

# workers power

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## Don't wait for Labour – fight for a pay rise now

As union leaders prepare to wind down strikes and settle for a pro-austerity Labour government, workers need to fight for a pay rise now and demand Miliband reverses the cuts

By Jeremy Dewar

HUNDREDS OF thousands of workers will walk off the job and take to the streets this month in pursuit of a pay rise. According to the Office of National Statistics, pay packets have fallen in real terms for every month since September 2009, the “deepest financial squeeze since the 1860s”. Millions of working class families desperately need to call a halt to the austerity that is slashing their incomes and destroying the welfare state.

On Monday 13 October Unison's 300,000 health workers will strike for four hours, to be followed by four days of action short of strikes. On Tuesday 14th up to a million local government workers in Unison, the GMB and Unite will strike, demanding a £1 an hour increase. Refuse collectors, social workers and teaching assistants have suffered a three-year pay freeze, sandwiched between two paltry 1 per cent “rises”. A further 1 per cent offer would still leave them a full 20 per cent below their real wage levels of six years ago. Then on Wednesday 15th 250,000 PCS members will strike against a pay freeze that has slashed their salaries by 20 per cent since 2010.

Finally on the 18th, the TUC will gather hundreds of thousands on the streets of London to demand a general pay rise from the government and employers. Of course every



socialist and worker should go on this demo to force the Coalition and bosses to concede pay rises. But the key question is, can such limited action make them cough up?

The answer is no. Unless we can mount the pressure to force the union leaders to rapidly escalate the strikes.

A Unison-sponsored motion was passed unanimously by the TUC Congress, calling for “a joint industrial action strategy... co-ordinating strike action among affiliates who are in dispute with their employers over the course of the next year”. But such motions are an annual event, just like the NUT's ducking out of the latest day of action and the routines failures to coordinate strikes. The cynical officials who put up

their hands to vote for such motions have no intention of actually carrying them out.

The other question is: is this the trade union leaders “last hurrah” before the election, before they call off all action on the grounds that they must not “embarrass” the Labour Party?

The answer is yes – unless we forcefully demand that our leaders make their millions of pound dependent on a radically different manifesto from the one Ed Miliband and Ed Balls and their Blue Labour advisors are planning.

The situation is getting worse, not better, and it is not confined to the public sector. Government statistics reveal that average wages – not real wages after inflation has been taken into account, but actual

wages – have fallen for the first time since 2009, mainly because low-paid and part-time new jobs are replacing better-paid, full-time jobs; four-fifths of the new jobs created in the past 12 months are part-time. TUC General Secretary Frances O'Grady said:

“Worryingly, the growth of low-paid work is as much a feature of the recovery as it was during the recession.”

### Precarious employment

Zero-hours contracts, temporary and agency work and bogus self-employment are all the rage, but they barely keep the wolf from the door. As a group, self-employed workers, who now number a record 4.6 million, earn half the average wage – just £209 a week – while

they work even longer hours than employees. The minimum wage means nothing to these super-exploited workers.

And while wages have remained stagnant – and are now falling – inflation has eaten away at the household budget: gas prices up 57 per cent since 2010, electricity up 22 per cent, food 16 per cent, petrol 11 per cent... not so much broken Britain as broke Britain.

Those on benefits – two-thirds of whom are in work – fare even worse as their claims are pegged to below real inflation and capped. The government sets targets to hound people off the register, while Atos and co have been driving the most vulnerable to suicide with their cynical methods.

This is why a real fight for

pay and benefit rises could ignite a bonfire of resistance. If approached in a spirit of respect and unity, public service users would actively support workers who provide and believe in these services.

If the fight for a pay rise was linked to a defence of those services, we could see the government in real trouble as the election approaches.

The example of the Scottish referendum shows how unpopular neoliberalism really is.

The union leaders have constantly promised coordinated action to win against the government and employers. But even when they get thumping ballots for action they cannot bring themselves to act all together on the same day. The teachers' union, the NUT, even called off its action this month. And even those that are held are routinely limited to one-day actions, held months apart – then terminated with barely a crumb to show for all our effort and sacrifice.

And instead of demanding class-wide reforms, saving the NHS or an end to all the cuts, strikes are limited to “trade disputes”, designed to alienate the wider working class.

The leaders often blame the members for being unwilling to take more action but they always turn out enthusiastically when called. It is these “leaders” who are too windy to call for all-out escalating action.

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# We need a new leadership to beat austerity

Continued from page 1

SO HOW CAN we replace these timid leaders and take control of our unions?

By uniting our struggles from below through reviving the trades councils in every city and town, turning them into real councils of action. By demanding the running of strikes is placed in the hands of those who are taking the action. By calling for longer, more frequent and coordinated strikes. And by reaching out to community groups, NHS campaigners and benefit claimants, and drawing them into united action.

Of course many socialists have been doing these things for six years. But what has been missing is a determination to take control when our leaders fail to respond.

Instead the leaders of the Socialist Workers Party, Socialist Party, Counterfire and Socialist Resistance have encouraged workers to place their trust in “left” leaders, like Len McCluskey (Unite), Mark Serwotka (PCS), Christine Blower (NUT) and Billy Hayes (postal union, CWU). They have created a People’s Assembly nationally and locally that is just another top table talking shop.

This paralysis has led to unnecessary defeats in the recent past. The pensions dispute of 2011 saw massive strikes in June and November. But when the right wing inevitably pulled out, the lefts meekly followed suit. The following year Grangemouth petrochemical workers in Scotland voted to strike and brushed aside threats to impose cuts, but McCluskey, instead of fighting, buckled under pressure. Then in 2013, despite huge postal strikes in 2007 and 2009 and continuing militant action from below, Hayes let Royal Mail be privatised without a fight.

All these betrayals could have been avoided if the National Shop Stewards Network or Unite the Resistance, controlled by the SP and SWP respectively, had called for and organised independent action by rank and file union members.

Yet time and again, when the rank and file have taken charge of their disputes, they have secured real victories. The “sparks”, electricians on construction sites, saw off a massive attack on wages and conditions through direct action. Hovis bakers defeated the imposition of zero-hours contracts by launching repeated week-long strikes and mass pickets. And most recently Ritzy cinema workers won a 26 per



Miliband applauds Ed Balls at this year's party conference, just after he has announced plans to cut child benefit

cent pay rise over three years with strikes and a consumer boycott.

That's why *Workers Power* has called for a national cross-union rank and file meeting on 8 November to try and pull together activists who see the need to organise resistance to the bureaucracy and build a new leadership. (See our Editorial on page 3 to get involved.)

## Labour to the rescue?

No doubt Labour leader Ed Miliband will be invited to speak at the mass TUC rally on 18 October – even though he has refused to support the October pay strikes, or for that matter, any strikes against austerity. (Has he supported a single strike in his political career?)

The reason is clear. Miliband believes, as do the rest of the Labour front bench and almost all of the trade union leaders, that the big political questions should be decided by parliament alone, not ordinary working class people themselves. And to play the parliamentary game, Labour must therefore appeal to middle class voters and consistently ignore or frustrate the wishes of trade union members and the working class as a whole.

The Americans call this triangulation. A simpler word for it is betrayal.

If there is one thing all commentators agree on, it is that the amazing turnout for the Scottish referendum was based on the fact that many work-

ers and young people voted for the first time in decades or in their entire life because they thought they could save the NHS and achieve a more equal society by doing so.

As we demonstrate elsewhere in this paper, they were wrong to believe an independent Scotland would achieve this, but nevertheless a “silent majority” does exist, one not represented by any of the major parties, one that wants to turn away from neoliberal policies of austerity, tax cuts for the rich, privatisation and low pay. But silence is no good. We need to give it a voice – a voice that becomes a roar.

Look at the record of the last Labour government. They introduced academies and hospital foundations on a massive scale. They loaded our public services with huge, unmanageable debts via PFI deals. They pegged the minimum wage so low that it was below the living wage and cut benefits, waging a war on so-called “scroungers”.

Not only that, Tony Blair and Gordon Brown sought to blame migrant workers, fuelling racism against the most vulnerable in society, and launched illegal and immoral wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, the consequence of which has been the rise of ISIS, the Islamic State. Brown even gave the Bank of England to the bosses and deregulated the financial markets, and we all know what a mess

the bankers made of the economy.

Miliband promised in his 2014 conference speech in Manchester that Labour would spend £2.5 million on “saving and transforming the NHS” by employing 20,000 more nurses, 8,000 more GPs, 5,000 more careworkers and 3,000 more midwives by 2020. He promised to fund this by a tax on the tobacco companies and a mansion tax. Yet Ed Balls wants to keep to the Tories’ spending cuts for the next two years and limit any progressive reforms to “what the market will bear” – i.e. profits before people is his slogan.

Bending to the pressure of the Tory tabloids and UKIP, Miliband wants to limit access to the welfare state for EU migrants, giving wings to the lie that foreigners cause cuts. The party wants to cut 100,000 unemployed young people off from benefits all together – unless they take a dead end McJob or work for nothing on a workfare scheme.

## Force our demands on Labour

Frances O’Grady, Dave Prentis (Unison) and Len McCluskey know all this but will not fight for alternative policies. Last Spring, they even meekly accepted – after a lot of huffing and puffing – the reduction of trade union influence in the party; now millions of affiliated party members have no say in choosing the leader, no say in choosing MPs, to go along with their no say in writing the manifesto.

As long as the unions support Labour, as long as workers have no alternative at the ballot box, we have to demand that Labour stops supporting austerity, stops presiding over wage reductions and the growth of low paid, insecure, non-unionised jobs, and starts saving the NHS, education, etc. by making the rich pay. We need to demand a Labour government repeals all the anti-union laws. The unions should make these demands now, at the very moment when Labour needs union money in its election war chest and union members to go on the knocker. Only if the union make funding dependent on satisfaction for their members demands will the leaders even listen to them.

But as well as doing this we have to prepare the alternative to Labour. We desperately need a new working class party, a socialist party, a party that puts direct action by millions above manoeuvres by MPs and councillors.

Len McCluskey acknowledges this fact, but delays any move towards cutting off funds for Labour and establishing a new party till 2017, as if Miliband and Balls will listen more after our funding of the party has placed them in Downing Street. No wonder he has cut so many poor deals for workers if this is how he treats negotiations. This kind of opposition to the Labour leaders is pure deceit.

We need a massive working class campaign now, on the scale of the referendum in Scotland, involving mass meetings in every locality, where workers, youth and activists can thrash out policies to counter the capitalist offensive. There can be no doubt that these would include:

- Abolition of the anti-union laws
- Reversing all the cuts
- Ending PFI and bringing public services, including Royal Mail, back into public ownership, under working class control and without compensation to the banks and hedge funds
- No new wars – no to Nato
- Minimum wage of £10 an hour, pegged to the cost of living.

Between now and May 2015, this must be our priority, along with continuing and upping the strikes. Of course we may have to vote for Labour in May – where there are not working class candidates standing on a clear programme of action against austerity – but if they come to office on a tide of working class anger, expectations and action, then we can either force them to respond to our demands – or make way for a new party that will.



## Editorial

# Organise the rank and file

OVER THE PAST year or two the failure of the union leaders – left as well as right – to call the escalating and united action they have promised at the TUC and union conferences, and the catastrophic retreat without a fight at Grangemouth, underline the importance of not relying on, or waiting for these leaders.

Of course we should continue to support any union leader that organises or supports militancy – like the local government strike on 15 October, the NHS action later in the month or the Bakers' Union unionising fast food outlet workers in the fight for the living wage – but the problem of bureaucratic misleadership remains.

On the other hand, though small in scale, actions by grassroots unionists – the Hovis bakers, the Tres Cosas migrant workers or the Ritzy cinema employees – indicate that initiatives by the rank and file and appeals for support from students, communities etc. are possible and can win. The fact that Jerry Hicks has repeatedly and increasingly scored 20-36% in Unite General Secretary election campaigns, and attempts have been made to organise rank and file groupings in their wake is also encouraging.

Though various national campaigns and bodies from Unite the Resistance to the Peoples Assembly have held big rallies, they all have been top table speech-making events for the union leaders and assorted celebrities – thoroughly top down affairs.

While we don't need another such another campaign, it is high time rank and file trade unionists got together, without platform speakers, for an open and wide-ranging discussion on what are the things holding back effective trade unionism and workplace organisation today.

We need to discuss how we can organise together across the unions and within each union, in the workplaces and communities; how we can give solidarity to one another's struggles, support union activists victimised by management or the union officialdom; how we can learn from one another the best practices and tactics; how we can set about unionising the unorganised and fighting to democratise and transform the unions.

We have therefore set up a campaign to organise a national meeting of rank and file trade unionists, a forum to begin such a discussion.

The meeting will be held in the Indian YMCA, Fitzroy Street, London W1 (near Warren Street tube) on 8 November.

### Support

After just a few weeks of starting, we have gained support for the idea. The Sparks – the militant electricians in the construction industry – ran out of time at their AGM to fully discuss the proposal, however 20 activists, including blacklisted members, signed up.

A national meeting of public sector trade unionists in Left Unity also agreed to support the campaign and a dozen prominent individuals joined on the spot.

Jerry Hicks, the Unite convenor who was victimised by Rolls Royce in Filton, near Bristol, has also enthusiastically lent his support. We hope that this will lead to further activists from his election campaigns and the Grassroots Left which we helped set up with Jerry's support getting involved.

The aim is to establish a coordinating committee, open to anyone who agrees with the basic aim of the campaign, which could meet in early October to agree an agenda and discuss how to spread the word, e.g. by leafleting strikes and the TUC demo on 18 October.

**Like us. Follow us. Register for the open organising committee.**  
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Website: [www.rankandfilemeeting.wordpress.com](#)  
Phone/text: 07883 089555



**NATIONAL CROSS-UNION  
RANK & FILE MEETING  
8 NOVEMBER  
12 noon TO 5pm**

**INDIAN YMCA  
FITZROY STREET  
LONDON W1T 6AQ**

Facebook: [crossunionrankandfile](#)  
Website:  
[www.rankandfilemeeting.wordpress.com](#)  
Phone/text: 07883 089555

## Defy the anti-union laws

Union leaders complain that their hands are tied by the anti-union laws, but where is the campaign to abolish them? **Jeremy Dewar** outlines how we could launch one

WHEN THE TUC voted to “consider the practicalities of a general strike” a few years back, union leaders’ response was to send some lawyers away to see if it was legal, not to consult their members on how we can organise it. As a result nothing more was heard of it.

This wouldn't happen in any other country in Europe. In Spain, Greece, France, Italy and Portugal, general strikes are a political question, not a legal one. That's not just because Britain has “the most draconian anti-union legislation in the Western world” as Tony Blair once boasted, but because faced with an unjust law we have some of the most craven union leaders, too.

It was not always so. Indeed our union leaders decamp to Dorset once a year to celebrate the Tolpuddle Martyrs, agricultural labourers deported to Australia for forming a trade union.

There is no right to strike in Britain, as Lord Denning, once pointed out, only a system of immunities from prosecution for breach of contract if the strike fits certain criteria. These criteria have been toughened up since the 1970s.

### The laws

- A strike must be called as part of a trade dispute over wages or conditions. It cannot be political.
- You cannot strike in solidarity with other workers, even if your work is totally intertwined with theirs.
- You must give seven days notice of a strike ballot, which must be postal and addressed to every member being called out and only to them. The employer must be given the wording of the ballot and all the names, addresses, work-

places and grades of the members. The boss can go to court and a judge grant an injunction at any time if there are grounds to believe that the ballot may not fit all these criteria. Just one out-of-date address or “ambiguous” phrase is enough to invalidate a ballot. No proof is needed, yet to defy the injunction is an offence.

- Workers can only picket their own workplace and must obey guidelines on picketing or they can be arrested and prosecuted.
- All unofficial strikes, called by the members involved but not by the officials, are deemed unlawful.
- In all unlawful strikes, individual members can be sued for damages, i.e. for millions of pounds. Union leaders, including unofficial “leaders” in the case of wildcat strikes, can be jailed, and union funds and assets seized as if they were terrorist organisations. The operation of the laws requires the private employer or the government as employer to go to the courts and get an injunction, and if ignored to impose fines and penalties. This gives the bosses or government the option of invoking the laws or not depending on whether the balance of forces favours them.

Included in this calculation are the questions: will the union strike, will the strike hit hard, will the union leaders fight or be put to flight?

Union leaders claim they oppose these laws, but not one of them has ever defied them openly – except, ironically, the Prison Officers Association, which doesn't even represent workers as such, but screws.

Yet countless workers have. Many have walked off the job,

like the Gate Gourmet workers after they were sacked by text message. Others have come out in solidarity, like postal workers who take “wildcat” action to boycott work redirected from striking depots. Pickets regularly involve hundreds of workers from various workplaces.

Rarely if ever are workers disciplined or sacked for these “offences”, proving that it is possible to defy these laws.

Does this mean they are impotent? Unfortunately, no. In fact they play a deadly role even before strike action is agreed. Union lawyers inform the executives that the action is unlawful and officials tamely agree to shelve it.

### How officials use them

Time and again the laws are brought up by trade union officials to counter arguments for more militant action. And the fact that they remain unchallenged has emboldened the Tories to promise more of them in the next government.

Led by anti-union hawks Boris Johnson and Francis Maude, the Tories want to further restrict, maybe even outlaw pickets all together. They also want to demand that unions reach a threshold of votes for a strike of 50 per cent plus one of all members balloted.

This would mean that every abstention, for whatever reason, is counted as a vote against strike action. It has been pointed out that if this rule were applied to the election of MPs, there would be only one MP in the House of Commons.

It is time for a real campaign to get these unjust laws off the statute books, to abolish them.

To do this we need to demand Labour repeals all the anti-union laws in its first par-

liamentary session in office. If it refuses to accept this, the unions should refuse to fund its election campaign.

In fact we need a massive campaign against them during the seven months before the next election, including petitioning on the streets and in the workplaces, and demonstrations right across the country. Labour MPs should put down a repeal bill now.

By these means we will of course not soften the hearts of the Tories but we will “educate, agitate and organise” millions of our fellow workers to demand freedom for the unions. And in the process we can recruit huge numbers of the unorganised to the unions, and encourage them to use them for higher wages, saving the NHS and many other vital issues.

Secondly, by raising awareness of the laws, we can increase the confidence to defy them among the rank and file of the unions. Then increasingly we will be able to make strike plans disregarding the laws, and if the laws are used, then we can expect other trade unions to call on their members to take strike action in their defence.

This is not a pipe dream. It's been done before – in 1972, when the Pentonville dockers were released after the TUC had called a general strike – one that had in reality already begun with action from below.

Some may argue that the '70s were a different era; we are not so strong now. But this misses the point; we rebuild union strength by mounting bold campaigns. If you aim low, you inevitably miss the target. If you aim high, you will get there – and maybe sooner than you think.



# FBI's Most Wanted

## Review – Assata: An Autobiography

By Joy Macready

“HE LOOKS JUST like what he is: a racist dog craka... I want to scream, ‘Dirty dog, slimy pig, you’re not a judge. You’re just another prosecutor.’”

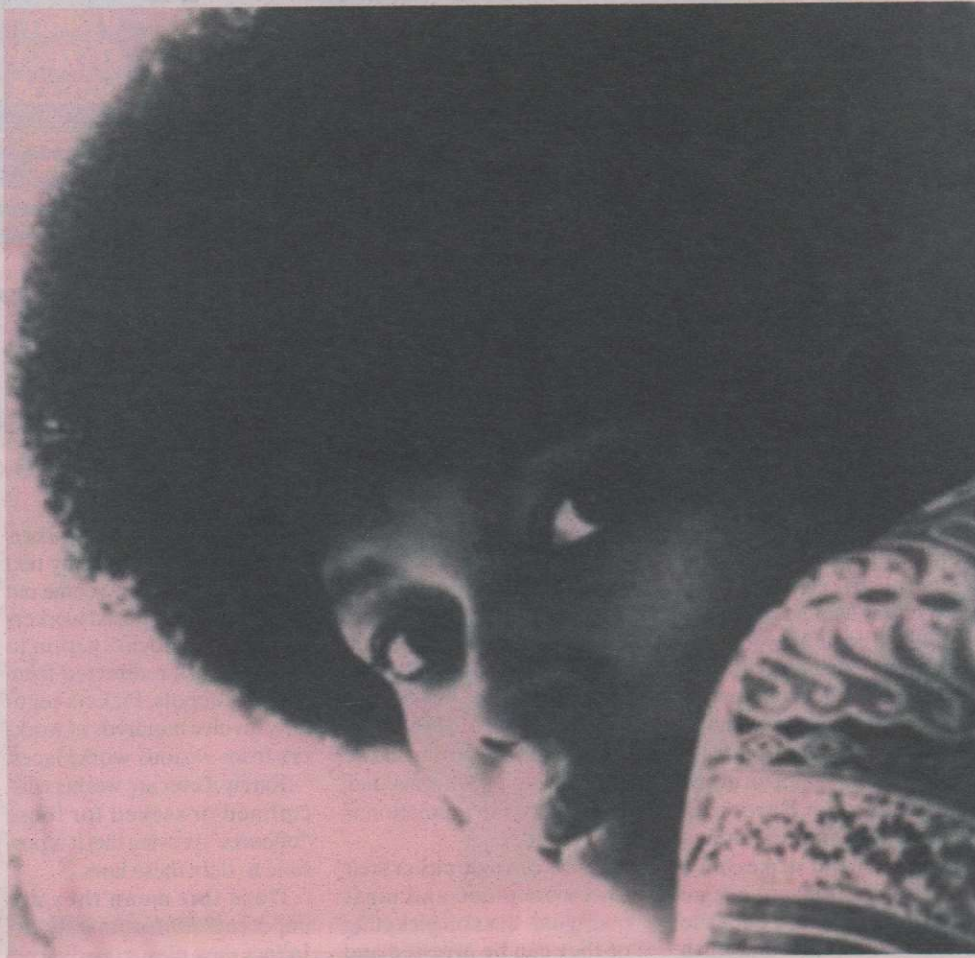
These are the words that Assata Shakur, a founding member of the Black Liberation Army and the first woman ever to make the FBI’s Most Wanted Terrorist List, uses to describe the presiding judge of the kangaroo court trying to “neutralise” her revolutionary potential.

But it wasn’t just one “craka” (white) judge that Assata was up against – it was the whole state apparatus, racist to its core from the judges to the prison guards, state troopers and police. But state racism doesn’t stop there – it pervades every aspect of life, including education, housing, employment, healthcare and childcare, and infects communities.

Assata’s autobiography exposes the naked racism built into the ideology – and reality – of the world’s greatest imperialist power, the USA. Her chapters alternate between the bogus trials and lengthy internment she faced in the 1970s, and her life as a young black woman growing up partly in the Jim Crow South and partly in the “integrated” North. The chapters are also punctuated with her powerful and sharp poetry.

She writes about the rise of the anti-war/anti-imperialist and civil rights movements in the 1960s and her growing militancy from a young age. This is illustrated in her gut reaction to the non-violence strategy of the National Association for the Advancement of Coloured People (NAACP) – “to sit there and let some craka dog spit on me, well just the idea of it made me want to fight”.

She also recounts her political journey from community politics and black empowerment to an international revolutionary. Her political awakening began when she was at Manhattan Community College, participating in student government and fighting for community control of schools and education, as well as deep political discussion with African liberation fighters.



“We always starting talking about reform and ended up talking about revolution. If you were talking about anything except a few little jive crumbs here and there, reform was just not going to get it. I was long past the day when I thought reform could possibly work, but revolution was a big question mark. I believed, with all my heart, that it was possible. But the question was how,” she writes.

She joined the Black Panther Party, which promoted militant self-defence, and worked in the free breakfast programme in East Harlem, getting up every morning to cook for and feed hungry children before they went to school, and free health clinics. However, stoked by police infiltrators, the Panthers began to tear themselves apart, and Huey Newton, the “Supreme Commander”, began expelling longstanding loyal members. So Assata resigned from the party.

According to Assata, “One of the Party’s major weaknesses, I thought, was the failure to clearly differentiate between aboveground political struggle and underground,

clandestine military struggle.” Assata was clear about the need for an armed struggle, but she argued it had to be part of a mass movement and supportive of the aims of the working class.

Not long after leaving the party, she was forced underground as state oppression was ratcheted up and the police began hunting her, trying to fit her up for crimes she didn’t commit.

### State terror

In the late 1960s, when the civil rights movement was at its peak, the FBI (led by J. Edgar Hoover) launched a counter-intelligence programme (COINTELPRO) to systematically “expose, disrupt, misdirect, discredit and otherwise neutralise” black organisations and individuals, railroading the best and most revolutionary activists into prison on trumped up charges.

The Fed had already imprisoned the Black Panther 21, who were arrested in a pre-dawn raid on 2 April, 1969 and charged with conspiracy to blow up the New York Botanical Gardens. Tellingly, after the longest political trial in New

York’s history, all 21 New York Panthers were acquitted of all charges in just 45 minutes of jury deliberation on 13 May 1971.

Angela Davis had also been jailed for almost two years for aggravated kidnapping and first-degree murder, of which she was acquitted in 1972.

In the same year, Assata, also known as JoAnne Chesimard, was on the FBI’s Most Wanted List, accused of being a bank robber, and subsequently a kidnapper and murderer. Her picture was plastered in every bank, post office and subway station in New York. She moved around covertly with the help of the Black Liberation Army.

### Assata’s politics

On 2 May 1973, she along with Zayd Shakur and Sundiata Acoli were stopped on the New Jersey Turnpike by state troopers who claimed that they had a faulty taillight; such spurious reasons were continually used to harass the black community, in the same way that stop and search is used today. This encounter left Assata critically wounded, and Zayd and a state trooper dead.

Incarcerated for the next four years, she was treated in

the most barbaric way. She was continuously confined in a men’s prison, under 24-hour surveillance, without intellectual stimulus, adequate medical attention or exercise, and without the company of other women. She spent most of this time in solitary confinement. During those years, all the many other charges that caused Assata to be a fugitive and led to the shootout on the New Jersey Turnpike were dropped for lack of evidence, dismissed or resulted in acquittal. The vicious vendetta that the state pursued against her is captured in great detail as she recounts the many trials she endured.

“I believe that to gain our liberation, we must come from the position of power and unity, and that a black revolutionary party, led by black revolutionary leaders, is essential.”

Black people do need to organise themselves within the wider working class movement in order to defeat racism and fight for their own specific needs, however Workers Power doesn’t support the building of separate black political parties or trade unions. We reject separatism and insist on both the possibility and the necessity of black and white workers uniting in the struggle against racism and capitalism.

### Separatism

Workers Power argues that black people – as well as other oppressed groups such as women, youth and LGBTs – should organise within a single revolutionary party, comprised of the most militant fighters against capitalism and racism. Black workers have a leading role to play in that party.

But in order to combat racism, sexism and homophobia, all oppressed groups have the right to caucus. Our support for the right of black workers to organise within the workers’ movement is aimed at strengthening the unity of the working class.

Furthermore in a country like the US, where racism and racial oppression are deep-rooted in the white population’s psyche and manifest, black working class movements will spontaneously arise and revolutionaries should support them or agitate for them if they do not yet exist. But such movements do not have to be – and should not be – black-only.

The great black liberation movements of the past show this to be the case. The anti-slavery movement of the 18th and 19th centuries, as well as the civil rights movement of the 1950s and ’60s, certainly had black leaders, but also white activists and leaders among them, especially from the Jewish community, where the experience of racism was both raw and recent.

But only the working class, black and white, has a consistent interest in defeating racism – and capitalism – once and for all.



# Workers power

## Scots rock the UK

The Scottish referendum has changed the political landscape across Britain. In this supplement, we look at the constitutional fallout and the far left's embrace of Scottish nationalism, and we propose a revolutionary response to the devolution debate

By Dave Stockton

DESPITE THE rejection of independence, the shock to the system caused by the final weeks of the referendum campaign – when it appeared the blue Saltire was going to be ripped out of the Union Flag – continues to be felt. The pro-union parties at Westminster, which made a solemn vow to devolve greater powers to Scotland, have already fallen out over the constitutional issues this has raised for England and the rest of the UK.

So Britain looks set for a major debate, which, to put it mildly, could complicate the forthcoming election campaign.

This was no ordinary ballot. For the first time in a generation, instead of being confronted by two or three parties with near identical neoliberal, pro-big business agendas, there appeared to be a real choice: an independent Scotland or more of the same.

For once, this was not a campaign primarily waged through million-pound TV ads and billboard posters, or even Obama-inspired call centre teams. Since every vote counts in a referendum, as with proportional representation, so there was no narrow focus on “key marginals”.

Instead there was a real political awakening of the whole population. School and college students debated in giant halls, as did older folk with their workmates, families and neighbours. Social media was abuzz. Professional politicians and newspaper pundits were followed and harassed wherever they went. Photo-ops became opportunities to spoil the party.

### What did the referendum show?

On 18 September a total of 3,619,915 people cast valid votes, a record turnout of 84.9 per cent of the electorate in any kind of ballot. In the end 2,001,926 voted No and 1,617,989 voted Yes. Yet the narrowing of the lead for rejection during the campaign was remarkable.

At the start of the campaign back in 2012 only 23 per cent supported independence. That rose to 29 per cent last year and by July 2014 stood at 33 per cent according to the Scottish



Miliband: not a happy bunny

Social Attitudes Survey. But on 7 September a YouGov poll gave it to the Yes campaign by 51 to 49 per cent. Cue Westminster panic.

For the Tories, with only one MP there, Scotland is a lost cause. It is Labour, with 41 of Scotland's 59 Westminster MPs, that is licking its wounds. Traditional Labour heartlands like Glasgow and North Lanarkshire swung most heavily to a Yes vote.

In Glasgow, the Yes won by 53.5 to 46.5 per cent and in North Lanarkshire, by 51 to 49. In West Dunbartonshire just under 54 per cent voted for independence.

There is no doubt that among Yes votes a huge number, maybe one third were recent converts, and moved because of Labour's inability to convincingly defend the welfare state, education, and unwillingness to pledge to restore cuts. In short they were persuaded that a traditional Labour agenda could best be achieved in an independent Scotland.

Labour paid the price for entering an unprincipled popular front with the Tories and Lib Dems. Better Together was a joke, offering not a “better” future but worse: more austerity, militarism and unfairness. Scare tactics around the currency and EU membership backfired as Scots refused to be bullied by the establishment.

This eventually dawned on Labour leaders after the disastrous second TV debate, which the audience gave to

Alex Salmond over Alistair Darling by 71 per cent. As one shadow cabinet member told the *Huffington Post*, “The truth of the matter is that we couldn't have designed a worse fucking campaign.”

The campaign's apotheosis arrived with its disastrously patronising TV advert, which dreams up the most apolitical woman imaginable saying:

“My Paul is worse than the telly these days. He will not leave off about the referendum! He started again first thing this morning: ‘Have you made a decision yet?’ I was like, ‘It's too early to be discussing politics, you eat your cereal.’”

Inevitably the advert backfired and was spoofed mercilessly online.

Suave middle class lawyer Alistair Darling just didn't seem to get it – at least until the last weeks of the campaign when Gordon Brown was drafted in big time.

Interestingly the elephant in the sitting room ignored by most of the for the late night media pundits was Austerity. YouGov polling showed the main issue was the belief that the NHS was not safe in the hands of a UK government in the Westminster bubble. So Labour had to pressure Clegg and Cameron to sign “The Vow” – carried on the front page of the *Daily Record* on 16 September – to leave the NHS in Scotland alone.

The SNP's positive appeal is in part because they no longer appear to be

the “Tartan Tories” they did in the 1970s. They successfully rebranded themselves under Salmond as a tartan Old Labour. Salmond, who, unlike Darling, speaks the language of ordinary folk, easily out-flanked Labour on the left, promising to renationalise the Royal Mail, raise old age pensions, provide free childcare and rid Scotland of the nuclear submarines at Faslane.

With the support of unions like the RMT and the uncritical backing of the far left Solidarity and left reformist Scottish Socialist Party, the Yes Campaign was able to pose as the more worker friendly side. Ironically the old northern and rural heartlands of the SNP, like Salmond's own constituency, Aberdeenshire, voted solidly No. As the adage goes, “You can't fool all the people all the time.”

### Self-determination

The referendum on independence for Scotland was a basic right supported by all democrats. The mass participation in the vote and to an important degree in the debate is to be welcomed.

But for all this the referendum was not a vote on austerity. It was a vote on breaking one state into two. And separation into smaller states is not a good thing in itself. While most revolutionaries believe every nation has a right to national independence, providing this is does not involve depriving another people of their right to it

(as the Israeli settlement does for Palestinians), this only has a progressive character if the nation concerned is suffering some form of national oppression and that independence can end this and thus aid the reconciliation of the workers of both countries.

For just over 300 years Scotland has been an integral part of a capitalist and then an imperialist Britain. Scottish and English merchants, industrialists, settlers and soldiers, have colonised and exploited the world, allying themselves with the oppressors and exploiters worldwide. Even far left converts to Scottish independence hardly dare argue that Scotland is an oppressed nation, like Ireland.

On the contrary, Scotland is the “third-richest region in the UK after London and the south-east of England”, according to Larry Elliot of *The Guardian*. State spending north of the border was £10,212 per head last year – £1,624 more than in England. Of course this is not to say that there are no areas of deep deprivation in Scotland – just as there are in London and the south-east. But these are class divisions, not national ones.

Whatever the hopes embodied by the mass participation of working class people in Scotland, the Yes campaign inevitably strengthened nationalism in Scotland. And now the media, the Tory right and Ukip have seized the opportunity to promote English chauvinism and parochial regionalism as props for their Europhobia and anti-immigrant racism. All nationalism – Scottish as well as English – undermines the basic working class principles of unity and internationalism.

The only antidote to this, as well as being the only way to really fulfil the hopes of working class Yes voters is to rouse the labour movement from its slumbers and launch a UK-wide struggle to defend the NHS, raise real wages, and take up important political issues like opposing the new cold war our rulers are launching.

And for this we are indeed better together, not as “Brits” – we should instil in people a deep hatred of the crimes of British imperialism – but as revolutionary internationalists fighting against our own ruling class.



# Devolution and democracy

By Dave Stockton

THE LAST DITCH “Vow” of greater powers for the Scottish Parliament made by the leaders of the three main parties has provoked a wave of demands for devolution in the four corners of the United Kingdom.

No esoteric debate on constitutional technicalities, the outcome of the debate will have a lasting impact on working class people throughout the UK for decades to come.

And if the three main Westminster parties fail to deliver on even the minimal promises made in the Vow, the Scottish National Party will push for a “neverendum” which could quickly turn the minority result into a majority for independence.

Intoxicated with nationalist illusions, a large section of the far left in Scotland seem determined to play the same game in the belief that at last and after so many disappointments they too will hit the parliamentary jackpot.

But two can play at beggary-neighbour, and nationalism north of the border is stimulating the growth of an even uglier English twin. The Mail and the

Express, the voices of reactionary English nationalism are doing their best to present more autonomy for Scotland as some kind of swindle for the 85 per cent of the UK population living in England.

Then we have Nigel Farage – a public schoolboy from the stockbroker belt – “standing up for England” despite leading the United Kingdom Independence Party. Fearful of being overtaken by Farage in the leafy shires and suburbs, the Tories, the party of Rule Britannia and the Union Jack, are insisting that they are England’s true defenders. From the party of Great Britain to that of Little England – what a comedown!

## Cameron’s gambit

Just over an hour after the announcement of the referendum result Cameron made a move that took Ed Miliband by surprise. He appeared to make fulfilment of his promises to the Scots (increase taxation and spending powers for Holyrood) contingent on depriving Scottish MPs of the right to vote on “English-only” matters:

“Just as the people of Scotland will have more power over

their affairs, so it follows that the people of England, Wales and Northern Ireland must have a bigger say over theirs. The rights of these voters need to be respected, preserved, and enhanced.”

Miliband complained bitterly that Cameron had not said a word about this when they discussed the Vow. He immediately rejected linking English devolution to fulfilling the promises to Scotland. Alex Salmond meanwhile claimed this was proof that “the English” were going to short change Scotland.

Backbench Tories, who think Cameron is what Thatcher used to call a “wet”, joined in the chorus that the Scots are about to be given privileges at English taxpayers’ expense.

Cameron is touting a change which would create a de facto English parliament at Westminster in which matters affecting England will only be voted on by English constituency MPs. He expects the Tories would dominate this on a semi-permanent basis. John Redwood, (aka Doctor Spock) one of the truest of Thatcherite true believers commented, “We just want to get on and do conser-

vative things in England in accordance with our majority.” The Tories clearly believe “England belongs to us” and that here they will be able to complete Thatcher’s legacy by demolishing the welfare state.

## Devolution trap

Thus an English parliament – elected on the existing first-past-the-post model – is clearly against the interests of workers in England as well as in Scotland, and we need to resolutely oppose this reactionary scheme. Devolution on this basis – with the existing power Westminster exercises over local government – would be a tyranny over the most deprived areas of the UK and parts of our big cities.

So too would the creation of English regions, organised solely on the basis of parity of population with Scotland and Wales. With no national or ethnic basis, these would be utterly artificial and, if some became Labour strongholds, others would be Tory hellholes. In other words it would increase inequality and unevenness – a postcode lottery that working class people in some regions would lose.

It would be a mechanism for preventing national government effectively re-distributing wealth from the rich, and the rural and suburban areas they hole up in. For example if Labour win the UK election in May 2015 and tried to fulfil Miliband’s pledge to spend more on the NHS, the Tories, if they had a majority of English seats, would be able to block Labour – because NHS spending in England would have to be voted through a Tory-dominated English parliament.

## Constitutional convention?

In a bid to skirt round the trap presented by the potential loss of its 40 Scottish MPs, Miliband’s Labour Party conference speech proposed a “constitutional convention” to “discuss” the various options for change. These will apparently include lowering the voting age to 16 and reforming the House of Lords into a “Senate of the Regions”.

However, a No. 10 source has already said, “It is up to the Labour leadership if they want to take part in the process” – i.e. the Tories do not plan to grant Labour a veto over their plans.

A further obstacle to a Tory constitutional coup is that Gordon Brown, widely hailed as the man who saved the Union and the initiator of the Vow, has made it clear he will denounce any delays.

Indeed Brown is making a bit of a comeback. He has interpreted the referendum result as “not simply about a desire to vote and participate; it is about a deep-seated desire for social change in this country... The independence we want is from the deprivation of millions of people and the inequalities they face.” Pity he didn’t realise this before the 2010 election. He might even still be prime minister.

But Brown is also an advocate of federalism. In a speech at the Edinburgh International Book Fair in August he said, “I believe that there is no alternative but to introduce these changes, which would be taxation powers for the [Scottish] parliament. It would mean that there would never be anything like a poll tax or a bedroom tax or rail privatisation imposed on Scotland against its will. There is a mood that too much power rests in London but that this is about to change.”

# For a UK-wide struggle for dem

The positive enthusiasm of millions in the Scottish referendum and the massive rejection of austerity and privatisation have opened up a path for the working class. The bosses are not to use the crisis to weaken the ability of the working class to demand widespread reforms and redistribute wealth from

“SCOTLAND WILL NEVER be the same again,” was the common verdict of Yes and No voters after the referendum. Within hours of the ballots being counted, this sentiment was being echoed in England and Wales.

But the British bourgeoisie has long been a ruling class; its main party lost no time in trying to turn this constitutional crisis to its own ends. Indeed David Cameron took just one hour after Alex Salmond’s concession to announce his response:

“We have heard the voice of Scotland and now the millions of voices of England must also be heard.”

With utter arrogance Cameron moved from staring a career-shattering defeat in the face to turning it into an opportunity to grab more powers for what he hopes will be a Tory-dominated English constitutional settlement. And speed is of the essence for now he has a majority with the broken

spirited Lib Dems in tow. Who knows what will happen after May 2015?

So he went on to promise the publication of a new Scotland Bill by 25 January, which would have its second reading by 27 March, and that “the question of English votes for English laws” must be resolved “in tandem”.

His reasons are cynical, but transparent. Labour has 49 Scots MPs at Westminster, the Tories one. If Scottish MPs are debarred from voting – for example on the “reforms” to the NHS – its will be easier he presumes to complete its destruction. And Scots should beware too. With the NHS in England in private hands, how long would NHS Scotland hold out against market forces?

## Danger

The working class both sides of the border need to wake up to this danger fast. There has not been a vote in Scot-

land on the way in which power could be more democratically accountable and the interests of the working class secured, only one on independence. The “increased powers” are vague in the extreme – almost a dud cheque.

“Millions of voices of England” and of Wales will not be “heard” unless they can join in a full democratic debate. Neither the Tories, nor Westminster – not even the SNP – has any popular mandate to decide on this. We have to demand a full debate, and ultimately an elected sovereign constitutional assembly or convention so that working people can bring into existence the most democratic state possible, a framework within which they can prosecute the class struggle and fight for socialism.

Here is what we think workers and socialists should argue for in this debate.

Labour’s proposal for a constitu-

tional convention goes further than the Tories’ plans but still does not go far enough, i.e. to a truly democratic solution. It is to be made up of Westminster MPs, councillors and assorted representatives of civil society. Moreover it will in effect only be advisory since final decision lies with parliament.

Instead what is needed is a fully sovereign constitutional assembly. This should be elected by all UK residents aged 16 or over, with absolutely proportional representation. This would allow for minority parties and views to be heard.

This should be preceded by a voter registration campaign, aimed at raising the representation of black and Asian people and the poorer sections of the working class, whose non-participation is common. In fact this should be the basis for all future parliamentary, assembly and council elections.

The delegates should also be

recallable by their electors, should they fail to represent their views at any point. All the sessions of the convention should be televised and made available on social media. Its task should be to hammer out a new constitution for the UK, including the relationship and powers of all its constituent parts.

Only in this way could the enthusiasm and level of engagement of the Scottish referendum, which virtually all politicians and media pundits (rather hypocritically) praised, be maintained and spread to the whole country.

## Constitutional reforms

We demand trade union freedom be written into the constitution, at a stroke abolishing all the anti-union laws and enshrining the right of every individual worker to join a trade union and the right to strike without legal



# THE VOW

The people of Scotland want to know that all three main parties will deliver change for Scotland.

## WE ARE AGREED THAT:

The Scottish Parliament is permanent and extensive new powers for the Parliament will be delivered by the process and to the timetable agreed and announced by our three parties, starting on 19th September.

And it is our hope that the people of Scotland will be engaged directly as each party works to improve the way we are governed in the UK in the years ahead.

We agree that the UK exists to ensure opportunity and security for all by sharing our resources equitably across all four nations to secure the defence, prosperity and welfare of every citizen.

And because of the continuation of the Barnett allocation for resources, and the powers of the Scottish Parliament to raise revenue, we can state categorically that the final say on how much is spent on the NHS will be a matter for the Scottish Parliament.

We believe that the arguments that so powerfully make the case for staying together in the UK should underpin our future as a country. We will honour those principles and values not only before the referendum but after.

People want to see change. A No vote will deliver faster, safer and better change than separation.



RECORD VIEW NOW VOTERS CAN MAKE AN INFORMED CHOICE

The vacuous vow the three main party leaders made, desperate to halt the Yes bandwagon

He then extended this vision to the English saying, "We're going to be, within a year or two, as close to a federal state as you can be in a country where one nation is 85 per cent of the population."

Miliband's two-year timetable for the constitutional convention has been denounced by Labour right wingers as "kicking devolution into the long grass". The majority of Labour MPs, content with an electoral system that guarantees Labour's future in a two-tier system, are likely to resist radical reform.

Nevertheless it is not the timescale that is the concern, but the content. It is far from clear whether Miliband's convention will be a new body, elected on a democratic basis with real decision making ability, or a cosy and conservative club of grasping MPs, councillors and church leaders.

What is needed is for the Labour movement to pre-empt on one hand the Tory plot to colour the map of England blue for generations, and on the other Labour's plans, which won't include allowing actual working class people to make any decisions.

We should put forward a demand across the whole working class movement for a sovereign constituent assembly – a decision making body that cannot be blocked by the House or Lords or the Monar-

chy. It should be elected by everyone over the age of 16, with delegates answerable to their electors by a process of immediate recall.

It is not sufficient to simply counterpose the struggle for socialism and workers' power with reforms to capitalist democracy.

Whether it is reforming the voting system or abolishing the monarchy, we should support any and every democratic reform, which enables the working class to fight better for its interests.

## Working class interests

Decentralisation and dismantling large states doesn't assist but hinders the class struggle. It doesn't weaken the class enemy; it weakens us. It creates not only objective obstacles, in terms of borders, states and economic institutions, but subjective ones: the reproduction of divisive national antagonisms.

The working class has an interest in a powerful central government which can seize the wealth of the rich, taxing the bankers and bondholders, nationalising and expropriating their enterprises and organising the efficient redistribution of productive wealth through national plans for healthcare, education, job creation, environmental regeneration, etc.

But we must also make sure that this centralism is democratic. As we lay out in the arti-

cle below, this means that the working class, through their parties, trade unions and trades councils, must organise mass assemblies in every town, borough and city to debate the kind of reforms we need, and initiate action to force them onto the Westminster agenda.

The same too could be said of Scotland. Salmond and the SNP tried to force through their vision of a capitalist Scotland with a Monarchy, emaciated local "democracy" and an economy tied to the interests of the bankers and big business. The Scottish working class also needs to press for the fullest democracy too, not settle for crumbs from the table of Cameron, Miliband and Salmond.

## Revolution

Such a democracy can engage working people because insofar as it is responsive to their needs and under their control. Democratic institutions must be made to work in our interests – used to attack social inequality and exploitation. As soon as they do, however, they will evoke a terrible reaction from the unelected parts of the state, the police, prisons and courts.

In short the fight for democratic reform goes hand in hand with the fight to make such reforms the launchpad for revolutionary change that makes a counterattack by the ruling class impossible.

# Democratic rights and socialism

constitutional crisis in Britain. But, argues **Jeremy Dewar**, workers needs to intervene with their own class demands and programme if from the rich to the poor

impediments, such as ballots. Alongside this should stand the freedom of speech and of association without any hindrance.

Local democracy in cities, towns, counties, and regions, should be fully restored and expanded. Instead of the unfair council tax and its predecessors, the poll tax and rates, councils should have the right to set the rates of a local wealth and income tax. There should be no limits set, or fines incurred (i.e. capping) on council spending. Central state revenue should be allocated to local councils in the proportion needed to offset their uneven levels of deprivation and poverty.

We believe that a powerful central state is needed if we are to redistribute wealth from the richer areas to the poorer ones, and from the capitalists to the working class. Principally this means the power to set the rate of taxation, so that the wealth of the capi-

talists can be used to raise the living standards of the working and popular classes as a whole.

If this is left to the separate nations or regions, then these egalitarian measures could be undermined by the richer areas, e.g. southeast England hanging on to its wealth.

A new constitution should guarantee that education and the NHS should be totally publicly owned and funded, and democratically run by the local and, where appropriate, UK-wide populations. All services, including prescriptions, eye tests and dentistry, should be free, and adequately funded by general taxation.

We demand Britain gets out of Nato and leaves all other reactionary, imperialist military alliances. Parliament should be forbidden from going to war without a vote by the people. All British overseas forces should be withdrawn; all British colonial possessions,

including Northern Ireland, should be immediately relinquished.

Against racism and chauvinism, we should insist on the right of all migrant workers and refugees to come and seek work in Britain. All such residents should acquire full citizenship rights, including the right to vote.

There are, in addition, a whole series of measures that should be taken to make the state more democratic: electoral laws that take away the advantages of media billionaires and capitalists to influence the vote; the election of judges; abolition of the House of Lords and monarchy; replacement of the standing army with a people's militia, and of the police with workers' guards, etc.

## Internationalism

Such a constitution would not make Britain a socialist country; it would not even make Britain fully democratic.

Only workers' democracy and social ownership can abolish the dictatorship that exists in every capitalist workplace – and this would take a social revolution.

No. Democracy is only an arena in which to fight for an end to exploitation and for a democratically planned economy.

But if the working class can ignite a real debate – with mass local assemblies and debates, through leaflets, pamphlets and rallies, via workplace and estate meetings – then we can deepen the engagement in political struggle that has begun in Scotland. We can divert it from being a struggle between different nations and communities, into a class struggle against the exploiters, a fight for socialism.

We have highlighted the above measures because they are clearly issues raised within the debate over Scottish independence. Some of them

could also be attempted by fighting for more powers to the Scottish Parliament and the Welsh Assembly. But this would narrow the range of allies workers north and west of the borders could be won to the struggle.

It would also sow illusions in the idea that either socialism could be achieved in one (small) country, or that the capitalist SNP could be used in that fight.

In fact Scottish workers have far more in common with English, European and the international working class than they do in Alex Salmond, Nicola Sturgeon or Brian Souther.

If the radicalisation of whole swathes of the Scottish working class is to continue and aspirations for a more democratic and equal society really be fulfilled, then we need to strive for a revolutionary, internationalist, socialist party: the Fifth International.



# Scotland and the nationalist left

Most of the far left in Scotland uncritically supported independence. **KD Tait** explains why their campaign was a capitulation to bourgeois nationalism and now continue to downplay the importance of class

THE DECISION by most left organisations in Scotland to pose a vote for independence as the way to oppose austerity, defend the NHS and strike a blow at the “establishment” was an opportunist concession to nationalism.

Scotland already has the means to obstruct certain cuts (tuition fees, the bedroom tax, etc.) and will probably soon receive greater freedom to do so by gaining more control over NHS spending.

The demagogy about the English establishment ignores the fact that Scottish capitalists are an integral part of this British establishment. And if Scotland became independent on the SNP’s model there would be an Edinburgh establishment – a Scottish ruling class – to replace the British one.

The pro-independence left ignored the fact that the SNP project is the project of the secondary tier of Scottish capitalists, chafing at the dominance of British and international capital – a project that seeks to win support among the working and lower middle classes for its own independence from dominant capital, at the expense of the working class.

Given the enormous integration of Scottish with British capital, it would undoubtedly remain a subordinate and subservient class to its big brothers, even in an independent Scotland, but no less harsh a master to Scottish and semi-colonial workers.

Most of all this left ignored the fact that the great movements of the working class in Scotland were always advances of a working class united across “borders”, made on the basis of class interest. This was true of the Chartists, the Labour Party, the shop stewards, the early Communist Party, the 1926 General Strike, the miners’ strikes of 1972, 1974 and 1984-85, the Poll Tax and the antiwar movement. They were class struggles, not waged in collaboration with bourgeois nationalists, whose goals are antagonistic to the working class, however much they may dress them up in social democratic language.

Of course “revolutionary” support for a historically regressive, not to say reactionary project of nation building was usually wrapped up in all the right phrases about democracy, anti-imperialism and so on. Perhaps the socialist left counted on the inevitable post-independence SNP austerity provoking spontaneous working class resistance, which they would capitalise on.

Naturally independence as a short cut to a major ruling class offensive is not an easy sell, so they peddled the illusory hope that it would provide a



Yes Scotland on the campaign trail – but look who’s driving the van

measure of protection. According to the schema, the shattering of these promises would expose the SNP, but not the left. This was a schema whose opportunism was matched only by its dishonesty. Ultimately it amounted to nothing more than “First the nationalists – then us”.

## Sheridan

Tommy Sheridan of Solidarity has recently revealed that he is a nationalist before everything else. He has shamefully abandoned any pretence of a class standpoint by calling for a vote for the bourgeois SNP:

“In order to maximise the pro-independence vote at next May’s general election, I believe all yes supporters should vote for the SNP and all pro-independence parties should not stand if the SNP candidate will commit to fight for a new referendum as soon as possible AND against all Westminster austerity cuts to welfare and public services. In other words I suggest we in the yes movement promote continued unity by backing the most likely independence supporting candidate at next May’s election. In concrete terms that means advocating an SNP vote to try and unseat a many pro-no party supporters as possible.” (Post on his personal Facebook account)

He will no doubt be delighted then that 20,000 people have joined the SNP in three days – as against considerably less for the revolutionary forces. He is obviously in agreement that an

independence coup by an SNP-majority parliament would be a justified. What part of “No” by a 10 per cent margin didn’t he understand?

The idea of breaking with the British establishment has within it the idea that working class forces in Scotland could more easily defeat the bosses if they were on their own. Such a schema underestimates the capacity of a victorious nationalist ruling class to demand sacrifices from a working class whose consciousness had been soaked in Scottish patriotism.

It would be able to blame all its problems on foreigners (probably still “the English”). Is it likely such appeal would fall on deaf ears? After all in newly independent Ireland most trade unionists and socialists accepted the nationalist leaders’ insistence that “Labour must wait”.

Doesn’t it occur to these people that the working class in a new Scottish state will also be smaller, less powerful and less able to resist global capital’s counter-offensive? There are many small capitalist countries in the world, but they do not always appear at the top of the class struggle league tables because of that.

Quite the opposite. In fact a successful revolution in a small country, even more than in a large one, would have to expand beyond its borders to survive. And a working class that has drunk so headily from the nationalist glass is not best placed to recognise this.

The frenzied propaganda for independence by the left – even when presented as an act of resistance to austerity – was in fact displacement activity on an epic scale. It could have been a massive rallying of Scottish workers and youth to take direct action against all the cuts and austerity. If indeed Scottish workers are more socialist, as the social nationalists claim, then such a campaign would indeed have acted as a beacon to everyone in the UK and started a revolt that could have driven the Coalition from power.

## Podemos panacea

The success of the Yes campaign in mobilising active participation has left the pro-independence left with a problem – how to crystallise the thousands of activists drawn around them into an organisation now that independence is off the table? This is particularly so for the Radical Independence Campaign – an alliance including the Scottish Socialist Party and the Scottish Greens.

Some on the left, like the International Socialist Group, have a model they think could transform the part of the yes campaign that was not directly hegemonised by the SNP. This prospect is specifically advocated by. Their model is the Spanish party, Podemos, which though scarcely 100 days old won 1.2 million votes and five seats in the European elections in May.

This experiment claims to offer a

“new kind of politics” which rejects the traditional terminology and symbolism of the left – no socialism, no red flags, just radical democracy and defence of the welfare state.

For the Podemos leaders, not only is the working class dumped as the main agency of social change, but its traditions totally compromised by the distortions of Stalinism and social democracy. This leaves only one solution and not a new one: “classless” populism. Obviously this can dovetail nicely with multi-class nationalism in Scotland.

But adopting the populist demagogy of left nationalists like Venezuela’s Hugo Chavez and Bolivia’s Evo Morales is an uninspiring model for rebuilding a fighting organisation of the Scottish, or British working class. The massive mobilisation of activists in the referendum campaign was an impressive achievement, if for the wrong goals. The sequel – sweeping them up into a demagogic, populist party – would be a disaster.

## Scottish Labour and new party

Such a perspective also ignores one crucial matter: the labour movement. And it was this force, however sclerotic and ham-fisted its campaign, which defeated the independence movement.

True, up to now the Scottish Labour Party has been paralysed by its slavish adherence to the minimalist social liberal politics of the UK party. But Gordon Brown’s intervention makes it clear that north of the border at least the Labour Party has to fight for its life against the SNP. It is very likely to reclaim its Old Labour, perhaps even its socialist clothes. The SNP will not forever be able to steer to its left.

It will not be easy to displace the Labour Party and tear up its roots in the trade movement either with an amorphous populist organisation or by slipstreaming the SNP, as Tommy Sheridan wants to do.

In fact the latter would be a terrible step away from class politics altogether. But the Podemos route is in the end no better. It too is substituting or at best subordinating the determining factor of class politics to the spreading of democratic as well as nationalist illusions.

In fact the whole project – undertaken by the two main far-left groups in the late 1990s – of forming independent parties in Scotland and espousing independence has proved disastrous. To continue down this path will lead irrevocably to their complete liquidation into bourgeois nationalism.

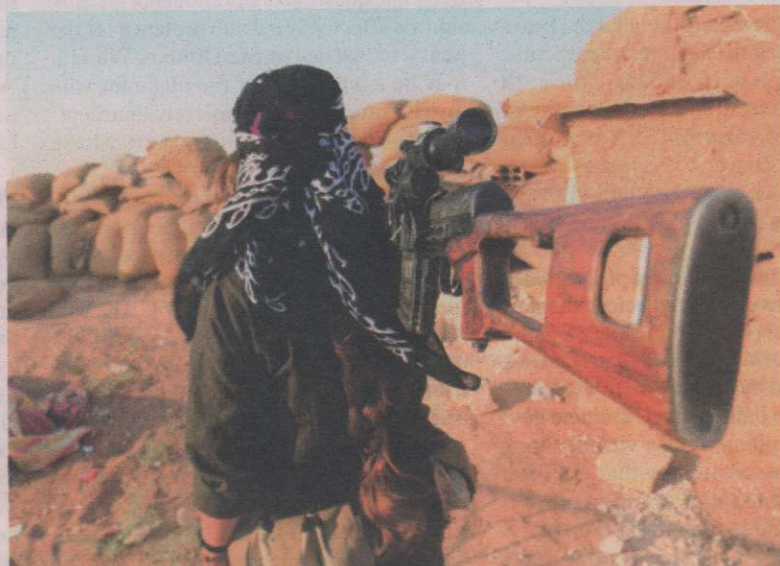


# Can Rojava Kurds unite with Syrian revolutionaries?

The liberated zones of the Syrian Kurds in Rojava have inspired debate and praise, but now hundreds of thousands are fleeing Islamic State terror. **Marcus Halaby** examines their role in the Syrian revolution and the ideology of their leading party

MUCH OF the international left has hailed the emergence of autonomous Kurdish institutions in Syria. Known as Rojava (“West” in Kurdish, referring to western Kurdistan), it is certainly true that their secularism and defence of women’s rights – symbolised in its all-women battalions – stand in contrast to the visible Islamist influence on the liberated zones in Syria’s majority-Arab regions, as well as to the outright intolerance of Jabhat al-Nusra and the Islamic State, being much more rooted in the population than these two organisations.

Moreover, the Islamic State’s spread into Iraq, and the attempts by the USA and Iran to intervene against it, has placed Syria’s Kurds – and Iraq’s – in the position of power-brokers between all the regional players.



Kurdish YPG militia Rojava guards against Islamic State

## Democratic Confederalism

In Rojava, the Democratic Union Party (PYD) claims to be putting into practice the idea of a non-state “Democratic Confederalism”, borrowed from the writings of the American anarchist Murray Bookchin, as a solution to the Kurdish national question that transcends the problem of state power by promoting extreme local autonomy.

Originally conceived by Abdullah Öcalan, the imprisoned leader of Turkey’s Kurdistan Workers’ Party (PKK) as a response to the defeat of the PKK’s armed struggle in Turkey, Democratic Confederalism in Syria has served the purpose of rationalising the collapse of the central state authority into liberated zones, which exist in both Kurdish and Arab majority regions.

Bookchin’s ideas, which the PKK has put into practice in Turkey as well, are influenced by the Zapatistas and promote small municipalities, run by direct democracy and mass assemblies, which may unite into a solely administrative confederation.

While both Bookchin and Öcalan give particular prominence to youth and women, as well as ecology, Democratic Confederalism also eschews an armed struggle for state power.

Bookchin is an avowed pacifist, but while this has led to a cessation of the armed struggle in Turkey by the PKK, this has obviously been problematic in Rojava, where the PYD has had an

ambivalent attitude towards the revolution against Assad and is now under mortal threat from ISIS. This essentially pacifist strategy vis-à-vis the state is a reactionary utopia.

## Oppressed nation

Alongside the Palestinians, the Kurds are one of the largest nations today not to have their own state. Comprising over 30 million people, their homeland is divided between four existing states: Turkey, Syria, Iran and Iraq. They have been oppressed as a national minority in all four.

In Syria, with a Kurdish population of around 2.5 million (the smallest of the four), the Kurds initially enjoyed a degree of autonomy under French rule. However, after independence in 1946, the post-Nasser and pre-Ba’athist government of Nazim al-Kudsi revoked the citizenship of some 120,000 Kurds in the north eastern Jazira region in August 1962, about a fifth of Syria’s Kurdish population at that time.

They and their descendants would be treated as aliens or as undocumented migrants, while the Arab nationalist ideology of successive Ba’athist regimes after 1963 would attack their language and undermine their identity, as also happened in Turkey and Iraq.

Even so, the material basis that existed for sustained Kurdish separatist struggles in Turkey and Iraq was not present in Syria. This is because

there is not one Kurdish region in Syria, but three slightly disconnected ones: the Jazira region around Hasakah and Qamishli, the mountainous Afrin region in the far north west of the country, and the Kobane region (known as Ayn al-Arab in Arabic) in between them.

Moreover, most or a large part of Syria’s Kurds do not live in any of these regions, but in the large Arab-majority cities, where they have formed a sizeable part of Syria’s working class and of its labour movement.

This has meant that the only way that Syria’s Kurds might establish a coherent Kurdish entity along the lines of Iraq’s Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG), as opposed to a degree of autonomy within a democratic Syria, would be if there was a Kurdish entity in Turkey to which it could attach itself, or if the Jazira region alone attached itself to the KRG.

## Syrian uprising

This finds its reflection in Syrian Kurdish politics. Kurdish nationalism in Syria has not primarily taken the form of separatism – although Kurdish nationalist parties were probably the largest part of the underground Syrian opposition after Hafez al-Assad’s crushing of the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood in the 1980s.

Ethnic Kurds in Syria’s major cities, themselves partially Arabised, have largely been more concerned with language and democratic rights than with

separation. The demands that united all the Kurdish parties following the March 2011 uprising were not for independence, but for autonomy and recognition of their collective identity.

And while the PYD-led People’s Protection Units (YPG) have established a presence in some Kurdish districts in Aleppo and elsewhere, they have not tried to claim them for any future Kurdish entity.

Indeed the Assad regime tried to buy off the Kurds quite early on in the uprising, by promising to grant citizenship to the stateless Kurds in Jazira. This only partially had the desired effect.

However, the murder of Kurdish leader and opposition Syrian National Council (SNC) executive member Mashaal Tammo in October 2011 provoked a demonstration of 50,000 at his funeral, five of whom died when security forces shot into the crowd.

The Assad regime more or less abandoned control of Jazira to the YPG militias during the Free Syrian Army (FSA) assault on Aleppo and Damascus in July 2012. Since then, however, there has effectively been a non-aggression pact between the YPG and the regime’s forces in Rojava, provoking accusations from the FSA that the PYD is acting as Assad’s subcontractor. Assad’s army, for example, still controls about half of Hasakah, and has a presence in Qamishli, while state employees in Rojava still receive salaries from the Assad regime.

## Syrian opposition

As one might expect, another feature of Syrian Kurdish politics is the extent to which Kurdish parties outside of Syria exercise an influence on it. The PYD in particular, as the Syrian sister organization of Turkey’s PKK, has benefitted from the relationship that the PKK had with the Assad regime, stretching back to its guerrilla war with the Turkish state in the 1980s and 1990s.

By contrast, the PYD’s fractious but more mainstream rival the Kurdish National Council (KNC) enjoys the support of Iraqi KRG President Masoud Barzani. Their rivalry has produced claims that the PYD has refused to share power with the KNC parties in Rojava.

At the level of politics, the PYD’s ability to link up with the mass democratic movement against Assad among Arab Syrians has been obstructed by its membership of the National Coordination Committee for Democratic Change, the so-called “patriotic opposition”. They quite early on opposed the Syrian revolution’s resort to arms, and tried unsuccessfully to negotiate a peaceful transfer of power.

Another factor in the PYD’s position of abstention from the mass revolutionary democratic struggle has been an entirely justified mistrust of and hostility to the Turkish state. However, the PYD has extended this attitude to the FSA’s leadership presuming them to be Turkey’s dependents.

Also the “official” Syrian opposition in exile has failed to do anything to reassure the Kurds of their collective rights in a post-Assad Syria. If anything, the more conservative elements in the SNC and its successor, the National Coalition share the outlook of the pre-Ba’ath regime that stripped the Kurds of citizenship in 1962, although grassroots oppositionists have generally been less hostile towards demands for Kurdish autonomy than their absent “leaders”.

## Unity

The blame for this disunity between Kurdish and Arab opponents of the Assad regime however does not all lie on one side. For all its protestations, the PYD have not been particularly intransigent opponents of the Ba’athist dictatorship, while the main concern of the Kurdistan Democratic Party of Syria (KDPS) has been to avoid provoking a Turkish intervention in Syria that might endanger Kurdish autonomy in Iraq.

Only full recognition of Kurdish national rights, and full Kurdish participation in the Syrian revolution can break this deadlock. The mutual threat posed by the Islamic State seems to have pushed the YPG and the FSA into closer cooperation. The YPG must urgently cement this unity in struggle before the Syrian revolution and the Rojava Kurds are drowned in blood. On the other hand, if the PYD forms an alliance with the US this will condemn them to a reactionary role in the crisis.



# Kiev losing a war on two fronts

The long-running civil war in Ukraine is now in its seventh month. With over 3,000 dead and civilians trapped in besieged cities, the Kiev regime is still unable to contain the rebellion. **KD Tait** asks if Poroshenko's days are numbered

ON 5 SEPTEMBER, six months of fighting between the ultra-nationalist regime in Kiev and the militias of the Donetsk and Luhansk People's Republics was brought to an end by a ceasefire signed in Minsk, Belarus.

On 16 September, the EU and Ukrainian parliaments voted simultaneously to endorse the EU Association Agreement. This free trade deal is the latest step in the social war waged against the people of Ukraine by the IMF and, behind it, European and US capital.

The regime installed by the "Euro-aidan" coup in February has plunged Ukraine into barbarism on all fronts; to the East, civil war and ethnic cleansing, to the West, the surrender of Ukraine to EU free marketeers and IMF austerity mongers.

The assault on its own citizens by the Kiev government, using fascist paramilitaries, allowed Russian imperialism to gain a powerful influence over the local resistance forces in the Donetsk and Luhansk republics. With the onset of winter, Ukrainians, East and West alike, face a political, social and economic catastrophe.

Yet, far from the counterrevolution having triumphed, it is in a crisis. This is not only a result of the military resistance of the Donbas. In the West, widespread opposition to military conscription and austerity have frustrated its plans for a quick victory.

The working class of Ukraine faces two imperialist enemies with counter-revolutionary objectives: the USA-EU bloc and Russia. However, their bitter rivalry and unwillingness to negotiate a solution has allowed many local forces, with different political agendas, to emerge on both sides.

The Kiev regime itself is split between war and peace parties. Similarly, the forces in the East are split between those willing to back a Putin agreed settlement and those determined to press on to defeat the Kiev forces. We have also received encouraging reports from leftists involved in opposition to the Kiev regime of moves to reconstitute an independent working class and communist political movement drawn from the thousands of workers radicalised by the struggle against fascism and against any attempts by the imperialist powers to dismember Ukraine.

**Kiev talks peace, prepares for war**  
Poroshenko was obliged to sign the Minsk ceasefire deal from a position of weakness because his forces besieging Donetsk were defeated and were about to lose control of Mariupol. While the ceasefire prevented a total rout, he had to concede many of the demands of the anti-Maidan resistance. These included autonomy for all Ukraine's regions, a military buffer zone, and the recognition of local self-defence forces. Although the deal only grants federalisation for three years, these are essentially the issues over which the ultra-nationalists and fascists who seized power in February

started a civil war. Moreover, fighting continues in certain highly contested areas.

To date, some 3,000 people have been killed and more than 6,000 wounded. The Kiev regime is refusing to recognise 260,000 internally displaced citizens as refugees, so they have no access to welfare or housing etc. Nearly one million have fled to Russia.

Those leftists, who insisted that the Euro-aidan was an anti-oligarchic, democratic revolution, have been refuted in the most undeniable fashion. The neoliberal-fascist government of Yatsenyuk-Turchynov, far from carrying through a "bourgeois-democratic" revolution, has brought Ukraine decisively into the orbit of western imperialism.

The IMF's "bold economic programme" for Ukraine was elaborated before the start of the "anti-terrorist operation", though the prior restoration of order in the East was demanded by its framers. In exchange for a \$17 billion bailout, the Ukrainian government is implementing a violent shock therapy surpassed only by that imposed on Russia during the restoration of capitalism. This includes the destruction of the remnants of social security and welfare that is the legacy of the overthrow of capitalism in 1917-21.

The IMF measures are designed to reduce the government's "fiscal deficit", that is, the difference between revenue and expenditure. However, quite apart from the added burden of the war, Ukraine's economy was never in any state to bear this burden. The IMF now forecasts a decline of at least 6.5 per cent in GDP, and possibly as much as 10 per cent.

According to Poroshenko, the war is costing \$6 million per day. He used the occasion of the military parade on Independence Day to announce a further \$3 billion in additional military spending. The IMF now predicts that Ukraine will need an additional \$19 billion in emergency support over the next 16 months.

The Kiev government has already slashed the value of pensions and public sector pay and frozen the minimum wage. Retail sales have plummeted by nearly 20 per cent since January, while inflation, now running at 14 per cent, is set to reach 20 per cent by January.

As a result of its forced decoupling from the dollar, the national currency, the hryvnia, has lost 43 per cent of its value, leading to a massive hike in the cost of repayments of dollar-denominated debts, both consumer and commercial.

The central plank of the IMF program is "reform" of the energy sector, including the privatisation of the national grid. This will directly benefit the owners of the industries who looted them following the collapse of the Soviet Union. Natural gas tariffs are to be hiked by 56 per cent and heating by 40 per cent in 2014. Annual rises of between 20 and 40 per cent are man-

dated from 2015 to 2017.

Gas subsidies will be ended completely over the next two years. The impact of this on the country's inefficient soviet-era mines and factories, particularly in the Donbas region, are as predictable as they will be devastating.

Quite apart from all the other measures, the single question of the ending of gas subsidies is effectively a death sentence for the heavy industries of the Donbas. While it may be a bitter pill for the oligarchs who invested there, it is completely unacceptable for the millions of workers whose livelihoods depend on them.

Given that around 42 per cent of Ukrainian electricity is derived from coal-powered plants, the government has prepared a disaster in a country where winter temperatures regularly plummet to -20°C. The currency collapse has led to a 19 per cent decline in the value of exports and contributed to a steep decline in production and rising prices.

The pursuit of EU integration has also forced the disruption of industrial production, which was oriented to Russia and the Eurasian Customs Union, by far Ukraine's biggest trading partner. The year on year figures for August speak for themselves. Output has declined in coal mining by 60.4 per cent, in machine building by 31 per cent, in metallurgy by 30 per cent and in industrial production by 21.4 per cent. In the industrialised Donbas region, July's year on year industrial output was down 29 per cent in Donetsk and 56 per cent in Luhansk.

Russia's economic interests in Ukraine are no secret and run a close second to geo-strategic concerns in explaining its intervention in the conflict. The legacy of the Soviet plan left heavy, extractive and military-high tech industry linked to Russia by a thousand threads; threads that a resurgent imperialist Russia did not hesitate to exploit and is unwilling to surrender. Russian companies own significant sections of Ukraine's communications, power, real estate and steel industries, along with around one seventh of the banking sector. It is certain that nothing on offer from the EU can possibly replace all this.

The closure or relocation of many of these enterprises, and the drying up of capital investment, is already provoking severe shocks. Kherson, one of the largest manufacturers, has entered bankruptcy proceedings. The high profile carmaker, ZAZ, has ceased operations. Even capital located in the West is not safe; the LAZ bus manufacturer, based in Lviv, has also stopped production. This follows the pattern set in Romania, Hungary and the Baltic States, which could not compete with European rivals after access to the Russian market was curtailed.

Yet the supposed "compensations", free movement of labour into the EU and access to its regional redistributive funding,

are not on offer to Ukraine, at least in the short term. Meanwhile, Ukraine's economic independence, which might previously have enabled it to alleviate its economic problems, has been surrendered to the IMF. When the IMF commands, Kiev must obey. Not for nothing did Yatsenyuk claim his government would be a "government of political suicides". Given the disastrous course embarked on, it is no surprise that the Free Trade aspects of the EU Association Agreement were postponed to the end of 2015 as a measure to protect Ukrainian economy.

## Political situation

Poroshenko's regime is undermining itself by the dogged pursuit of the IMF's economic programme and military conscription. Of the so-called "progressive Maidan" there is no sign. The regime is forced to rely ever more directly on the ultra-reactionary forces at the core of the anti-Yanukovich mobilisations in early 2014. This is expressed by the proposal for "social-lustration", that is a purge of officials linked to the former regime, as demanded by the fascists.

Up to one million people will be subject to "screening", including all those who worked under former president Yanukovich, former Communist Party and KGB officials and civil servants, as well as the staff of the prosecutor's office, intelligence services, interior ministry and the cabinet of ministers. Generously, this does not include the President. Poroshenko himself not only served under Yanukovich but helped found his Party of the Regions.

Such a widespread purge is obviously unpopular amongst the wide layers of ordinary workers who will be affected. However, it also threatens to cut a swathe through the political class, all factions of which are thoroughly corrupt and stand to lose. Except, that is, those in the ruling wing. This unpopular law was blocked several times and was only passed after the Speaker of parliament, Oleksandr Turchynov, under pressure from the far right who mobbed MPs outside the parliament building, ruled that he would not pro-rogue the session until the law was passed.

## Repression

The corollary to the integration of the fascists into the repressive apparatus of the state is the sharp rise in attacks on oppositionists across the country. The most high profile case has been the state repression of the Communist Party of Ukraine (KPU), which had 32 deputies representing 13 per cent of the vote. After its parliamentary fraction was dissolved on 24 July, the General Prosecutor of Ukraine found the party guilty of "financing terrorism", that is, supporting the resistance movement in the Donbas and the secession of Crimea.

Throughout the summer, members of the KPU have been subject to harassment,

**The Kiev government has slashed the value of pensions and public sector pay and frozen the minimum wage. Retail sales have plummeted by nearly 20 per cent while inflation, now running at 14 per cent, is set to reach 20 per cent by January**



arrest, kidnapping and extra-judicial murder. Vyacheslav Mikhailovich Kovshun, secretary of the Luzhky village party organisation, was tortured to death at a National Guard checkpoint on 22 June.

Even parliamentary deputies are not immune from harassment. Opponents beat up the Communist Party leader, Petro Symonenko, in the parliamentary chamber. When Elena Bondarenko, a Party of Regions deputy, condemned the war and called for a minute's silence to commemorate victims, the Speaker, Turchynov, turned off her microphone and demanded she "kneel before the Ukrainian Army". Radical Party leader Oleh Lyashko then jumped up and demanded she be sent to the front and shot as a traitor.

On September 11, after a sustained campaign of intimidation, the Security Services of Ukraine (SBU) raided the offices of the oppositional Vesti newspaper and seized computers, files and records. On September 18, fascists violently broke up a demonstration against the war and price rises in Kharkov.

The communist organisation Borotba (Struggle) has been subject to a campaign of fascist and state intimidation with its offices in Kiev and Kharkov raided and closed down. Fascists murdered Andrey Brazhevskiy, a 21-year-old Borotba member, during the Odessa Massacre on 2 May. Vlad Wojciechowski, from Odessa, is their latest member to be arrested. After being injured during the 2 May attack, he was arrested and spent several weeks in prison. During the night of 12 September, he was arrested along with two members of the KPU and Communist Youth by the SBU and Nazi paramilitaries who planted "evidence" in his home. After a confession extracted under torture, he faces 8 to 15 years in prison on charges of "terrorism".

### October elections

The Yatsenyuk government, formed on 27 February, was an unstable coalition of nationalists from the Fatherland Front, the neoliberal UDAR party and the fascist Svoboda party. The coalition collapsed on 24 July with the withdrawal of the UDAR and Svoboda factions. Although Yatsenyuk's resignation was rejected, he denounced the collapse of the coalition as an act of opportunism by parties unwilling to take the blame for passing the austerity programme necessary to fund the war.

On 25 August, Poroshenko called a snap election for 26 October. The political manoeuvres have begun in earnest with the formation of the so-called "People's Front", headed by Yatsenyuk and Oleksandr Turchynov, an open alliance between nationalists and fascists.

The party's liberal bourgeois-democratic façade is undermined by its "Military Council", headed by leaders of various "volunteer battalions" currently conducting punitive pillaging across east Ukraine. It includes Andriy



3,000 Donbas miners march in Donetsk in the summer. Their banner reads, 'Fascism will not pass!' – ¡No Pasarán!

Parubiy, noted fascist and founder of the neo-Nazi Social National Party (now Svoboda), Andriy Biletskiy, commander of the openly fascist Azov battalion and leader of the neo-Nazi Patriots of Ukraine and the Social-National Assembly, as well as commanders of the fascist Aidar volunteer battalion and the Kyiv-1, Dnipro-1, and various other National Guard battalions. Its Political Council includes Tatyana Chornovol, former member of the neo-Nazi UNA-UNSO and widow of the fascist Nikolai Berezov, a platoon commander of the Azov battalion killed during the liberation of Ilovaik by self-defence forces.

The People's Front will challenge Poroshenko's party at the October polls.

The rest of the political spectrum is dominated by such reactionaries as Yulia Tymoshenko, who suggested solving the "Eastern problem" by "nuking the katsaps", the oligarch, Ihor Kolomoisky, who bankrolls his own private army the Dnipro-1 battalion and organised the attack on the Russian embassy in Kiev, or Oleh Lyashko, leader of the far-right Radical Party, who commanded his personal militia in the east and operated as a law unto himself, kidnapping people, interrogating them and recording it all on camera as part of his presidential election campaign in which he came third, with 8 per cent of the vote. Members of the neo-Nazi Social-National Assembly were elected to the Kiev city council on Lyashko's Radical Party list.

The elections will be a parody of democracy. The banning of the Communist Party, and the imposition of a reign of terror by fascist paramilitaries occupying the eastern regions, will no doubt deliver the desired result. For these reasons we agree with the call by Ukrainian Marxist organisation Borotba to boycott the elections which

"held in the midst of a bloody civil war and genuine right-wing dictatorship, will have no legitimacy for most people of Ukraine".

### The resistance

The evolution of popular resistance to the Kiev regime's attempt to seize control of the cities in the East into a civil war is a crucial factor determining the dynamic of future class struggle in Ukraine.

For six months, the people of East Ukraine defended Donetsk and Luhansk against the furious assault of pro-government forces, spearheaded by neo-Nazi storm troopers. The front-line has seen the largest military operations in Europe since the Second World War. The punitive operations and martial law imposed in the occupied areas have led to a rise in separatist sentiment, which was previously a minority current.

Russia undoubtedly exercised a significant influence over the People's Republics through its control of the "military surplus store" and supply of humanitarian aid. Nevertheless, the character of the movement in the Donbas as a genuinely popular resistance has so far thwarted Russia's attempts to negotiate a solution to the crisis that is acceptable to both Moscow and Kiev. Putin's goal is not to annex "Novorissiya", as he annexed Crimea, but rather to reach a deal with Poroshenko and the West, which will let him keep Crimea and prevent a total western takeover of Ukraine. Clearly, too, he wants to lift the economic blockade being built around his country.

The emergence of an armed civilian resistance movement, which, despite its contradictory character, expressed clearly anti-oligarchic, anti-fascist and democratic demands, was an unwanted and unpleasant headache for the Putin regime.

It was especially awkward because the people of Donbas, who have deep roots, not only culturally and historically but through family and economy in Russia, appealed to the Russian regime to aid them in their struggle. Putin, having cast himself in previous conflicts as the defender of Russians in the near-abroad could not abandon them without great cost to his own personal standing.

Equally, however, he had no intention of allowing the development of a militant and armed working class on his doorstep. That might act as an encouragement to popular opposition to the oligarchs in Russia. His first attempt to resolve this difficulty was to offer to surrender Donetsk in return for Russian control of Crimea. This was the purpose of the June ceasefire. Unfortunately, for him, both the self-defence forces and the fascist militias had other ideas. Led by Igor Strelkov, the Donbas militias retreated from Slavyansk and organised the defence of Donetsk, overthrowing those leaders who were preparing to surrender the city. Putin only managed to regain some control of the situation by using the threat to cut off the flow of supplies to Donetsk and Luhansk and to remove Strelkov and impose more compliant figures on the Novorussian leadership.

The Russian control of the People's Republics, exercised through the "military surplus stores", clearly had a decisive impact on limiting the ambitions of those sections of the separatist leadership who had ambitions grander than Putin's. However, the resistance to the Kiev regime cannot be reduced to the political programme (such as it is) of the unstable constellation of separatists, opportunists, workers' representatives and agents of Russian imperialism and Ukrainian oligarchs, who make up the leadership of the DPR and LPR.

Socialists' support for the resistance is not based on its military leaders, whose contradictory statements are often coloured by Great Russian chauvinism and separatism. They are leaders because of their military skills and the resources they can bring, not because they express the objectives of the people defending the barricades of Luhansk, Donetsk, and dozens of towns and villages across the region. Their consciousness reflects far more the working class identification with their region as a population of immigrants from various parts of the former USSR and with nostalgia for its relative economic security and welfare, plus the legacy of the antifascist struggle against the Nazi occupation.

It was absolutely legitimate for the people to defend themselves against the attacks of the Kiev regime and the fascist gangs it sent into the cities of the East, however critical we might be of the symbols under which they first fought. The Russian flags were appeals to Russia to help them; when it refused to intervene decisively, these flags disappeared and were replaced by others.

Leadership within the "peoples' republics", however, was soon seized by a variety of nationalists, representatives of workers and sheer political opportunists. The opportunists were able to maintain their influence through their links to Moscow and to certain eastern oligarchs, particularly Rinat Akhmetov.

Because the working class has no sizeable political organisation of its own, independent of the oligarchs, it was not able to assert itself in the initial stages, although the mass demonstrations of workers against the war showed that it was no atomised social force or neutral observer. Nevertheless, the mobilisation of tens of thousands of local workers into popular militias has created its own dynamic. People are not only willing to fight to defend themselves against fascist attacks but equally to fight to prevent a return to the old conditions of economic misery and exploitation. They want radical change.

This is expressed in reports of the creation of a new communist organisation that includes former members of the KPU and of revolutionary organisations and communists radicalised in the course of the military and social struggle against the Kiev regime and the interference of Russian imperialism and Russian chauvinists.

The task for socialists in the imperialist countries is to organise against Nato's new cold war and against the support of their governments for the Kiev regime's military offensive and austerity programme. It is also their duty to give as much support as possible to the emergence of a political party, based on working class independence, appealing to workers right across Ukraine. By loyal criticism and discussion, we hope we can help it to develop a programme not for "people's power" or a "people's republic" but for workers' power, workers' council democracy and socialism.



# Workers power

## No to war in Ukraine, Iraq and Syria

By Marcus Halaby

US PRESIDENT Barack Obama took office in 2009 promising to end the US occupation of Iraq. Today US warplanes are bombing Iraq and Syria with the aim of “degrading and destroying” the Islamic State. Pentagon press secretary Adm. John Kirby said. “We know we are at war with ISIL [ISIS or Islamic State]”.

In Britain Labour supported Cameron in the parliamentary vote to authorise UK planes bombing Iraq. Tony Blair as usual wants “boots on the ground” and an alliance against Islamism with Russia and China, the old “clash of civilisations” refrain.

Having supported a Shia sectarian regime in Iraq for four years and faced with a Sunni-ISIS “uprising”, Barack Obama has had to go into reverse, trying to rebuild some sort of Sunni-Shia coalition, and even draw Iran and Saudi Arabia together to combat ISIS.

Now Obama is subjecting Iraq to his trademark tactic of airstrikes, seen so often in Pakistan, Yemen and Somalia. These murderous attacks are supposed to avoid American casualties, which ground troops would entail. But bombing and drone strikes, and the inevitable killing of innocent civilians will if anything win hearts and minds for ISIS.

### Coalition of the unwilling

The Final Declaration issued at the recent meeting of the North Atlantic Council in Wales endorses this renewed “War on Terror” in Iraq and Syria. Now the bombing has started. US Secretary of State John Kerry is after “boots on the ground” from allies in the region. But the intense rivalries within the new coalition will make this difficult if not impossible.

The pretext for this reassertion of American power is the threat posed to Iraq by Islamic State extremists. But the USA is acting to keep in power an Iraqi government that still rests mainly on sectarian Shia militias. These are responsible for atrocities every bit as terrible as the Islamic State’s, and which, like their sponsor Iran, supports



Two French Rafale jet fighters fly over Iraq on 19 September

a dictatorship in Syria that has killed more than 200,000 of its own people, including with poison gas.

And they are relying on the support of a country, Saudi Arabia, whose own official ideology is a landmark of social and religious intolerance indistinguishable from the Islamic State’s, one which beheads around a hundred people a year, for “crimes” including apostasy, witchcraft, blasphemy and homosexuality.

Obama and his allies Saudi Arabia and Qatar, as well as his enemies Syria and Iran have between them produced the Islamic State monster that now threatens the stability of a major oil-producing state that was supposed to be a model of US nation building.

The Islamic State, like al-Qaeda and the Taliban before it, is a direct product of the 2003-10 US invasion and occupation of Iraq. It grew in Syria, not through popular support but because the revolution against the Assad dictatorship, led by the Free Syrian Army, was subjected to a US-inspired blockade of arms and funds, handing the initiative to those Islamists who could tap into the fortunes of the ultra-reactionary dynasties of the Arab Gulf.

The labour movement, here and internationally, must oppose this latest war drive. This will be harder than it should be given the dire situation of the British far left, whose internationalist horizons have narrowed since the days of the anticapitalist summit sieges and the antiwar demonstrations of a decade ago.

One sign of this has been the polarisation of the left over both Syria and Ukraine. The Stalinist and Russophile forces that defend the antifascist resistance in the Donbas generally excuse President Bashar al-Assad’s mass murder in Syria. They see Putin’s Russia as the champions of a global anti-imperialist axis.

At the same time those elements of the “post-Leninist” left, who correctly defend Syria’s revolution, cheered on the pro-EU movement in Ukraine and excuse its fascist-infested pro-Nato government. They see Putin and Russia as the main danger and totally ignore Nato’s offensive in Eastern Europe.

The blindness of both to the big picture conspired to produce a pitiful mobilisation against the NATO Summit in Newport on 31 August, despite the decisions taken there, which will

have a decisive influence on the next 10 to 20 years.

Compared with the regular international days of action of the 1998-2004 period, or even with the Occupy movement, it is clear that the major socialist, communist, anarchist and left Labour forces have in their despair jettisoned principled internationalism.

### A global offensive

Our ruling classes – unlike the left – are at not at a loss as to what to do. While the banking crisis of 2007-08 rocked the Western economies, their answer was to bail out the bankers and bondholders. Governments rapidly seized the opportunity of the fiscal crisis that followed to launch a global offensive against welfare and public services.

Internationally tension between the new imperialist powers like China and Russia, on the one hand, and the old ones like the USA and the EU, on the other, began to mount, spreading from the economic into the military-strategic sphere. Within the Western alliance tensions between Germany and the USA have grown, as the US tries to thwart Germany’s plans for economic links with Russia and China.

The Nato Summit’s Final Declaration is nothing short of a declaration of a New Cold War in pursuit of US hegemony in Europe and a new hot war in the Middle East. It aims to create a new Iron Curtain of military bases on Russia’s borders.

Combined with Obama’s new strategic doctrine of a “Pivot to Asia”, aimed at containing China with another string of new or expanded bases, it means we are in a new and dangerous period of rivalries between the great powers. But clashes in the new cold war could become hot.

### Rebuild anti-war movement

We need to rouse the left from its slumbers – from its daydreams of Occupy-style peaceful revolutions, courtesy of neo-conservative Secretary of State Victoria Nuland and the largesse of Western “democracy foundations”. The genuinely dictatorial

regime in China and the highly repressive one in Russia certainly deserve popular movements for democracy, indeed social revolutions. But “revolutions” under the sponsorship of the West or its agents, as in Ukraine or in Egypt, rapidly reveal themselves as counter-revolutions.

Likewise no credit should be given to the false “humanitarian” arguments that our rulers will raise to justify their latest adventure. This holds true regardless of whether the excuse for their bombing involves aid to the Kurdish Peshmerga, saving refugees or defending the rights of women.

All these targets of the Islamic State have the right to defend themselves, and to take arms and assistance from wherever they can find them. Yet the US and its Nato allies have up to now refused to supply weapons to the Kurds or to the Syrian secular and democratic revolutionaries. They did nothing until recently to stop the flow of weapons and fighters to ISIS and al-Nusra. In the early days of the Syrian revolution they maintained an arms embargo, which could only benefit Assad.

US airstrikes in Iraq and Syria will create the civilian casualties we saw in Iraq, Afghanistan and Pakistan. Far from crushing ISIS will they will probably help it sink roots. Should the Kurds go beyond taking weapons from the US to doing Washington’s dirty work for it, this will ultimately rebound on them, as it has in the past on so many other allies of the USA.

The response to the Israeli brutalities in Gaza this year showed that there is still a massive potential for resistance to the US, Britain and their allies. We need to build on this base a resolutely anti-imperialist, antiwar movement.

- No to a new round of the War On Terror – no airstrikes
- No to Nato expansion - no to the New Cold War
- No to EU-US or Russian imperialist domination of Ukraine
- Support the Syrian and Kurdish Resistance to Assad and ISIS
- Support the Ukrainian Resistance