds of the Balochi national movement, not the networks of LeJ.

Balochi men, women and children have been arrested, tortured and killed during the systematic persecution against anyone suspected of sympathising with the Balochi national movement.

What is clear is that the state is using the climate of fear to justify operations in Khyber Pakhtoonkhwa and in Balochistan. These will bring nothing but hatred, racism, war mongering and the displacement of population – and ultimately encourage terrorism.

The Left and liberal democracy

Many on the left welcomed the appointment of Dr Malik (left nationalist and pro-federation) as Chief Minister of Baluchistan and said it was a wise decision of the Nawaz Government. They hoped that he would solve the real issues affecting people, such as the disappeared persons, the ongoing military operations and the

need for industrial and social infrastructure.

Instead, Malik's National Party has capitulated and made it easier for the state to crush the national movement. After all, as chief minister, Dr Malik is now supervising all military operations.

Self-determination and socialism

The important question now is what should be the attitude of revolutionary socialists in the current situation. The Balochi national movement is an important question of class struggle in Pakistan.

Firstly, socialists should support the Long March and the demands for the release of missing persons. We should fight for an end to military operations and try to spread resistance across the working class and youth in all the provinces of Pakistan.

In addition, we must oppose the PPO and build a movement against it. This is a law that will not only be used against the Balochi but also in every issue deemed by the ruling elite to relate to the "War on Terror". It will certainly be used against the working class who are facing tremendous hardship in Pakistan and fighting back through industrial action.

Secondly, socialists must give unconditional support to the

right to self-determination, though this does not mean we advocate separatism. Russian revolutionary Lenin rightly argued that support for the self-determination of oppressed peoples by the workers of the oppressor nation creates better conditions for working class struggle. Instead of the workers of the different nations fighting each other, they can unite to fight against the capitalists.

As socialists, we want a voluntary federation of nations, not a forced one. We want to abolish borders and boundaries instead of creating them. National self-determination (including the right of oppressed nations to form their own states, if they wish) has to be understood as a step towards this unity. It increases the forces of socialist revolution. Why? Because the workers and all progressive forces of the oppressor nation and state can only win the trust of the oppressed if they support their democratic rights without hesitation.

The achievement of self-determination, with the support of the workers and peasants of the former oppressor nation, is the best way to weaken reactionary forces in both nations. It would create the best situation in which to fight the exploitative classes in both nations. As soon as the system of class exploitation is overcome, the basis for the exploitation of one nation by other nations will be overcome, too.

In these circumstances, revolutionary socialists should critically support the Balochi national movement. At the same time, we must also point out the class differences within the national liberation movement and the dangerous misleadership of bourgeois forces. We need to fight for the working class and socialist forces to become the leadership of the national liberation movement.

The working class needs to build its own organs of struggle that will link their struggles with those of the whole Pakistani working class, as well as with workers worldwide. The working class movement would use the methods of class struggle, including strikes, occupations and the general strike, culminating in a mass political uprising. In this way, the national liberation of Balochistan and the struggle for socialism can move forward.

Workers should reject the false promises of independence

The Scottish people face a historic decision on 18 September 2014, when they vote on the question: "Should Scotland be an independent country?" **Andy Yorke** considers what advice socialists should give

ALTHOUGH POLLS continue to show a majority against complete independence, but in favour of increased powers for the Scottish parliament ("Devo-Max"), the latest YouGov poll (3 March) registered erosion of the pro-Union majority: 53 per cent against independence and 35 per cent for.

The narrowing of the majority to 18 points is a direct result of Cameron and Osborne's campaign. Their threats, including denying Scotland the continued use of the pound, exclusion from the EU and the exit of banks and financial institutions, has rightly angered many Scots. The idea that they could be bullied into staying in the UK was a huge miscalculation.

Scotland's First Minister and SNP leader Alex Salmond bases his appeal on the promise that an independent Scottish government will halt the austerity and the destruction of education and health services imposed from Westminster.

He promises that independence would mean a more prosperous country with less inequality. North Sea oil would pay for a return to the social welfare policies that used to be Labour's trump card before Blair, Brown and Miliband abandoned them.

Marxism and Nationalism

Socialists defend the right of the Scottish people to decide their own future, whether to separate from the UK or to seek greater autonomy within it. We totally condemn the threats and bullying of Coalition ministers. Likewise, we oppose the exclusion of the so-called "Devo-Max" option in the wording of the referendum.

If the Scottish people vote yes, every worker and democrat in the rest of the UK should campaign for the Westminster Parliament to recognise and implement that decision immediately and without any discriminatory measures. The UK labour movement should take political and, if need be, industrial action against any measures by our rulers to thwart the full realisation of the Scots' democratically



expressed wishes.

The Russian revolutionary Lenin compared self-determination to divorce: Marxists must support the right unconditionally but that does not mean that they always advocate its implementation. Indeed, Marxists have always preferred the largest possible states because they have the potential for the largest possible class struggle.

The exception to this is where one nation is oppressed, politically or economically, within a larger state dominated by another nation. This was the case when the whole of Ireland was held within the UK, and remains the case in "Northern Ireland". However, while Scotland is a distinct nation within the UK (as opposed to a region like Yorkshire) it is not an oppressed nation.

Certainly, the Acts of Union of 1706 and 1707, which created the United Kingdom of Great Britain were not expressions of the democratic wishes of either nation, since neither parliament was itself democratic. However, Scotland rapidly became integrated into the rising British Empire, participating in the oppression of India, Ireland and all the other colonial possessions.

This enriched Scottish capitalists, creating a powerful industrial and banking sector

centred on Glasgow, "the Empire's Second City". Scottish regiments were often the crack forces of colonial conquest.

Today, although it suffered heavily from Britain's post-war industrial decline, Scotland ranks third in GDP per capita and household income after the two wealthiest English regions, London and the Southeast.

According to the SNP, independence and control of North Sea oil revenues would give it the eighth highest output per capita in the OECD club of industrialised countries. It is the promise of this potential wealth that the SNP is dangling in front of voters, desperate to escape the economic blight of Tory austerity and a Labour "alternative" that can only offer austerity-lite.

The SNP's promised land

Since the 1980s, the SNP has targeted Labour voters with limited but significant reforms, combined with pledges to business of fiscal responsibility to prove it is a party fit to govern. Besides blocking the Coalition's NHS privatising reforms, scrapping university tuition fees and funding tenants to neutralise the cruel bedroom tax, the SNP government has promised an expansion of free nursery care and school meals, conditional on achieving independence. These reforms, coupled with Labour's commi-

ment to continuing Coalition austerity, gave the SNP its landslide victory in 2011.

However, independence is no guarantee of a better life for Scottish workers. The SNP's post-independence plans for deregulation and a 3 per cent tax cut for business as a whole are aimed at hiking profits and attracting international investment. Even with oil, taking a share of the UK's debt and with state spending billions above its tax revenues, the SNP's promises of small rises in the minimum wage, benefits, pensions and a dramatic expansion of childcare would have a large question mark over them.

If further proof were needed, the SNP's policy of keeping the pound would mean accepting monetary and some taxation policy from Westminster and the City of London. If the country stayed within the EU, the same would be true for huge areas of public policy. Along with plans to keep NATO and the monarchy, the "independence" of Scotland would be more symbolic than real.

The SNP, and the wing of the Scottish capitalist class it represents, wants to grow Scottish capitalism by being more neoliberal than the UK, thus initiating a race to the bottom. The social reforms would soon prove to be just window-dressing, to be discarded once the

new owners are safely in command. They will declare that workers must wait till the new independent state has found its feet and is prospering – that is when its bosses are making big profits. It will be a long wait in present global conditions.

Class and independence

None of this should be a surprise since the SNP is not a party of the Scottish working class. Still less is the SNP a party of the Scottish people as a whole, as every Marxist should know, this is a nonstarter since parties represent classes. It is a capitalist party, even if it has adopted some social democratic reforms to avoid the old "Tartan Tories" jibe.

That is why it is wrong for the pro-independence Scottish Socialist Party and other leftists to work with the capitalist SNP in the Yes campaign. Rather than "warmly welcoming" their decision to fund tenants hit by the bedroom tax, socialists should have exposed the way Salmond & Co financed this by taking money from other services and condemned the policy as merely a tactical manoeuvre.

Those who claim that independence will shatter any illusions in the SNP as workers clash with an SNP government showing its true capitalist colours ignore the power of nationalism to appeal for sac-

rifices for the new nation. The SNP will have firm allies in the union bureaucracy of an independent Scotland, which will put up no more resistance than the UK bureaucracy as a whole has done in over five years of austerity.

Similarly, those like the Socialist Workers Party and International Socialist Group who say that "breaking up the British state" means weakening imperialism are talking nonsense. Scotland would be a small imperialist power, like those of Scandinavia and Benelux. Through Nato and the EU, it would be totally at the service of the big imperialisms. The vacation of Faslane would be a minor irritant not a major blow. To talk this sort of nonsense is unworthy of people who regard themselves as Leninists.

"Socialists" who fail to challenge nationalism, which divides workers and is a deadly enemy of internationalism, are not aiding the class-consciousness of Scottish workers but undermining it. Those that reinforce separatism are just helping the nationalists in their task of dividing the working class and dulling its class-consciousness.

Those, like the SSP, who argue it will be easier to achieve reforms, create jobs or redistribute wealth in an independent Scotland are giving a socialist gloss to SNP lies to the working class. None of these things are possible without class struggle. If Scottish workers can fight for austerity after independence in a mass movement of strikes and protests, then why not do it now, hand-in-hand with their English, Welsh and Irish brothers and sisters?

We believe socialists should call for a no vote in the referendum, making it clear that this is in no sense a vote for the United Kingdom of British imperialism, its flag, its queen or its state institutions. Whatever choice they make, socialists in the rest of the UK will continue to stand shoulder-to-shoulder with their Scottish brothers and sisters in the fight for working class power, border or no border.

Miners' strike 30 years on: 'We're the

WITH NOT just their own futures at stake, but also the future of the entire working class, the women of the pit villages came out to fight for their livelihoods and communities during the Great Miners' Strike of 1984-85. They set up support groups and organised communal kitchens, meetings, pickets and protests. Like the miners, they were getting a crash course in the nature of the state and the realities of the capitalist system. Women who had never taken an interest in such things before travelled across Britain and overseas, speaking on platforms to raise support for the strike.

When Thatcher threatened pit closures, strikes began across the country until the National Union of Miners (NUM) called a national strike. The women of the mining villages were what allowed the strike to go on for a whole year despite all the nasty tricks that the Thatcher government threw at them.

From soup kitchens to activism

They were refused benefits in an attempt to starve them. The miners picketed the pits daily so it was up to the women to raise the money and solidarity needed to keep the strike going.

The miners' wives began by organising networks to ensure that the wel-

fare of the strikers – food supplies, communal kitchens and so on – was maintained. But within a very short time the wives began to organise more than just collective cooking. Women from Kent and Doncaster organised their own demonstration in Leicestershire to show support for the striking minority there and boost the campaign to spread the strike. Kay Sutcliffe from Aylesham Miners' Wives Support Group wrote:

"We called a meeting... after hearing about the miners going back to work in Nottingham. We were expecting maybe 10 or 15 women, but we got 50. There were mixed feelings about what we should do, but we decided to go and hold a women's demonstration up there.

"We went to the local NUM and they said that, as the Kent mines came under the Leicestershire region of the Coal Board, we should demonstrate there. It was one of the first women's demonstrations in the dispute."

From the beginning these women were clear that they wanted to be involved in the strike in their own right and not just be regarded as providing welfare support in the background. Wives of the Hatfield Main miners explained:



"We're trying to get the women together from the community and involved in the strike. It's so they don't have to ask their husbands what's going on. It's so they know what's going on for themselves... It's the first time working class women have been organised like this since the fight for the vote."

Women Against Pit Closures

The actions of the Kent and Doncaster

women inspired thousands of others across the country. Networks began to take shape. More women's demos followed, women's support groups were formed in every mining village and a working class women's movement was forged.

Five thousand women attended a rally in Barnsley. This was followed by a conference in June and a large protest march in London on 11 August 1984; 23,000 working class women

attended that event, joined by other women trade unionists.

The name Women Against Pit Closures was adopted at a national delegate conference in Chesterfield in December 1984 and the group sought Associate Membership of the National Union of Mineworkers (NUM).

Violence

For the first time women also joined men on the picket lines and took part

100th anniversary of Rabotnitsa time to recreate its success

ON INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY we are celebrating the 100th anniversary of Rabotnitsa (The Woman Worker). Started by a group of Bolshevik women, including Nadezhda Krupskaya, Konkordiya Samoilova and Inessa Armand, the first issue came out on 8 March 1914 and covered current events in the workers' movement, paying particular attention to the participation of women workers. Rabotnitsa also reported on women's working conditions, along with stories of revolutionary struggles abroad.

Organiser

The magazine aimed to educate and raise the political consciousness of women workers, as well as stress their common interests with working class men, not only in Russia but also all around the world.

In the first year, the editorial board produced seven issues with a circulation of 12,000. The money needed to support the publication was collected from

women factory workers and they distributed it in their workplaces.

After the 1917 February Revolution, Rabotnitsa was re-launched as a journal run by the Zhenotdel, the newly established women's section of the Bolsheviks. The magazine was an organising tool. Later that year the Zhenotdel ran a Petrograd Conference of Working Women, just prior to the October Revolution.

After the Bolsheviks took power, the women's section built on its success by organising the first All-Russian Congress of Women Workers in 1918.

As Lenin argued, the newspaper is the scaffolding of the party, "not only a collective propagandist and a collective agitator, it is also a collective organiser". And that was how Rabotnitsa started out.

However, as Stalin rolled back the gains of the revolution, Rabotnitsa tragically changed from being a revolutionary organising tool to reinforcing the role of women in the home, with

articles on motherhood and housekeeping tips.

We want a socialist women's magazine

Fast-forward to today, the revolutionary left is once again discussing the need for a working class women's publication. The International Socialist Network (ISN) put out the call to other left activists, and the first meeting was a positive example of how people from different political organisations can work together.

Following the revolutionary Rabotnitsa model, consensus was quickly reached among those in the room; the magazine will be a tribune of working class women and a campaigning tool to build support and solidarity with struggles across the UK and internationally.

Join our collective effort to launch a working class women's publication. If you are interested in getting involved drop us a line at womenspub@gmail.com

Join our Facebook group: 'We Want A Women's Mag'

For a working

Working class women across the country are confronting austerity and winning local battles.

YOU CAN hear the rumble. Snippets here and there, up and down the country. Impressive victories for Save Lewisham Hospital campaign and the Scottish Anti-Bedroom Tax Federation; a march in Canterbury to save children's centres; healthworkers in Leeds and Bradford walking out against cost-cutting; Glasgow and Doncaster care workers striking against pay cuts and longer hours; and now teachers are preparing for a national strike on 26 March over worsening of pay, pensions and conditions.

Working class women are taking to the streets and finding the courage to fight back, at a time when the union leaders are showing an appalling lack of appetite for struggle. These fighting campaigns are not exclusively made up of women, but they are a growing majority.

Working class women are at the forefront because they have no buffer to protect themselves from these vicious attacks. When a local nursery is shut down, it is women who have

to work part-time to look after their children because other childcare is too expensive; when care in the community is slashed, it is women who have to look after family and neighbours.

Together, standing shoulder-to-shoulder with our working class brothers, we can turn this constant stream of rebellion into a torrent.

The reality of austerity

Working class women are bearing the brunt of austerity. They are shouldering a severe burden as a result of cuts to benefits and public services imposed by the government since they came to power in May 2010. And there are still more cuts coming down the pipeline: £60 billion over the next four years.

As well as caring for children, women are carers for disabled relatives and for parents in their later years; so the Bedroom Tax, the cuts to Disability Living Allowance and to local authorities' elderly care fall more heavily on their shoulders.

Meanwhile real earnings have

women of the working class'

in flying pickets. In what often became a violent and confrontational situation women were in the front line, and like the men on the pickets were injured as a result. In such traditional communities men were initially resistant to the involvement of women, but soon came to realise their importance and how vital their support was.

Women Against Pit Closures became a political movement in its own right. Sutcliffe wrote:

"A group of the local NUM, including my husband, went to picket the Wivenhoe docks in Colchester to stop coal imports coming in. They were all arrested and put in jail. We had a women's meeting that night, and on the spur of the moment we decided to get in a Dormobile and go down there. There were only about 12 of us, and we weren't even dressed for a demonstration! Some of the women had come to the meeting dressed for a social gathering, not in warm clothes, but we decided that was what we were going to do.

"It was the first time we had ever been in a confrontational situation with the police. We couldn't believe how many police there were, and only a handful of us. They threatened to arrest us for walking on the road. We

felt very intimidated by them. We were conscious that some of them weren't police – they didn't have police numbers. We knew the state used the military to police the strike."

'Storm in a B cup'

The achievement of the women in building a fighting movement so quickly from scratch was even more remarkable when you consider that despite the generally progressive politics of the NUM its record on women's issues was poor. Attitudes among many miners, including key leaders like Arthur Scargill, were backward at the start of the strike.

The Yorkshire Miner, was one of the best and most militant union journals around at the time. It played a vital role in organising and campaigning for the strike from the outset. This same paper had, for years, also run its own "Page Three Stunner". Every month a miner's wife or girlfriend would be pictured in a bikini or scanty underwear, accompanied by suggestive captions.

Following a campaign by socialists, inside and outside the NUM, to get this sexist rubbish out of the paper, Scargill went on television to defend the Page Three slot. He claimed it was

a way of getting miners to read the rest of the paper and dismissed the campaign against it as "a storm in a B cup".

At a mass demonstration of miners' wives a few months into the strike, the very same Scargill announced to rapturous applause that he had been wrong, that the women of the mining communities were not eye candy for his members but working class fighters in their own right, and that the Page Three slot in the Yorkshire Miner would be abolished. Thousands of their husbands joined in the applause, their view of women changed forever by the action of the women themselves.

The whole movement answered, in one fell swoop, all of the complicated theoretical arguments that had gone on among socialists and feminists about self-organisation and whether or not men were the enemy. The women organised themselves, as allies of the striking men.

Their organisation gave them the means to participate in a common struggle – a class struggle against their class enemies, whether female (Thatcher) or male (MacGregor). The working class women's movement organised women as a detachment of the class struggle not as a means of

separating from that struggle.

Legacy

The legacy of the miners' wives movement is a precious one. It proves that real working class unity can only be created when the outdated and reactionary prejudices that persist amongst all too many male workers are transcended. It proves that it is working class women who can achieve that unity through their own militant self-organisation.

And it proves that the goal of self-organisation need not be the prosecution of a separate women's struggle against men, as many feminists at the time had argued, but a common class struggle against sexism, against women's oppression and against capitalism itself.

As a miner's wife, Eileen from South Wales, said, "That year was hard, but I wouldn't have missed it for the world... It's shown me the courage we have as people, and I hold my head up high as a working class woman who supported working class men."

(Originally published in *Workers Power* 284, March 2004, edited by Rebecca Anderson)



Women's Assembly: how not to organise

ON 22 FEBRUARY around 200 women attended the Women's Assembly in London. Tightly stage-managed by Socialist Action and Counterfire, the top-table speakers were predominantly Labour, Green Party and trade union officials – none of whom were leading the fightback against the cuts. The sole activist in the closing rally was Louise Irving of the Save Lewisham Hospital Campaign.

Not one concrete proposal or new campaign came out of this conference. There was no talk of action or future Assemblies; at the end, everyone patted themselves on the back just for turning up.

A telling indication of what class of women the organisers were aiming at was that there was no crèche to help working class women to participate. And that was reflected in those that came: mainly older women, and not that many rank and file union militants or community activists.

This is definitely not what is needed to build a fight back against austerity. We need a working class women's movement built democratically from the bottom up by those involved in daily struggles and strikes, not by bureaucrats. We need to involve local activists, women's groups and federations, as well as building a fighting movement within the trade unions through rank and file women's caucuses and conferences.

class women's movement

Bringing these class fighters together to forge a working class women's movement has the potential to bring the cuts government to its knees, argues Joy Maccready

declined, involuntary part-time employment has increased, and for the first time in five years the gender pay gap has widened, now standing at 15.7 per cent. Women pensioners suffer the greatest gap, on average receiving £6,500 a year less than men.

In addition, out of every 100 jobs created in the private sector, only 37 have gone to women. In the public sector, where a majority of women work because benefits such as maternity, parental and care leave are better, an estimated 700,000 workers are expected to lose their jobs by next year. In addition, a shocking 50,000 women lose their jobs while on maternity leave each year.

Cuts to legal aid will disproportionately affect women, as it no longer available to women who need to use the courts in relation to child contact and divorce, unless they can "prove" domestic violence.

Women also face a double-discrimination as migrants and as members of ethnic minority communities, and have been especially scapegoated as

such in the context of prolonged economic stagnation. Muslim women have been targeted for wearing the veil and subjected to increased violent attacks.

These are all reasons why we need to fight for a working class women's movement today.

Building a movement

But what would a working class women's movement look like? What would it fight for?

A working class women's movement would link up action groups, campaigns and caucuses in different unions and communities, building working class action to fight for its demands. Strikes, occupations and solidarity would be central.

In almost every big class struggle, like the Great Miners' Strike, women have begun to organise in their own groups, either building solidarity or as a way of raising their own demands in the male-dominated labour movement. Women need a broad and active movement to fight for their immediate

demands, with the political capacity and leadership to take those struggles further and secure genuine advances for women.

In addition to fighting back against the cuts, a working class women's movement would raise specific demands to combat women's oppression, such as domestic violence and rape, discrimination at work, the lack of abortion and contraceptive rights, inequalities in pay, inadequate childcare and healthcare, sexist culture, etc.

Many of these demands will also resonate with middle class women that are being thrown back by austerity. And in calling for a working class women's movement, we are not saying that only working class women could be part of it. Women from other classes would however have to recognise the need to join and support the struggles of the working class. They would have to be won to a class perspective on the fight for women's liberation.

Likewise we must win working

class men to fight consistently for women's liberation, and against sexism and the institutional obstacles to women's participation in political life. That is why we need a movement that fights against women's oppression in every form and wherever it manifests itself.

As socialists, we know that the majority of women will only be liberated and free from discrimination when the economic foundations of class rule and male supremacy are overthrown. Only under a socialist society – run for human need rather than private profit – will women be truly liberated.



Workers power 5

Strikes show Egypt's revolution lives on

By Marcus Halaby

A STRIKE WAVE has forced the resignation of Egyptian Prime Minister Hazem Al Beblawi and his cabinet, only a month after the military junta of Abdel Fattah el-Sisi rigged a constitutional referendum to enshrine its rule.

More than 20,000 workers at state-owned textile factories in Mahalla El-Kubra struck in February, demanding the dismissal of the company's boss Fouad Abdel-Alim and a rise in wages from levels as low as 520 Egyptian pounds (£44) per month to the official public sector minimum wage of 1,200 Egyptian pounds (£105).

Textile workers in privatised enterprises, not covered by the minimum wage, have struck for their re-nationalisation, with employees at Tanta Flax and Shebeen Weaving factories demanding the implementation of court rulings declaring their privatisations illegal.

Workers at Cairo Public Transportation Authority, with 42,000 employees, whose wages range from 600 to 1400 Egyptian pounds per month, have also struck for the minimum wage.

Elsewhere, there have been strikes

in manufacturing and in iron and steel production in El Asher, Alexandria and Suez, as well as strikes by doctors, pharmacists and civil servants in Alexandria, Kafr el-Sheikh and Cairo.

Overall, 100,000 workers have taken part in 54 strikes and occupations so far this year.

Minimum wage

The minimum wage has become the focus for strike action precisely because Sisi's junta promised to raise and implement it to win support for its coup last July against the Muslim Brotherhood-led government of Mohamed Morsi.

They appointed former Egyptian Federation of Independent Trade Unions (EFITU) president Kamal Abu Aita, as manpower and immigration minister to sell the coup to trade union members.

Since then, Abu Aita has used the excuse that the minimum wage falls under the jurisdiction of the National Council for Wages rather than his own ministry to argue that workers should negotiate their wages instead of taking strike action. The minimum wage is now subject to so many exemptions that the number of people benefitting



from it has been reduced from a hypothetical six million to just 400,000.

Repression

This strike wave has taken place amid ongoing repression of Muslim Brotherhood activists and other political opponents of the military regime. The Brotherhood-led Anti-Coup Alliance has held demonstrations across the country every Friday, which have spread to provincial regions that had not previously seen mass protests.

Egyptian security forces now hold at least 692 university students in detention, while courts have sentenced 220 protesters in Alexandria to prison

for seven years, and 21 students from Cairo's Al-Azhar University for five years, for "participating in illegal protests".

Hisham Kamal and Ehab Shiha from the Alliance have accused the security forces of subjecting female detainees to rape and sexual assault.

The banned four-fingered "R4BIA sign", showing solidarity with the victims of the massacre of up to 2,600 unarmed protesters outside Cairo's Rabaa Al-Adawiya Mosque on 14 August 2013, has become popular with protesters.

The Beblawi government's resignation demonstrates how fragile the Sisi

junta's relationship with its bourgeois "liberal" frontmen is. Beblawi's replacement as prime minister is his housing minister Ibrahim Mahlab, a former official in ex-dictator Hosni Mubarak's National Democratic Party.

Moreover, interim president Adly Mansour has reconstituted the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF) under Sisi's leadership as defence minister, rather than his own. This will provide Sisi with the option of continuing to act as the military regime's real leader behind a screen of constitutional legitimacy and "emergency" provisions, whatever the outcome of presidential elections in March or April.

But this is a sign of weakness rather than strength.

Sisi's military coup has not brought Egypt's revolution to an end. What is now needed is to unite the strikes with the struggle for democracy and for the end of military rule.

But for this, the Egyptian workers' movement will need to go beyond trade unionism. It will need to offer a united front to all those facing repression. Islamist or not, and to launch a revolutionary party to struggle for power.

Solidarity with Syria's revolution

By Marcus Halaby

THREE YEARS AGO this month, 15 schoolchildren in Daraa – encouraged by events in Egypt and Tunisia – were arrested and tortured for painting anti-regime graffiti on the wall of their school.

Their treatment would be the spark for demonstrations of at first a few hundred and then a few thousand people in their home town, which quickly spread to demonstrations of hundreds of thousands across the country.

Three years on, and Bashar al-Assad's regime has plunged Syria into a war in which more than 200,000 have been killed, indiscriminately bombing and starving its own people and murdering the doctors who try to save the lives of its victims.

And yet, where democratic revolutions in Egypt, Tunisia, Yemen and Bahrain have attracted expressions of sympathy and solidarity from the labour movement and the international left, Syria's has provoked controversy and division.

The recent conference "Syria in the context of the Arab Spring", held in London on 15 February, was therefore long overdue.

Attracting upwards of 150 people, it demonstrates the potential to bring together those in the British labour movement and on the left committed to establishing a movement of political and material support for those fighting and suffering in Syria, along the lines of the existing movement for solidarity with the Palestinians.

15 March demo

The conference agreed to support a national demonstration in London on 15 March to commemorate the third anniversary of the Daraa uprising.

To build for the demo – and beyond that a movement – will mean tackling the arguments that have so far obstructed solidarity with the Syrian people, among them the idea that Syria's Ba'athist regime is in some way "anti-imperialist", "secular" or even "socialist".

It will also require us to address the arguments of those who initially sup-

THREE YEARS ON ... REVOLUTION MARCHES ON

#RevolutionUntilVictory #SyriansDeserveLife

ON THE 3RD ANNIVERSARY OF THE SYRIAN REVOLUTION

JOIN US TO MARCH FOR THE SYRIAN STRUGGLE FOR FREEDOM

& TO CALL FOR AN END TO ASSAD'S KILLING MACHINE

★ ★ ★

SATURDAY 15 MARCH 2014

ported the revolution but have since abandoned its defence, on account of the involvement of Islamist forces and the regime's exploitation of sectarianism.

As Joseph Daher of the Syrian Rev-

olutionary Left Current explained, the Syrian revolution's ultimate cause has been the spiralling social injustices that resulted from Assad's neoliberal policies, which provided "socialism" only

for the Assad family while inflicting poverty on the people.

The Assad regime's longstanding exploitation of the Palestinian cause, described at the conference as "filthy emotional blackmail", is likewise a myth that needs to be demolished.

International solidarity will be key to the survival or defeat of the Syrian revolution. In particular, it will be necessary to raise the demand for asylum rights for all Syrian refugees and for the right of Syria's revolution to arm itself.

Only in this way will it be possible to present an alternative to the prospect of intervention with NATO bombs, by defending the legitimate struggle of the Syrian people against all its enemies – wherever they be and whatever disguise they adopt.

We fully support the call made at the conference to organise a campaign for solidarity with Syria – and we urge all principled socialists, every supporter of democracy and peace, and all those who sympathise with the revolutionary struggle of the Syrian people to join it.