

workers power

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MONTHLY REVIEW OF THE WORKERS POWER GROUP

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Osborne devolution plans threaten to break up the NHS

Plans to hand over NHS control to local authorities will destroy universal healthcare provision



DARA O'COGAIDHIN

The NHS ranks consistently among the top three priorities voters care about. Yet a recent policy, which has barely showed on the political radar of most electors outside of Manchester, threatens to fragment and ultimately destroy the national character of the health service.

Chancellor George Osborne intends to hand Greater Manchester control of the region's £6 billion health and social care budget. This is the latest and most significant step yet for so-called 'Devo-Manc': the devolution of powers to the Greater Manchester Combined Authority (GMCA) that will also give the region control over transport, planning, housing and policing.

No one in Manchester has ever voted for this. On the contrary, when asked two years ago if they wanted an elected Mayor with greater powers, the 2.7 million people of Greater Manchester said no. It seems that because the referendum in Scotland rejected the call for independence, this has ignited a widespread demand for decentralisation.

This is the art of demagoguery – to link reactionary solutions to real felt needs and problems, relying on ignorance of their actual causes and covering them up.

Of course there is anger over the growing north-south divide, which has blighted cities like Manchester, not to mention the high-handed approach of the Old Etonians at the core of the Tory party. But devolution of public services without the national redistribution of wealth can only lead to further impoverishment of the poorer regions.

Haven't Tory cuts to local government funding already led to Labour councils, including Manchester, taking the responsibility for destroying jobs and services since 2010? Indeed this is what Osborne intends. The "Northern Powerhouses" he talks about are more likely to become Northern Workhouses. And Labour will take the blame and the shame.

Cuts

The 10 councils on the GMCA are currently responsible for social care. From April 2016 they will also control spending on public health, general



DEVO MANC IS THE THIN END OF THE WEDGE

practitioner services, mental health and acute services and community care.

Lord Peter Smith, chair of the GMCA, says the plan will create an "integrated plan approach" that is "tailored to the needs of people in our area". But bringing health and social care under GMCA management will not compensate for the massive cuts imposed by the Con-Dem coalition.

Greater Manchester is already in the midst of a highly controversial reconfiguration, in which four

to five hospitals are to lose their A&E departments or other acute services. At the last count, the region's hospitals were running a deficit of £40 million. It's also expected that the GMCA must pool its health budget with its much smaller social care budget, which has been cut by 12 per cent in real terms over the last four years.

Responding to Osborne's announcement, Anne Athow of the British Medical Association (BMA) accused the Tories of lobbing a "wrecking ball at

the National Health Service". The BMA has warned that handing over health care budgets to local councils risks creating a postcode lottery, with differing priorities and levels of care between different regions.

Labour

Labour's Andy Burnham argues the resultant danger is the creation of a "two-tier NHS" which destroys the principle of a universal and comprehensive service. Posing as a defender of the NHS, he said Labour would commit an extra £2.5 billion a year to the NHS. This falls well short of the extra £20 billion a year that the Institute of Fiscal Studies estimates that the NHS needs to meet patient demand.

Burnham has also pledged to repeal the Health and Social Care Act that unleashed market competition into the health service. As with British Rail 20 years earlier, the Tories' plan is to run the NHS down, then parcel it up and sell it off cheap. While socialists welcome Burnham's pledge to repeal the Act, we also remember New Labour promised to renationalise the railways before the 1997 general election, then did nothing of the sort while in office for 13 years.

We can't rely on the Labour leadership to save the NHS. The major health service unions, Unison, Unite and the GMB, must demand of the party they fund that Labour offers a cast iron pledge to repeal the Health and Social Care Act, to rip up the crippling Private Finance Initiative deals and other outsourcing contracts, and to tax the rich to pump £20 billion a year into the NHS.

If Labour will not do this, then the unions must break from Labour and pool their funds to launch a new working class party committed to socialism.

In order to press our demands on Labour – and to defend the NHS, whoever wins the election – local campaigns against cuts and closures should link up with union branches now to build a mass movement to coordinate protests and strikes. Health workers need to organise in their unions, forming rank and file networks, to decide what kind of action is effective – and make it happen if the union bosses won't fight. ●

What we fight for



Workers Power is a revolutionary communist organisation whose politics are founded on the following principles

CAPITALISM is an anarchic and crisis-ridden economic system based on production for profit. We are for the expropriation of the capitalist class and the abolition of capitalism. We are for its replacement by socialist production planned to satisfy human need. Only the socialist revolution and the smashing of the capitalist state can achieve this goal. Only the working class, led by a revolutionary vanguard party and organised into workers' councils and workers' militias can lead such a revolution to victory and establish the rule of the working class in society. There is no peaceful, parliamentary road to socialism.

THE LABOUR PARTY is not a socialist party. It is a bourgeois workers' party – pro-capitalist in its politics and practice, but based on the working class via the trade unions and supported by the mass of workers at the polls. We are for the creation of a genuine workers' party, based on a programme for the overthrow of capitalism and the implementation of socialism and workers' power.

THE TRADE UNIONS must be transformed by a rank and file movement to put control of the unions into the hands of the members. All officials must be regularly elected and subject to instant recall; they must earn the average wage of the members they represent. We are for the building of fighting organisations of the working class – factory committees, industrial unions, councils of action and workers' defence organisations.

OCTOBER 1917 The Russian revolution established a workers' state. But Stalin destroyed workers' democracy and set about the reactionary and utopian project of building "socialism in one country". In the USSR and the other degenerate workers' states that were established from above, capitalism was destroyed but the bureaucracy excluded the working class from power, blocking the road to democratic planning and socialism. The parasitic bureaucratic caste led these states to crisis and destruction. Stalinism has consistently betrayed the working class.

The Stalinist Communist Parties' strategy of alliances with the capitalists (popular fronts) and their stages theory of revolution have inflicted terrible defeats on the working class worldwide. These parties are reformist and offer no perspective for workers' revolution.

SOCIAL OPPRESSION is an integral feature of capitalism, which systematically oppresses people on the basis of race, age, gender and sexual orientation. We are for the liberation of women and for the building of a working class women's movement, not an "all-class" autonomous movement. We are for the liberation of all the oppressed. We fight racism and fascism. We oppose all immigration controls. We fight for labour movement support for black self-defence against racist and state attacks. We are for no platform for fascists and for driving them out of the unions.

IMPERIALISM is a world system, which oppresses nations and prevents economic development in the vast majority of third world countries. We support the struggles of the oppressed nationalities or countries against imperialism. Against the politics of the bourgeois and petit-bourgeois nationalists we fight for permanent revolution – working class leadership of the anti-imperialist struggle under the banner of socialism and internationalism. In conflicts between imperialist and semi-colonial countries, we are for the victory of those oppressed and exploited by imperialism. We are for the immediate and unconditional withdrawal of British troops from Ireland and all other countries. We fight imperialist war, not with pacifist pleas, but with militant class struggle methods, including the forcible disarmament of "our own" bosses.

FIFTH INTERNATIONAL We stand in the tradition of Marx, Engels, Lenin and Trotsky and the revolutionary policies of the first four congresses of the Third International. Workers Power is the British Section of the League for the Fifth International. The L5I is pledged to refound a revolutionary communist International and build a new world party of socialist revolution. If you are a class-conscious fighter against capitalism, if you are an internationalist – join us!

Whose party is it?

Labour's union paymasters need to get more bang for their buck



JEREMY DEWAR

The latest figures for party funding in the run-up to the election are revealing. Tory and Labour incomes are fairly equal at £29 million and £26 million respectively in 2014.

Looking more closely at the last quarter, when funding for all parties increased, in anticipation of the election campaign, the Tories received £8 million and Labour £7 million. Neck and neck, you might think. However, their sources are different as chalk and cheese.

The Conservatives rely almost exclusively on large donations from the big bourgeoisie – the capitalist A-listers. Their most generous contributor last autumn gave half a million; their third biggest donor, David Rowland, coming in with a respectable £322,000, is a property developer, who registered as living abroad for many years as a tax dodger, er, I mean exile.

Another large chunk of Tory party's recent funding came from hedge fund managers: £2 million worth. Not a bad investment – as you'd expect from people who make a living from asset stripping and sacking whole workforces – considering hedge funds received a £145 million tax break in 2013.

So what about Labour?

They received relatively little from private donations. Most scandalously, the party accepted £400,000 in the form of writing off staffing costs from accountants PricewaterhouseCoopers. As Margaret Hodge has pointed out, PwC makes millions advising on "tax avoidance on an industrial scale". If Labour cannot resist the allure of big money in opposition, then what will it be like in office?

Others? Tony Blair gave £100,000 last month. But he can afford it; he's amassed £70 million since leaving the Commons in 2010.

In reality, however, it is the unions who finance Labour. In particular, the big three: Unite, Unison and the GMB, who gave £1 million each to the party at the end of the year. It is certain that more will follow.

On top of that, thousands of union activists will be pounding the streets canvassing houses, staffing banks of telephones cold-calling voters and leafleting shoppers in High Streets. Millions of union members will receive pro-Labour propaganda in union maga-

zines and stalls in workplaces up and down the country.

Even though Labour remains the biggest party in Britain, with 190,000 members, its paid up support is falling compared with 'radical' newcomers to the big time like the

If Labour cannot resist the allure of big money in opposition, then what will it be like in office?

Greens, SNP and UKIP, who are all dramatically on the rise. So the mass of associate members affiliated via their trade unions enormously increases the reach of Labour.

This is significant. It is why millions of workers – millions of the more class conscious workers – continue to support Labour. It is why Labour, even today, after the illegal and immoral wars it propagated for British imperialism in Afghanistan and Iraq, after introducing Private Finance Initiative hospital deals, free-standing Academy schools and student tuition fees, even after its pernicious decision to join with the Lib Dems and Tories in a popular front campaign to "save the union" – despite all this, Labour remains for millions of workers "their" party.

But what do working class people get from "their" party? In particular, because it is through the affiliated unions that this relationship is most clearly manifested, what do the unions receive from Labour?

Not enough.

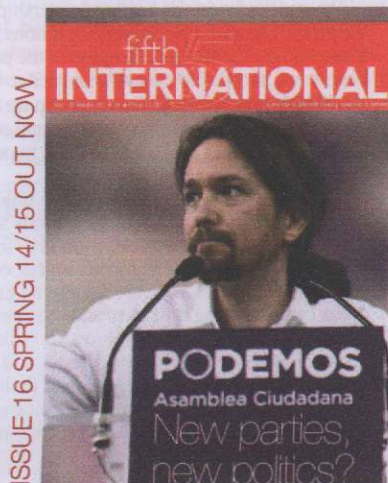
The anti-union laws, crafted by Thatcher and Major, will remain in place. Council housing, the most secure, most affordable and most democratic way to resolve the housing crisis, will not be revived. Every privatised industry, sector and company will be safely protected from the threat of renationalisation. And the minimum wage will be pegged to the floor, with the aspiration of a living wage lingering in the ether, just an aspiration.

Most damning of all, Labour repeats its mantra: no reversal of any Tory cuts; stick to Coalition spending limits for the first two years.

The saying about whoever pays the piper calls the tune certainly holds true for the Tories. But with Labour this does not hold true. Those who pay the Tory piper get to call Labour's tune as well.

The Tory press continually attack Labour because of its "union paymasters". But what do they actually get for their members millions? A repeal of the anti-union laws? Taxing the rich to pay for the public services? Reversing the cuts and Privatisations? Upping the minimum wage to a living wage?

You must be joking. ●



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EDITORIAL

War of words

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An independent workers' press could counter Tory media monopoly

★
BERNIE MCADAM

All the experts agree the 2015 general election is the most unpredictable for decades. New parties, like Ukip on the right and resurgent parties like the Scottish Nationalists and Greens on the left, could hold the two big parties to ransom as coalition partners.

Sections of the left have welcomed the rise of the Greens and even the SNP as alternatives to a Labour Party that promises to keep to Osborne's cuts agenda for two years and implement the rest of it - only more slowly and humanely. It is true that this has allowed the SNP and Greens to steal Labour's old reformist clothes.

They can afford to; neither is about to form a Westminster government. The SNP claim that they have acted as a buffer to austerity in Holyrood. On some issues they have but they have signally failed to use their powers to vary income tax by 3p in the pound to fund services and raise benefits. The more "devo max" they are given, the more they have to raise taxes on Scottish business to fund expenditure, so the more they will turn to austerity themselves.

The SNP have passed on cuts where they are in power at local government level. Dundee and Glasgow SNP and Brighton Green controlled councils have all passed cuts budgets and attacked their own workforces, mirroring local Labour cuts.

The Greens and SNP are not a battered shield, mitigating cuts. They are a sword in the Tories' hands, making

They all resort to the "dented shield" argument - that 'we are fending off the worst blows': in reality they are a sword in the hands of the Tories making cuts for them.

Nowhere do they try to oppose cuts by mobilising working class people to strike, demonstrate and occupy. Like Labour all they can do is pose their own election, their own management of capitalism as the solution.

As parties of reform, they are no better than Labour - just further back down the road of power that leads to inevitable sell-out. More importantly, they have no organised roots in the trade unions, no historic links to the struggle for independent working class politics. Electing them will do nothing to overcome the main obstacle to a struggle against the crisis of the capitalist system - the leaders of the trade unions and Labour who will continue to lead the working class to defeat after defeat until the working class creates a new party of its own, based on a programme for the abolition of class society and capitalism.

Simply replacing Labour with the SNP or Greens would be step backward, towards middle class "radicalism". Even the idea of cross-breeding Scottish nationalism with left reformist socialism as much of the Scottish far left is trying to do - whilst openly rejoicing at the prospect of the SNP smashing up Scottish Labour - is preparing a major defeat for the Scots workers.

Certainly we need to break the unions from Labour but not from independent working class representation. We need to win the mass workers' organisations to militant, class i.e. socialist politics. That is why Workers Power is campaigning for a vote for Left Unity and Trade Union and Socialist Coalition candidates, to gather greater forces to the project of a new fighting party of the working class.

But wherever there are no TUSC or Left Unity candidates, we call for a vote for Labour, to kick out the Tories and the Lib-Dems and keep out all the other openly capitalist parties from Ukip to the SNP. At the same time we demand of Labour candidates that they break with all forms of austerity and support the fightback against it, here and now and if they get into government. ●

“Sex Lessons at Five Under Labour”, “Sick Benefits - 75% are Faking”, “Immigrant Baby Boom” “Immigrant and Scrounging”... and so it goes on. Disgusting as it is predictable, this is a sign of what to expect from the Tory dominated press, as the election campaign gathers pace.

And we should not underestimate its scale. The Mail accounts for about a fifth of newspaper sales nationally. Together with the other right wing papers, around nearly three quarters of the market is safely in the same camp, with the mildly pro-Labour Daily Mirror and Daily Record, and the liberal Guardian and Independent accounting only for a quarter of the market between them.

So we can expect a continued barrage of attacks on “Red Ed”, “Mr Weirido” and “Ed the Loser”. But the Tory press are not joking. Ludicrous as the “red” label is, it helps stir up the reactionary middle class fear of the left and presses the Tory Party to the right. It is noteworthy that Cameron is not exactly a favourite of these rags since he tried to play the liberal on social questions, like gay rights.

The “othering” of Miliband by the Mail started back in September 2013, when it targeted Ed's father Ralph (a Jewish refugee who served three years in the Royal Navy in the Second World War) as “The man who hated Britain”. It went on to inform us that, “Red Ed's pledge to bring back socialism is a homage to his Marxist father”.

Pulling Labour right

But there is another purpose to this red-baiting: to shape the political landscape and recast Labour's campaign promises. The media barons and tabloid editors are past masters at manufacturing “public opinion”, whipping up a frenzy of hysteria over certain issues, while remaining utterly silent on others.

On the NHS, the Mail has been quick to point out the reservations that millionaire Labour donor John Mills has about Labour's policies. Mills thinks it is wrong to fund the NHS from a “mansion tax”, preferring privatisation. His views go down well with the Mail and are given prominence, the better to pressure Labour into toning down its already timid opposition to Tory “reforms”.

On immigration and race, there is same old framing of public debate around smears and hysteria, with the Daily Express warning us that “more than a quarter of British Muslims” sympathise with the Charlie Hebdo killers. This from the paper that once informed us that, “Muslims

tell us how to run our schools”.

All these papers warned us last year of tidal waves of Romanians and Bulgarians coming to Britain... something that never materialised, and was never corrected.

This paranoid focus reinforces pre-existing prejudices, sending the message that immigrants and asylum seekers are a threat to our social fabric. It deliberately fuels anger and resentment, thereby inciting racist hatred and violence. But it is also a call on politicians, a mechanism to bully apparently the “out of touch”.

How does Labour respond? By promising to “get tough” on immigration, as they had “got things wrong” in the past. Miliband even tried to berate Cameron in parliament this month for not meeting his own 2010 election pledge to cut net migration to below 100,000. Again we see Labour being pulled to the right, trying to pander to the racist UKIP vote, while the media hype up Farage.

Left wing BBC?

So where does that mighty champion of objectivity, the BBC, stand? The right wing press constantly accuse it of left wing bias. The Mail on Sunday's Peter Hitchens, for example, says that the BBC is, “morally, socially and culturally biased against conservative ideas”.

But as Owen Jones has pointed out, the BBC “is stacked full of right wingers”, especially at the top, and this campaign by the privately-owned print media “allows the right to police the BBC: to make the corporation fearful of crossing certain lines, and to ensure that the right sets the political agenda”, while leaving liberal left journalists “reluctant to return fire for fear they will help to fatally undermine the BBC”.

Prominent Tories at the BBC have recently included recent Chairperson Chris Patten, a former Cabinet minister, political editor Nick Robinson, a former chairman of the Young Conservatives, plus George Osborne's special advisor Thea Rogers and right wing journalist Andrew Neil, former editor of The Sunday Times. A Cardiff University report has found that Tory politicians appear on BBC news programmes far more often than their opponents.

Whose media?

The media moguls are of course part of the capitalist class; they own and control profit-making businesses. But they have an especially important role in the defence of capitalist society, as the purveyors of pro-capitalist and pro-imperialist ideology.

ist ideology.

How then is it possible for some of the right wing press's campaigns to appear to run against the real needs of the bourgeoisie?

For example, most of the tabloids run down the EU and are in favour of Britain getting out. But the bosses' trade union, the CBI, says eight out of 10 employers support UK's membership, and the City of London certainly wants Britain to stay in.

Similarly, the pro-Tory media is hysterically against mass immigration. Yet most serious capitalists understand that migrants play an important role, plugging gaps in the labour market which otherwise might lead to a skills shortage, and dampening down pay demands.

But here the media is deliberately scapegoating the Brussels bureaucracy and immigrants in order to divide the working class against itself and divert attention from the real causes of falling wages, the housing shortage or the creaking NHS: the capitalist crisis, caused by the system.

Even if The Sun's owner Rupert Murdoch and Express Group proprietor Richard Desmond are toying with the idea of backing the “fruitcakes, loonies and closet racists” of UKIP, their real purpose is to bolster Nigel Farage's credentials as some sort of spokesperson for the “white working class” and to damage Labour's standing.

What the ruling class and its media always unite on though is their hostility to any expression of working class militancy and a common front on essential Western interests. Hence the unanimous backing - from the most rabid reactionary to the fuzziest liberal - on the war drive against Russia.

Our media!

While the media remains under the ownership and control of the capitalists there is little chance of working class interests being advanced in it. That goes as much for the Daily Mirror as it does for the Tory press. The Daily Mirror may well appear pro-Labour, standing up for the NHS, but the Trinity Mirror Group is a capitalist corporation that stands in the tradition of union busting and censorship, not to mention phone hacking.

As media unions at ITV vote for strike action over pay, as Express Newspapers prepare for redundancies, it is clear that trade union organisation in the media must take a stance.

But this should also involve a fight for a veto over what is published. A good example of this happened in 2006, when the NUJ chapel at the Daily Star heroically pulled a page that mocked Islam, headlined the Daily Fatwa, replete with crude jokes and a “Burqa Babes” page 3.

The organised working class needs its own mass media, one that espouses an anti-capitalist and socialist alternative. It should be funded by the trade unions and run under the democratic control of elected rank and file members.

Only this way can working people's struggles be represented and the bosses' lies countered. A workers' paper, alongside social media, would link up with international workers' organisations and expose the role of our imperialist ruling class around the world.

But a crucial task is to take media ownership out of the hands of the billionaires and make their means of misinformation and manipulation serve the democratic interests of their readers, listeners and viewers. This will be a vital part of the socialist revolution and transformation of society. ●

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Scandal or business as usual?

Nationalisation is the only solution to endemic corruption in the banking system

★
JOY MACREADY

Whose customers include drug barons, arms dealers, dictators, terrorists and blood diamond dealers? Why, a bank of course.

Leaked documents from an ex-employee show that HSBC made huge profits for years through handling secret accounts for criminal, even murderous (but always wealthy) customers.

HSBC may be the one in the dock at the moment, but make no mistake; all banks have remarkably similar client lists, in spite of reams of international anti-money laundering and "Know Your Customer" regulations.

The irony is that HSBC certainly does know these customers, as its Swiss private banking arm bent over backwards helping them dodge taxes and launder cash.

An employee of HSBC's private bank in Switzerland, Hervé Falciani, realised the bank he was working for was operating a massive and illegal tax evasion and money laundering service for the super-rich. He started collecting the data in 2009 and handed it over to the Swiss authorities, who did nothing, then the French.

Recently The Guardian and Le Monde journalists analysed a portion of the data. The 30,000 accounts they looked at contained over \$130 billion. Correspondence details how officials not only advised and assisted clients in evading taxes, but even handed over "bricks of cash" so that they could spend their ill-gotten gains without leaving a paper or electronic trail.

British tax officials identified 1,100 UK-based tax evaders from the HSBC files they received in 2010. While they have recovered £135 million owed taxes, however, only one person has been prosecuted to date.

Yet the chair of HSBC from 2006 to 2010, Lord Green, was marked out by the Tory government – for promotion to trade minister. Green only resigned – without showing the slightest glimmer of remorse or self-awareness, – when he was forced to.

Similarly, Douglas Flint, current HSBC boss, was adamant in front of the House of Commons committee that while he believed "in personal accountability" and that "people should be held responsible for what they have direct oversight over", he didn't "feel that proximate to what was happening in the private bank".

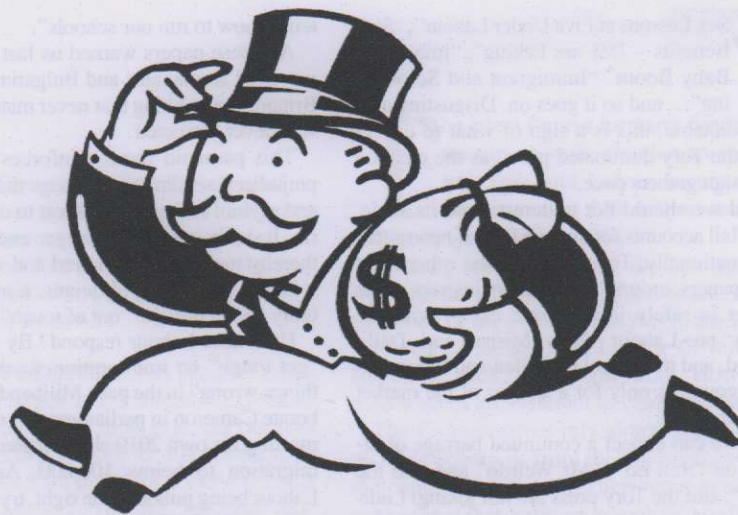
Amazingly such weasel words can keep the cream of capitalist talent out of the dock. As Labour MP Margaret Hodge, chair of the Public Accounts Committee, quipped, "If it had been a benefit cheat it would have been up for court years ago."

Market manipulation

Although it appeared as if HSBC had made it through the banking crisis in 2007-08 relatively intact, it certainly hasn't escaped the numerous market misconduct scandals that followed.

In November, five global banks – HSBC, along with Citi, JP Morgan, Royal Bank of Scotland and UBS – were fined a total of \$3 billion by UK and US financial watchdogs for manipulating the \$5 trillion a day foreign exchange market. (Barclays is also incriminated but has yet to agree a settlement.)

The FX probe revealed that a number of traders from different banks colluded together in online chat rooms, which they named "the Car-



TOO BIG TO FAIL, TOO BIG TO JAIL?

tel", "the Bandits" and "the Mafia". They passed on confidential information to move the FX market in their bank's favour, an activity called "front running" a trade.

Even the Bank of England has been pulled into the fray, as files show its former chief FX dealer had been aware that front running was a common (not to mention illegal) practice as early as 2006.

The FX scandal kicked off just as the furore over manipulation of the London interbank offered rate (Libor) had begun to die down. Libor, which is the benchmark rate at which banks lend to each other in the short-term, underpins approximately \$350 trillion in financial derivative products.

Again bank collusion came to light. As a result, Barclays had to pay out more than \$500 million, Swiss bank UBS paid \$1.5 billion and Lloyds \$370 million in fines, while Citi, RBS, JP Morgan and Deutsche Bank paid lesser amounts. (Some paid much less because they had grassed the others up). All have set aside millions for future manipulation settlements.

Many senior banking executives have used this opportunity to settle old scores and toss a few scapegoats to the regulatory wolves; however, it is clear to see that this behaviour was sanctioned – even promoted – by senior management. It was not just a case of a few "bad apples" but the whole banking system that is rotten to the core.

The role of banks

Under capitalism, banks play a specific role in the circulation of money, injecting "liquidity" into the markets. Finance capital is held by the banks and lent out to individual capitalists to invest in expanding their business' productive capacity – but this comes at a price (i.e. interest). In this way, money appears to generate more money on its own, particularly when the banks engage in speculative activities.

Taking a "real economy" example, in order to lend out money – and get more in return – a banker must be certain that the loan can be paid back. To decide which companies to invest in, they scrutinise companies' accounts and business plans and sit on company boards. Consequently, they have intimate knowledge of the

inner workings of any industry and take decisions as to what areas of industry "deserve" investment based on an expected rate of return.

By extending credit, financial institutions also increase the speed at which money is invested in production and then re-circulated into other areas of the economy.

But they also engage in highly speculative activities, such as the FX market that runs the gamut from corporate payments for supplies or wages in other currencies to high frequency traders trying to extract revenue from the smallest pip in currency movements.

It is this quest for ever-greater rates of return – turning money into more money – that also drives banks to bend their own rules and manipulate the "free" market. What is most telling about these investigations is that it wasn't just one investment bank that allowed its traders free rein, but all the top global institutions. Even though they compete against one another, they colluded to cheat their clients and boost their profits.

Individual prosecution

The regulators are only now beginning to pursue individuals for their role in market manipulation. There have been a few arrests and even fewer trials to date, but there are also many traders that are still sitting at their desks and making money for their bank.

These traders may not have benefitted directly from market manipulation, but as the investment banks' profits soared so did their bonuses. Many received more than three times their salary in bonuses.

However, the real winners were the upper echelons of the banks, with their golden handshakes, platinum goodbyes and diamond retention packages.

Barclays' ex-CEO Bob Diamond walked away with £120 million during the five years following the credit crunch. He resigned "in disgrace" (but not in poverty) after it emerged that under his supervision Barclays had manipulated Libor.

The government allows crooks like Diamond and RBS' Fred "the Shred" Goodwin to walk away scot-free and take their money with them. This is where the real fraud lies in society, not in working class neighbourhoods.

Compare their treatment with a benefit

claimant trying to survive on £53-£79.15 per week, who can have their meagre dole stopped if they miss an interview or refuse to take a zero-hours contract job. If prosecuted for benefit fraud, for example because they took on a little extra work to try to make ends meet, they either have to pay it all back, see their homes and possessions confiscated or spend up to 10 years in prison.

Diamond, Goodwin and their cronies haven't paid back a penny of their ill-gotten gains and continue living quite comfortably in their mansions, with their Jags and yachts.

The answer

The capitalists' answer to the banking scandals is to increase regulations governing the banks, effectively forcing them to reduce their leverage ratio, "even the playing field" by curbing the excesses and making bankers adhere to codes of conduct.

The UK government, for example, has implemented powers to claw back bonuses and make misconduct a prison term offence of up to seven years.

Effectively what they are trying to do is give banking a makeover, making it appear well regulated and innocuous, so it can play its part in a "budding economic recovery".

But finance capital has no morality. Its only aim is to increase its profits, and it will do that by any means necessary. Even if it can't openly manipulate the market as it has done recently – remember, front running has always been illegal – it will find other ways of increasing the rate of return on money, such as returning to the collateralised debt obligations (CDOs) they sold in the run up to the crisis.

But we have a very different answer. We don't believe that the banking system can be reformed.

Instead we call for the nationalisation of all the banks and for them to be merged together under one roof and under working class control.

This is very different from the "nationalisation" of RBS, which effectively nationalised the debt for the taxpayers to bear, while allowing the bank's top executives to walk away with ever increasing remuneration packets. It is sickening that a bank, which is 80 per cent owned by UK taxpayers, paid out £421 million in bonuses last year at the same time reporting a £3 billion loss and 14,000 job cuts.

Since 2009 RBS has lost the taxpayer £49.4 billion and shed 48,000 jobs.

We demand that all bankers' bonuses should be immediately revoked. In addition, all the money that the banks owe in fines should be redistributed to provide decent homes, healthcare and social services to hard-hit working class communities across the country.

But we must combine the fight to take over the banks with the fight to open the books of the crisis-ridden corporations, and to reveal the networks and deals that finance capital keeps hidden and to force the rich to pay back their evaded and avoided taxes in full.

We must go further and fight for the overthrow of capitalism, which is an anarchic system of exploitation and crisis, and replace it with a democratically planned economy – one that will expropriate the ruling class and take state power. To do this, we need to build a revolutionary party of the working class. ●

Saudi Arabia's unholy war

Is the desert kingdom responsible for the rise of Islamic State?

★
MARCUS HALABY

Our rulers routinely present the beheadings of hostages carried out by the Islamic State (IS) as proof of their need to send their military forces into a region whose past experience of Western bombing, invasion and occupation created the very forces that they are fighting against today. But there is a state in the region that beheads dozens of people every year, many of them poor foreign migrants sentenced without even the semblance of a fair trial, that will not be the target of Western bombings or sanctions any time soon.

That state, Saudi Arabia, just happens to have the world's second largest oil reserves, about a fifth of the total, and is the world's second-largest oil producer after Russia, with about 13 per cent of world production. It is, today, a key part of the unholy coalition of states ranged against IS, taking part in airstrikes against IS targets in Syria in September 2014, and building a 600-mile long fortified wall to separate it from regions of Iraq now under IS control.

Saudi Arabia's official ideology is "Wahhabism", a particularly intolerant sub-sect of Salafism that it shares with IS, and which it made its mission to export to the rest of the Arab and Muslim world.

What is less well known is that Wahhabis form only between a fifth and a quarter of Saudis, roughly the same size as Saudi Arabia's Shi'a

Muslim minority, the latter treated as second-class citizens despite forming a majority of the population in most of the oil-producing eastern half of the country. This leaves "ordinary" non-Wahhabi Sunni Muslims at just over half of Saudis - and about two-thirds of Saudi Sunnis.

Moreover, the form of Wahhabism promoted by the Saudi state is strongly opposed to participation in politics, making it a highly convenient ideology for an absolutist monarchy whose ruling dynasty claims a divine right to rule. This puts it at odds - politically, as well as theologically - with "mainstream" Islamist movements like the Muslim Brotherhood, and in particular with the explicitly political Islamism associated with the ideas of Sayyid Qutb, as well as with Wahhabi and Salafist movements beyond its borders who reject the Al Saud dynasty's claims to rule. IS leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi's declaration in June 2014 that he was now "Caliph Ibrahim", the religious and political leader of a global Muslim caliphate, was a direct challenge to the Saudi state's legitimacy.

These factors make the Saudi monarchy particularly vulnerable to the rise of the Brotherhood and its imitators like Turkey's Justice and Development Party (AKP), especially when their programmes espouse proposals for political reform or constitutional government. This in turn helps to explain the Saudi state's visceral hostility to

movements that most outsiders might assume would be its natural allies, supporting "secular" dictators like Egypt's Abdel Fattah el-Sisi or Libya's Khalifa Haftar against their Islamist opponents, supporting the secular nationalist Fatah against Hamas, the Brotherhood's Palestinian offshoot, and helping to establish Zahran Alloush's Salafist "Army of Islam" in Syria precisely to oppose IS and its rival, Jabhat al-Nusra.

For its part, IS is probably the Sunni Islamist formation in Syria and Iraq least dependent on Saudi and other foreign sources of funding. In its origins in Iraq under the US-led occupation after 2003, it was able to establish a "business model" of revenues extracted locally through tribute, extortion and ransom, which it took with it to Syria after 2012, in the process developing a relatively sophisticated bureaucracy by the standards of its rivals. Its seizure of oil fields and refineries in Raqqa and Deir Ezzor in eastern Syria gave it a further source of independent revenue, an experience since repeated in Iraq following its seizure of Mosul. This ironically turned its nominal enemy into one of its biggest sponsors, as the Assad regime provided it with revenues to protect the pipelines that enabled Syria's oil, to continue to reach the world market.

It is not coincidental that the Western powers moved toward a direct confrontation with IS after its seizure of Mosul and Tikrit in June 2014.

And here their concerns were not for the protection of the Kurds or the Yazidis, but to prevent Iraqi Kurdistan's large oil reserves from falling into IS's hands.

The US-allied Saudi state might not have "funded" IS - although many of its citizens, including a part of its ruling class certainly did. But it does bear the responsibility for creating the ideological climate within which movements like it, many of them now hostile to the Saud dynasty, could acquire legitimacy.

Most infamously, Saudi Arabia poured billions into supporting the US-backed Islamist insurgency against Afghanistan's pro-Soviet government in the 1980s, in the process launching the career of Osama bin Laden and his al-Qaeda movement, from whose offshoot in Iraq IS originally emerged. And Saudi Arabia remains the godfather of an ultra-reactionary religious sectarianism across the region.

It has been helped in this by an equally virulent Shi'a sectarian politics promoted by the Iranian theocratic regime, whose proxy militias in Iraq have a record of massacres of Sunnis every bit as grim as IS's massacres of Shi'as and Kurds. That this receives less attention in our media is in part due to the fact that these sectarian militias are on "our side", having helped stabilise the US-led occupation and propping up Iraq's Western-supported and pro-Iranian regime since. ●

Hawks v doves

Ukraine ceasefire exposes tensions between United States and the European Union

★
DAVE STOCKTON

The surrender of government forces surrounded in the town of Debaltsevo has brought some respite for the population of the Donbas but the Kiev regime is unable to stem the imminent Kiev collapse provoked by its punishing enslavement to the IMF.

The ceasefire arranged at the 'Minsk 2' talks between Germany, Ukraine, France and Russia, was the result of efforts by France and Germany to achieve a settlement with Putin. The peace talks excluded the United States and Britain because a lasting peace conflicts with their pretext for maintaining an economic and military blockade around Russia.

Preserving the Russian menace and the option of renewing the war in the east is key to the survival of a regime resting on the twin pillars of a Ukrainian-nationalist ideology and a state apparatus infiltrated by fascists. Without this the grotesque mismanagement of every aspect of economic and political life would soon undermine its social base and likely lead to its overthrow.

The Anglo-American bloc is determined that the ceasefire should be maintained only for long as is necessary for the Kiev government to re-group its forces for a fresh offensive. Why else

would they greet the ceasefire with a new round of sanctions and violate the clause calling for the removal of foreign troops by immediately dispatching hundreds of "military advisors"?

For all the propaganda about a Russian 'invasion' of Ukraine - which the German security service, the BND, dismissed as just that - it is clear that Putin has pressured and even replaced the leadership of the Donetsk and Lugansk Republics. Though far less powerful than his Western enemies he is the head of an imperialist power. His objective is to block the US and EU's attempt to absorb Ukraine into Nato and the EU and to increase the economic and military squeeze on Russia.

So also he has sent weaponry and volunteers into east Ukraine, so that Kiev could not successfully crush the resistance, he has also done all he can to limit their independence. In short he only wants to maintain the two republics as bargaining chips in the conflict with the EU-Nato bloc. If Russia could agree a satisfactory arrangement with Germany and France, then it would sacrifice them without hesitation.

However the very existence of 'people's republics' whose defence still rests largely on militias of local workers, and whose leadership is obliged to make demagogic attacks on the oli-

garchs and who positively reference the social gains working people secured in the USSR, is not a scenario Putin wants to give legitimacy to. Coopting and ensuring that the compliant leaders who are prepared to work with the patronage networks of Ukrainian oligarchs established in the east amongst the local state, government and security forces is important.

The struggle by the forces of Donetsk and Lugansk remains a justified defence of the democratic rights of the people of the region not to be forcibly retained in a state run by fascists and nationalists. This remains a progressive fight independent of the Great Russian nationalist and socially reactionary politics of the leaders of the DPR and LPR.

The biggest fly in the ointment for Washington's plans to turn Ukraine into a US protectorate - greater than a regime of kleptocrats whose armed forces cannot defeat a greatly outnumbered and less well armed militia - is Ukraine's collapsing economy. It can hardly rely on Germany and the EU states in the middle of the Greek crisis to bail out and sustain Ukraine - a country with four times the latter's population.

The economic reforms demanded by the EU and the IMF spell disaster for Ukraine, east and west. Debt bondage, privatization and closures,

the takeover of Ukraine's best agricultural land by the likes of Monsanto, will mean increased misery. For this reason a united movement against the pillage of the country needs to be built up which can expose the mirage of European prosperity and drive the Maidan fraudsters like Nuland's appointee Yatsenyuk from power and heal the rifts in the Ukrainian working class.

The dire and deteriorating economic conditions require a united workers' movement to fight for economic social and political rights; a movement whose goal should be a workers' government. Such a regime, based on workers' councils, could expropriate the oligarchs, disarm and crush the fascist gangs, meet the masses' urgent needs for jobs and a living income, and reach out the hand of solidarity to the workers of Russia and the European Union alike.

There is one major obstacle to this; if Poroshenko and Yatsenyuk are able, with US assistance, to renew the offensive against Donetsk. Therefore - whilst doing all in their power to reach out to their western sisters and brothers - the working class of the East must hang on to their weapons. ●

(1) <http://www.spiegel.de/international/world/germany-concerned-about-aggressive-nato-stance-on-ukraine-a-1022193.html>

women

We need to talk about abortion differently

Review: Katha Pollitt, 'Pro: Reclaiming Abortion Rights', Picador, 2014, pp258, \$25



JOY MACREADY

“We need to talk about ending a pregnancy as a common, even normal, event in the reproductive lives of women... We need to see abortion as an urgent practical decision that is just as moral as the decision to have another child – indeed sometimes even more moral.”

Finally, someone has had the courage to reject the almost universal depiction of abortion as a tragedy for every single woman at any given point in her life. For many women, ending a pregnancy can be akin to a life-saving act, one of self-preservation. But it is also so much more than that.

As Katha Pollitt writes, “Legal abortion presents the issue of women’s emancipation in particularly stark form. It takes a woman’s body out of the public realm and puts her, not men and not children, at the centre of her own life.”

Through her book, *Pro: Reclaiming Abortion Rights*, Pollitt attempts to reframe the debate around abortion, rejecting the commonly held view that it is a “bad thing, about which we shake our heads sadly and then debate its precise degree of badness, preening ourselves on our judiciousness and moral seriousness as we argue about this or that restriction on this or that kind of woman.”

Abortions happen whether they are legal, performed by medical professionals and covered by national health care insurance, or illegal, performed in dirty clinics or dangerous back streets.

Millions of women worldwide are forced to break the law to end a pregnancy. Just recently the body of a young Brazilian woman, Jandyrá Magdalena, was found mutilated beyond recognition the day after she went for an abortion, a ghastly reminder of the life-threatening risks women take to end a pregnancy.

From the very beginning of the book, Pollitt goes to the heart of the material need for abortions, exposing the scarcity of resources for single mothers and even two-parent families, and the contradictory pressures on young women to be simultaneously sexually alluring and withholding – “hot virgins”.

Her main argument is that abortion needs to be a normal part of healthcare for women, not just in a biological and physical context but also a social context. As she explains,

“...access to legal abortion is a good thing for society and helping a woman obtain one is a good deed. Instead of shaming women for ending a pregnancy, we should acknowledge their realism and self-knowledge... Society benefits when women can commit to education and work and dreams without having at the back of

their mind a concern that maybe it’s all provisional, because at any money an accidental pregnancy could derail them for life. It’s good for people to have sexual experiences and not fear birth control failure.”

Pollitt rightly challenges the “awfulisation of abortion”, where even pro-choicers use negative language: sad, tragic, thorny, vexed, complex, difficult, etc. There is a general acceptance that abortion is a terrible tragedy and no woman could do it with a clear conscience.

Ending a pregnancy needs to be seen as a choice like all other choices in our lives, she argues. “...it can at times be difficult but for many women, but abortion is an incredibly good thing and allows them to go on to lead productive lives, instead of being chained to the home.”

She calls for free abortion on demand, arguing that it is central to women’s emancipation to have control over their own fertility, when and if to have a family. “Without this right, it’s as if motherhood is the default setting for every woman from first period to menopause, and needs to say yes to every zygote that knocks on her door.” She also demands better sex education and birth control.

US reactionary tide

As an American feminist, Pollitt writes predominantly about the situation in the US, which recently saw the Republicans (now in control of both the House and Senate) drop its most recent attempt to ban abortions after 20 weeks, instead settling for permanently banning federal money from going to pay for abortions on the 42nd anniversary of *Roe versus Wade*.

Even the 1973 landmark decision by the US Supreme Court gave women the right to abort only until viability. The decision effectively gave a foetus limited rights around the time of viability, or 24 weeks. However, what it did give American women was a choice.

As Pollitt says, “Legalising abortion doesn’t just save women from death and injury and fear of arrest, and it didn’t just make it possible for women to commit to education and work, and free them from shotgun marriages and too many kids. It changed how women saw themselves: as mothers by choice, not fate.”

Today, the reactionary anti-abortionist movement is gaining ground in the US, led by the Republicans and the religious right. Between 2011 and 2013 US states enacted 205 new restrictions on abortion availability.

This includes waiting periods – counselling and 24 hour “cooling down” periods; inaccurate scripts that doctors must read to patients, i.e. abortion causes breast cancer, mental illness suicide; bans on state Medicaid payments; restrictions on insurance cover; and parental notification and consent laws.

At least 73 clinics have closed down or stopped performing abortions during the same period.

Working class and poor women are the most affected by these new limitations to abortion,

which means that clinics are too far away, too expensive, too encumbered by restrictions, regulations and humiliations.

As of May 2014, 23 states had passed laws regulating ultrasound scans before abortion; three states require that it must be shown to the pregnant woman, while others must offer to show it. Many state legislatures have tabled “personhood amendments” to state constitutions, which proposed that the terms “people” and “person” should apply to every human being “at any state of development” – but these have failed at the ballot box.

Last summer, the Supreme Court exempted the Hobby Lobby crafts store chain from providing IUDs and certain emergency contraception under insurance cover under Obamacare because the CEO believes they are “abortifacients” which infringes his religious beliefs. So a boss has more rights and control over a woman’s body and her fertility than she does.

Abortion is a class issue

Pollitt argues that denying women the right to end a pregnancy is effectively opposing women’s independence and full participation in society. Reproductive rights are an economic issue, she says, and without the ability to limit and time their pregnancies, women will always be disadvantaged at work and subordinate to men.

A man who accidentally impregnates a woman isn’t forced to drop everything; he isn’t expelled from school, shamed for being promiscuous, and forced to accept a life of difficulties and dimmed hopes in order to co-parent.

Rightly, Pollitt identifies that the origin of women’s oppression lies in the home. She exposes how the whole world runs on women’s unpaid or grossly underpaid labour. “When that work is an extension of female domestic roles

“If women rejected labour within the family, society would have to pay enormous sums to replace it”

– caring for children or elderly, preparing food, cleaning houses – it is ill paid, low skilled and low status,” she writes. “And yet, if women rejected labour within the family, society would have to pay enormous sums to replace it.”

But she doesn’t make the link to the overarching economic system in which social norms are constructed. Capitalism is based on private property and the appropriation by the capitalist class of surplus value produced by workers.

As soon as human society developed to where a surplus was created, i.e. more means of subsistence than were required for immediate consumption, someone had to control the surplus, marking the origin of class society. Private property underpins women’s subordination in

that it is essential to ensure to pass on the surplus (wealth) to legitimate heirs. Therefore women’s fertility and sexuality has to be tightly controlled within the patriarchal monogamous family structure.

Industrial capitalism, which revolutionised the nature of human production, maintained the

“Society benefits when women can commit to education and work and dreams”

family structure and women’s private role in the home, providing free labour to reproduce the next generation of workers and labour power.

Hence it is only through the overthrow of capitalism and the class system that women will truly be liberated. However, without a class analysis, Pollitt’s answer is solely to build a stronger pro-choice movement through feminist, pro-choice and reproductive justice organisations, coupled with community activism. She reports a pushback on the legislative front, with 51 pieces of pro-choice legislation passed in 14 states in 2014.

But without a political alternative to capitalism, this is destined to be a labour of Sisyphus – with the pro-choice movement making some gains that are then rolled back as the reactionary right recovers power in an age of austerity.

Therefore, in line with theme of Pollitt’s book, we have to reframe the debate around what our society should look like. We need to create a society based on need, not greed; where women will have equal access to jobs and education, housing and healthcare, and the ability to decide whether or not to have children based on their desires, not under economic or societal pressure. Consequently our aim should be the overthrow of capitalism – and replace it with a socialist system.

For that to happen, we need working class organisations to take up the fight for women’s liberation and for the liberation of the working class as a whole against the exploitative capitalist class.

The weakness in Pollitt’s argument, even though she talks about poor, working class and women of colour, she doesn’t mention self-organisation along class lines. She doesn’t argue for the trade union movement to take up such a vital issue for their members – both women and men – and to take strike action to force Hobby Lobby’s CEO to back down, instead of letting a bourgeois court decide the fate of women workers.

In order to effect change, we need build a working class women’s movement that fights together hand-in-hand with working class men, and together we can truly challenge women’s oppression in all spheres of our lives and smash the system of oppression that keeps all of humanity under its tyranny. ●

Not mourning, but rebelling!

★
SVENJA ZHENOT

In Turkey, mass protests in response to a racist murder is a sign of the changing situation of women and opens the possibility of organising a working class women's movement against the sexism and exploitation inherent to capitalism.

The corpse of the young Kurdish Alevi, Özgecan Aslan, was found on 11 February, in a river in Mersin, a city in southeast Turkey. She had been first stabbed to death and then burned because she tried to defend herself against a rapist.

The main culprit has vanished, but some men from his family, who were also involved in the crime, have already confessed. They have a history among the Turkish fascists, the Grey Wolves. On Facebook they reported watching a Turkish series that begins with the rape of a young woman.

Violence against women

Özgecan was on her way home, sitting at the back of a minibus, when the driver attacked her. Because of her ethnic background, she was, as an individual, socially disadvantaged. But hers is not an isolated case and we have to address the issue of the frequency of brutal violence against women in Turkey.

Since the Justice and Development Party (AKP) government came into office in 2002, violence against women has increased rapidly. By 2009, the number of registered cases had in-

creased by 1,400 per cent!

The AKP is a conservative Islamist party. Its policies stand against equality between men and women, against non-Muslims and against ethnic minorities, and have been enforced with authoritarian methods; but it has strong support in the heavily religious and economically backward rural population.

At the very beginning of his political career, the former mayor of Istanbul and current Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan, declared: "Democracy is just the train on which we travel until we reach our goal. The mosques are our barracks, the minarets our bayonets, the domes our helmets and the faithful our soldiers."

Since then, rising unemployment has been blamed on women seeking paid work. Instead, it is said, they should stay at home, where there is enough to do looking after the house and bringing up children.

According to Erdogan, every woman should have at least three children and pregnant women should not leave the house. For him, too much equality would harm the cohesion of the family; he says that violence against women has not in fact increased - people just think it has.

Thus, not only women, but also the debate about their oppression, should be banished from public life. In a new legislative programme, penalties for violence against women have been reduced, while at a general level they are proposing widespread introduction of the death penalty.

Resistance stirs

After Özgecan's death, thousands of women in many cities took to the streets, with the slogan "We aren't mourning, we're rebelling!" This is the right approach.

Of course, the event itself is so unbelievably awful that anyone should be saddened by it, but compassion alone will not help the many women who continue to suffer from such violence.

Rather, the current anger and mobilisation should be the starting point for a strong women's movement that fights against their structural oppression.

In Turkey, where the institution of the family continues to play a very important role, the right of women to organise politically is the first major hurdle that must be overcome. In the trade unions, for example, the proportion of women is very low, many men do not understand why they should organise together with women, especially not when they supposedly compete with them for jobs. We have to counter this reactionary consciousness that hides behind a "tradition" that is beyond criticism.

A new women's movement should be understood from the outset as part of the labour movement, as a working class women's movement. The current struggles of the unions do provide a starting point for joint action but it is clear that such a movement must address chauvinism, sexism and reactionary ideas and behaviour not

only in society at large, but also among workers themselves.

That is why it is fundamentally important that women can meet each other, talk about their oppression and learn to defend themselves. Özgecan tried to defend herself with pepper spray, but she was alone and had no chance. Especially in rural areas, it is important that women create self-defence organisations.

The recent demonstrations have repeatedly emphasised that the government itself must take the blame for increasing violence against women, the fact that offenders are not convicted and that it appears as normal that women are humiliated and oppressed.

The increase in violence against women and the reactionary attacks from the government and the extreme right are also a response to a change in the society, which is also reflected in the protests. Women are being drawn into production, into economic life. Although this often goes hand-in-hand with the dual burden of doing housework and childcare alongside working for lower wages, it also undermines their traditional subordinate role in the patriarchal family.

The slogan "We're not mourning, we're rebelling!" expresses the fact that many women no longer accept their roles as servants and oppressed victims. This can be the foundation stone for the emergence of a new working class women's movement that locates the roots of women's oppression in the foundations of capitalist class society. ●

A new voice for women

★
JOY MACREADY

In the backroom of a Cardiff pub, a small group of radical women from diverse political backgrounds came together to do something daringly different - launch a magazine focused on working class women, to give our struggles and our fighting spirit a voice.

The main discussion centred on what we wanted the publication to be. Some said it should be a feminist publication from a socialist perspective; others stressed that it should be a place where we can discuss a wide range of topics, from violence against women to class issues, such as the housing crisis and how women are fighting back against austerity.

All agreed the publication should be open to independent socialists, members of different organisations - and none - across the left. We want to involve LGBT+ activists and those involved in combating oppression generally.

The publication will be as open and accessible as possible, so working class women and other people interested in getting involved can have a place to speak up and express their views. It needs to be inclusive and comprehensible to people to new politics.

Origins

It was almost a year to the day since the first meeting of the We Want a Women's Mag collec-

tive. The idea was born out of the need for an independent working class women's perspective on how to fight against austerity, but also how to fight sexism in society and within the left. Many women active on the left felt politically discouraged in the aftermath of the sexual abuse scandals that tore through the two largest socialist groups in Britain.

Since then, members of the editorial board got a website off the ground (see below) and started posting articles, reports and reviews. But the project needed a boost to attract a wider group of women to contribute, whether through submitting articles, artwork, photos, short reports, poems, podcasts, etc.

In Cardiff, we decided that it should be a campaigning, lively magazine that is not just about how difficult life under austerity is, but broadcasts the courageous, resourceful and inspired fightback that women are leading across the UK and internationally - we can learn so much from each other.

The mothers of the Focus E1 successfully campaigned against evictions by occupying vacant flats in Newham last year, after being told they would be rehoused outside of London.

But we shouldn't be afraid of getting our hands dirty either in some weighty theoretical work. It is important that we progress our theoretical knowledge and development with new theories

- not just about "women's issues", but on a wide range of topics. We can use the pages of the magazine to engage with different ideas and openly debate them in a comradesly fashion.

Crucially, we can use the publication to rally working class women to a socialist perspective. We can use it to pull together the multitude of different campaigns and activists, and to launch a united fight against a common enemy: the bosses, the landlords, the bankers and loan sharks, and the bourgeois politicians that are slashing benefits and privatising everything that moves hand-in-hand with big business - the capitalist class.

A working class women's publication would be the "scaffold", as Lenin called it, which we can build a working class women's movement around - a movement to pull together working women and students, unemployed women and pensioners into a fighting force that could truly roll back the austerity measurers that this government - and most likely the next - is ramming down our throats.

Workers Power believes a working class women's movement is vital for two reasons. First, the oppression of women is alive and kicking - very hard. The labour and trade union movement, led overwhelmingly by men, often merely pays lip service to the fight for women's rights and demands: for example the recent sell-outs of (mainly) women workers in the NHS and

local government.

A women's organisation is needed to place our demands centre stage and, along with militant male workers, seize control of our own disputes.

Get involved!

We have some great ideas to start off with, including using the website to myth-bust slanderous lies in the mainstream media. We may produce an election special, not in the sense of who to vote for but in terms of what the big issues are facing working class women and what socialists should be arguing for.

But we are also looking for contributions from every arena of class struggle: reports from protests and other activities, interviews, film and book reviews, etc. Why not submit an article on a subject you care passionately about.

The next meeting of the We Want a Women's Mag collective will be held from 12 - 5pm on Saturday 18 April in London at the Cock Tavern, 23 Phoenix Road, Euston NW1 1HB. At that meeting we will be deciding when to produce the print run of the magazine, commissioning more articles, discussing ideas and also deciding on the NAME of the publication! ●

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Order reigns in Tobruk

The fate of Libya's revolution will be decided in Tunis and Tahrir Square, not Tripoli



MARCUS HALABY

Those on the left who supported Muammar Gaddafi's dictatorship against its own people in 2011 regularly cite the chaos and confusion in Libya today as proof that his dictatorship was a necessary evil, and that his overthrow would inevitably lead to Libya's becoming "another Somalia", a fragmented "failed state." Some even suggest that the West wanted this outcome.

In fact, the Western imperialists' strategic objective was not to create a disorderly shambles, but to maintain a stable regime in Libya that could keep its oil supplies flowing to a Europe heavily dependent on them. Indeed they only turned against Gaddafi after the popular uprising against him in February 2011, having been caught supporting the losing side in both the Tunisian and Egyptian revolutions a few weeks earlier.

Only when it seemed clear that his regime had lost its ability to maintain order did they turn against him. For over a decade they had been his major customers, and British, French and Italian politicians all had flattered and fawned on Gaddafi and his sons.

Two parliaments

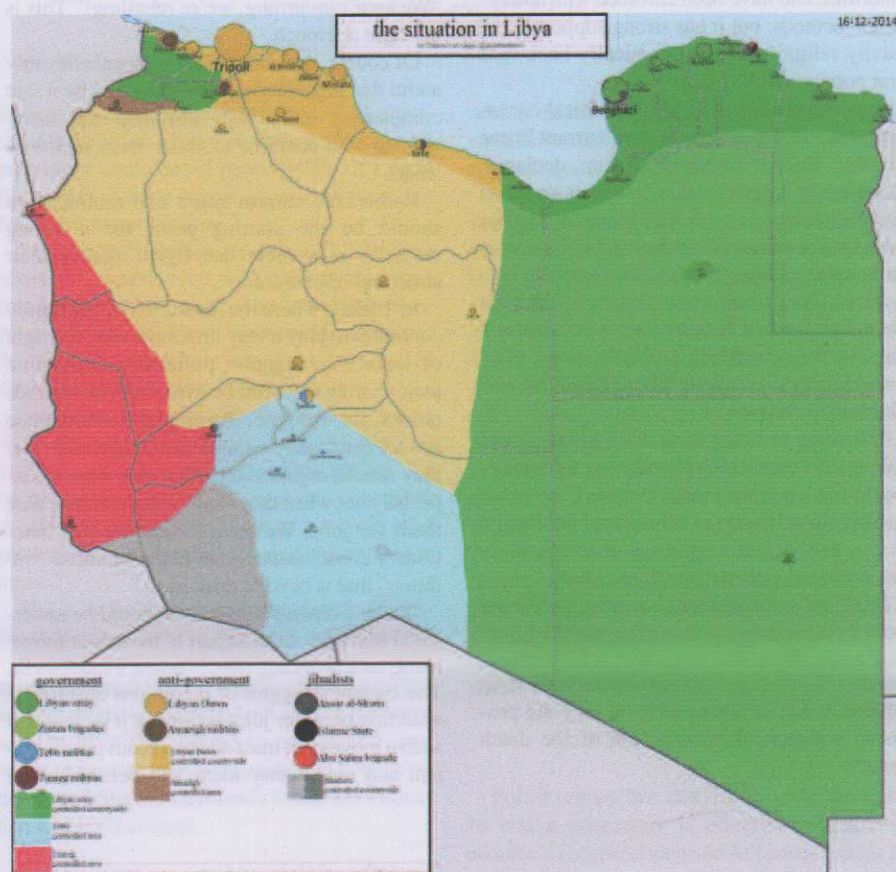
Their difficulty, four years after the dictator's overthrow, is that the USA and its EU allies have found few if any reliable candidates for the job of imposing order. Indeed these candidates' attempts to do so only seem to increase the instability that they fear so much.

Today, for example, there are two rival governments and parliaments in Libya, each controlling no more than a fifth of the country.

The Tobruk-based government recognised by the United Nations (UN), and dominated by military strongman Khalifa Haftar, a Gaddafi-era general turned sometime US agent, is supported by the USA, Egypt's military dictatorship, the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Saudi Arabia. It controls the far east of the country, along the coastline close to the Egyptian border. However, eastern Libya's main city, Benghazi, is divided between the control of this government and the conservative Islamist Shura Council of Benghazi Revolutionaries. And this pro-Western regime is so lacking in popular support that it notoriously had to hold meetings of its parliament, the Council of Deputies, on a Greek car ferry moored off the coast of Tobruk.

Through its militia allies like the Zintan Brigades and the Gaddafi regime's former special forces unit al-Saiqa, it has however managed to assert control of much of the oil production in the country's eastern interior, raising oil production from 200 to 800 thousand barrels a per day, as compared to the pre-revolution figure of 1,600.

Haftar's major rival is a "moderate" Islamist government in the capital Tripoli, occasionally called "Libya Dawn", resting on the rump of the General National Congress (GNC) elected in July 2012. In similar a line-up to the one in Egypt before the military coup that overthrew President Mohamed Morsi in July 2013, Turkey and Qatar are both supporting it. Its military defence is conducted mainly by the Libya Shield Force and by the Libya Revolutionaries Opera-



THE BALANCE OF FORCES IN REVOLUTIONARY LIBYA

tions Room, both coalitions of militias that fought on the anti-Gaddafi side in 2011, which had been recognised and funded by the post-revolutionary government prior to the current crisis.

This crisis began in December 2013, when the GNC unilaterally extended its mandate following a stormy relationship with its prime minister Ali Zeidan, who had hoped to disarm the former anti-Gaddafi militias with whom many of the GNC's deputies were aligned. An abortive coup attempt by Haftar in February 2014, aimed at forcibly dissolving the GNC and holding new elections, was followed by a "slow coup", consisting of a political campaign to secure the support of current and former military officers against the militias.

Zeidan's dismissal by the GNC in March 2014 brought him openly into Haftar's camp, which launched "Operation Dignity" in May 2014, a combined heavy weapons and air assault on Libya's second-largest city Benghazi, which remains divided today, with thousands of its residents displaced. This bloody assault was justified to the Libyan public and to the outside world as an "anti-terrorist" operation, in particular directed against Ansar al-Sharia, the Salafi Islamist movement held responsible for the attack on the US Consulate in Benghazi in September 2012, in which US Ambassador J. Christopher Stevens was killed.

By declaring the whole of Libya's Islamist spectrum to be "terrorists" who had the choice of leaving the country, being killed or being arrested, Haftar succeeded in uniting most of Libya's fractious Islamist camp against him.

The siege of Benghazi was followed by "elec-

tions" in June 2014 to the new Council of Deputies, in which there was only an 18 per cent turnout, as compared to the 60 per cent that elected the GNC in July 2012. Unable to convene in Benghazi, this new pro-Haftar parliament set itself up in little Tobruk instead, resting on support from Egypt and the UAE.

Haftar's attempt to seize Tripoli and dissolve the GNC in June 2014 created a constitutional crisis, as the Supreme Constitutional Court, under Haftar's pressure, refused to recognise the GNC's dismissal of Zeidan's successor as caretaker prime minister Abdullah al-Thani, who then also defected to the pro-Haftar camp, taking many "secular" GNC deputies with him. The following month, an uprising dubbed "Operation Dawn" led by militias supporting the rump GNC seized Tripoli's airport and asserted control over Libya's third-largest city Misrata, the industrial city whose militia played a key role in the liberation of Tripoli from the Gaddafi regime.

The Supreme Constitutional Court, now under the pressure of the militias, then declared Haftar's parliament unlawful in November 2014, setting the stage for the current stand-off, with UN-brokered talks foundering on an insistence by the Tobruk regime that it be recognised as the sole government of the country.

The Egyptian regime has since bombed and invaded the port of Derna, between Tobruk and Benghazi, in February this year, using the pretext of the beheading of 21 Egyptian Christians by an Islamic State-aligned militia there. This militia and others like it, like the much larger Ansar al-Sharia, now have their main base of support in the region around Gaddafi's home

town of Sirte, between Benghazi and the region around Tripoli and Misrata. They are rumoured to consist of Libyans who fought alongside the rebel forces in Syria, although conspiracy theories abound that many are actually Gaddafi's old defeated loyalists in new, Islamic garb.

Working class

Libya's difficulty is one shared by Saudi Arabia and the Arab Gulf states: that as an oil rentier state, it lacks a large native working class of its own, having recruited the majority of its workforce from abroad. Lacking permanent rights of residence, let alone political rights, that might give it a visible stake in the political future of the country, this working class's natural reaction to the chaos of revolution and civil war has been to flee the country and then return after things have calmed down, rather than to intervene in events as a force in its own right.

Nor have the multi-class forces thrown into struggle by the revolution against Gaddafi made any serious attempt to appeal to Libya's migrant working class as a potential ally in their own struggles; indeed, black African migrants in particular were the targets of racist pogroms by insurgent forces in 2011, in the belief that they were the Gaddafi regime's mercenaries.

So while Libya in February 2011 might have responded to the experience of successful popular uprisings either side of it (in Egypt and Tunisia) with a genuine popular uprising of its own, it did not take long for the post-revolutionary process opened by this uprising to become dominated by the inter-tribal and localist rivalries that were only partly hidden from view under four decades of what was a highly personal dictatorship.

Haftar, resting on the parts of Libya's middle classes who were appalled by the lawlessness of the militias, and who had hoped for a return to business as usual after the overthrow of Gaddafi, succeeded in building a movement around him that could intimidate the more "responsible" (that is, imperialist-aligned) politicians to join him, and pose to the imperialist powers as restoring the "rule of law" over the law of the jungle.

But he could do that only by deepening Libya's divisions further, in particular by alienating those for whom their self-sacrifice during the 2011 revolution created a social and political debt of blood whose repayment the militias stood as a guarantee for.

His opponents, however, possess a "democratic mandate" for their rule only marginally more credible than his – and, moreover, espouse a reactionary social programme that can only alienate those for whom the state-promoted (if often superficial) "secularism" of pre-revolutionary Libyan society represented a genuine social gain.

It follows that Libya's fate, without a working class with a political voice and a consciousness of its own, will continue to be decided from outside. And this in turn means that the outcome of Libya's post-revolutionary crisis will be decided, one way or another, by the fate of working class struggles elsewhere in the region, beginning with Egypt and Tunisia. ●

The forgotten Islamic State

Like its infamous cousin, Nigeria's Boko Haram is a legacy of imperialism



JEREMY DEWAR

An oil rich nation, once a colony, now exploited by Western multinationals. A corrupt political elite systematically excluding the vast majority from any share in the country's natural wealth. Beset by sectarian divisions encouraged by the ruling class, and now subject to a brutal jihadist insurgency with a thoroughly retrogressive Wahhabi interpretation of Islam.

Sounds familiar? Most will immediately think of the Islamic State (IS) in Iraq and Syria. But this description fits just as well for Boko Haram in Nigeria.

Boko Haram shot to infamy in April 2014, when it kidnapped 276 schoolgirls in Chibok, a largely Christian city in the north-eastern state of Borno. Its leader Abubakar Shekau revealed the full brutality of his movement's misogyny when he ranted on video:

"I am going to marry out any woman who is twelve years old, and if she is younger, I will marry her out at the age of nine. You are all in danger. I am the one who captured all those girls and will sell all of them. Slavery is allowed in my religion."

A Twitter campaign went viral when Michelle Obama lent her support to #BringBackOurGirls. Even a "startled David Cameron" held up a placard for the camera. And as ineffective as it was, this is probably the USA and UK's most visible show of concern to date for what is happening in Nigeria today.

Boko Haram has been active as a paramilitary force since 2009, launching devastating attacks on the United Nations headquarters in the capital Abuja in August 2011. It controls much of Borno state and parts of neighbouring Yobe state, and its activities cross over into Cameroon, Chad and Niger.

Around 130 towns and villages have fallen to it, with tens of thousands of civilians killed and close to a million displaced. It has experienced both victories and defeats, taking and then losing Chibok in November 2014. Chadian fighter planes and Cameroonian troops have fought it alongside a poorly resourced, underpaid and grossly demoralised Nigerian army. Early this month Nigeria, Chad, Niger, Cameroon and Benin formed a Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF) against it.

But Boko Haram's most remarkable defeats have been inflicted on it by self-defence groups, as in Baga and Mubi in northern Borno, where some of the heaviest fighting has been. Nevertheless, it has strengthened enormously over the last 18 months, probably more than doubling in size to around 12,000 fighters.

What is Boko Haram?

Founded in 2002 in Borno's capital Maiduguri by Mohammed Yusuf, with a name that translates as "People Committed to the Prophet's Teachings for Propagation and Jihad", it initially recruited madrasa and university students. It was in this period that the group earned its unofficial title, Boko Haram ("Western education is forbidden").

Yusuf's outpourings are far-fetched to say the least and are seemingly oblivious to Islam's long association with scientific enquiry. As well as rejecting the theory of evolution and a spherical Earth, Yusuf even questioned the water cycle, saying, "We believe it [rain] is a creation of God rather than an evaporation caused by the sun that con-



BOKO HARAM BIDS FOR THE ISLAMIC STATE FRANCHISE

denses and becomes rain."

Nigeria's northern states provided Yusuf with rich pickings. After military rule ended in 1999, many northern oligarchs turned to Islam to gain a social base. Twelve northern states have declared Sharia Law as the basis of their legal system, despite sizeable non-Muslim minorities.

The northern ruling elite at first turned a blind eye to Boko Haram's "excesses", with some even funding it as a bargaining chip with the Christian dominated south. Divisions between a mainly Hausa-speaking Muslim north and a Yoruba-speaking Christian south were encouraged under British colonial rule and benefit the ruling class in both parts of this vast, 176 million-strong country. The capitalists of one community typically react to an election defeat by trying to make the country ungovernable for their opponents.

It was only when the charismatic Yusuf began to appeal to disaffected and unemployed young men in his regular television appearances that the authorities started to worry. In 2009, Yusuf was arrested in Maiduguri. He was then recaptured after an alleged "escape attempt" and summarily executed in public. Hundreds were killed in the fierce fighting that followed his death.

But if the police, notorious for extrajudicial killings, thought this would cut the head off his movement, then they were proved wrong. Shekau soon emerged as Boko Haram's new leader and launched a bloody military offensive. Unemployed youths provided him with a flow of recruits.

Ideologically, the group seems not to be that well defined. It has been linked to al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) in the past and corresponded with Osama bin Laden. More recently, it has declared its affiliation to IS's global "Caliphate", although it is far from clear that this move has been or will be reciprocated.

In substance, however, Boko Haram has more in common with al-Shabaab in Somalia and the Armed Islamic Group (GIA) in Algeria, and has benefited from the flow of weapons into the region from mercenaries fleeing Libya after Gaddafi's defeat. In short, it may well be inspired by "jihadist" Islamism in south-west Asia, but it is very much a product of Africa.

Poverty and inequality

Nigeria is Africa's largest oil producer and a full member of OPEC. Yet this wealth has had little, or even a negative impact on the lives of millions, especially the further one travels from the former

capital Lagos and the more developed south-west.

An indicator of Nigeria's under-development is that it has practically no oil refineries; petrol has to be re-imported and is subsidised from oil revenues for sale in garage forecourts. Its energy industry is plagued by corruption and tax evasion. When former central bank chief Lamido Sanusi claimed in February 2014 that state oil company revenues worth \$20 billion had gone missing, President Goodluck Jonathan sacked him.

Theft by syphoning off oil from pipelines is rampant, accounting for as much as 20 per cent of production. This has its corollary in the growth of piracy and in the degradation of the land, something that provoked mass protests in the 1980s, and which has gotten even worse.

In the north, however, there is no sign of these huge riches. According to *The Economist*:

"Nowhere else in the world are more children out of school. Fewer than 5 per cent of women in some parts can read or write. Estimates put three out of four residents in the northeast below the poverty line, around twice as many as at the southern end of the country."

No wonder Boko Haram can recruit more quickly than the army can kill its fighters. But this alone does not explain why the army is losing to it.

Nigeria's officer caste developed its present taste for wealth, power and corruption during the Biafran war in 1967-70, with several coups and counter-coups since. Few people believe much of the \$4 billion annual military budget reaches its intended target, and the recent \$1 billion additional military spending appears to have disappeared without trace. As a result, soldiers often go without pay for months on end, leading them to set up apparently "official" checkpoints with the sole purpose of extracting bribes from civilians.

As for Sunni Muslims in today's Iraq, there seems to be little to choose for the local population between the corrupt and murderous Nigerian army and Boko Haram. Nor is there much faith in the country's politicians. Nigerian senators are paid \$1 million a year, the biggest pay packet of any group of politicians in the world.

What can be done?

The roots of Nigeria's social, economic, political and now military problems have to be located in its exploitation by Western imperialism in conjunction with the local bourgeoisie.

The USA only declared Boko Haram a terrorist

organisation in 2013, four years after its insurgency began. It has done very little to combat it since. Why? Because imperialism is solely interested in Nigeria's booming south, where GDP growth is on course for 7 per cent a year, potentially taking Nigeria into the top 20 world economies.

So oil majors like Chevron, ExxonMobil and Shell invest billions in the oil sector, massively boosted by trade with China, but northern states like Borno can go hang, as far as Obama, Cameron and Xi Jinping are concerned.

The only force capable of and willing to stand up to Boko Haram is the Nigerian working class, allied to the peasants, nomads and fisher folk of the north-east. Their patience and belief in the government, army and international agencies to come to their aid has long run out.

Meanwhile, there have been numerous examples of villages and towns arming themselves and taking on Boko Haram, sometimes successfully. What they lack is weapons. While Boko Haram has stolen tanks and armoured personnel carriers, the self-defence groups have only machetes and clubs. They should demand weapons from the government, fraternise with the soldiers and if necessary raid barracks so they can defend their communities.

As many men – and women – as possible need to be organised, armed and trained. The sooner Boko Haram's raw recruits meet their match among the villagers, the sooner their morale will crack.

The remnants of the #BringBackOurGirls campaign continue to picket government offices, often attacked by the police in a blatant attempt to silence them. They must not be silenced, but link up with councils of workers and peasants in the towns and villages, and appeal to the wider labour movement for support.

The Nigerian Labour Congress and Trade Union Congress launched a successful general strike three years ago against massive hikes in petrol prices. Millions heeded its call. Yet both organisations and the small reformist Nigerian Labour Party have effectively been silent over the war.

The Democratic Socialist Movement, the Nigerian sister party of the Socialist Party in England and Wales, has called for solidarity against Boko Haram's advance, but has largely confined its demands to calling for regular payment of and arms for the rank and file soldiers. Scandalously, it extends this call to the corrupt and hated police.

But the soldiers don't just need to be paid; they also need to be won to the side of the workers and the peasants and away from their officers. Socialists should demand the election of all officers and the dismissal of those guilty of corruption and brutality: for the right of soldiers to hold political meetings, to strike and to join political organisations.

There have been widespread reports of mutinies and even shootings of officers. These spontaneous acts of rebellion need to be made more conscious and linked to the goals and organisations of the working class and poor peasants.

If Nigerian socialists can over the coming months argue for these goals and link them to the wider goal of working class control of the oil sector and the banks, then the crisis caused by Boko Haram can become a launch-pad for the fight for revolutionary socialism. ●

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Syriza's negotiated surrender

The fight is on to force the government to carry out its promise to break with austerity



KD TAIT

Syriza's failure to secure concessions on Greece's loan repayments shows the weakness of a strategy based on exploiting divisions within Europe's ruling class. The priority now is to halt the retreat, and to prepare the working class to take all measures necessary to defy the Eurozone and carry out Syriza's electoral programme.

Fresh from masterminding Syriza's humiliation at the hands of the Troika, Greece's Finance Minister Yanis Varoufakis has pledged to "squeeze blood out of stone" to repay IMF debts due this month.

The 20 February agreement between Greece and the Eurozone ministers is a betrayal of Syriza's promises to end austerity, to make no more sacrifices for the euro, and to put the interests of workers before those of the bosses. From campaigning for a write-off of the debt, Greece has committed to "complete fully and swiftly all of its financial obligations towards its partners".

The four-month extension to the second bailout was made conditional on Syriza running a budget surplus, that is, continuing with austerity. Instead of appealing to the working class of Greece and Europe to mobilise against this blackmail, Varoufakis, who describes himself as an "erratic Marxist", revealed himself to be a charlatan in the service of capital.

Presented as a necessary compromise, Varoufakis suggests that the extension allows Syriza to carry out 20 per cent of its anti-austerity measures. But the only thing it actually guarantees is that the €1.8 billion due to the IMF in March will be paid on the dot and to the last cent.

The seven-page document that outlined the concessions that Syriza "negotiated" in return for a little more rope is a damning list of attacks that Syriza was elected to oppose.

In short, Syriza has promised to repay all of the debt that it once rightly denounced as illegitimate and made all measures to improve the situation of working and poor people subject to approval by the same Institutions that it promised to kick out.

Broken promises

Syriza promised to restore the monthly minimum wage from €580 to €751. This has been replaced with a promise to raise it "over time", in a manner that safeguards competitiveness and productivity, alongside "labour market reforms" deemed necessary to create a "better business environment".

Worse, "the scope and timing of changes to the minimum wage will be made in consultation with social partners and the European and international institutions." Syriza has effectively issued the working class an undated cheque, one that has to be signed by the same people that have cut the paychecks of many Greeks by up to 50 per cent.

Gone too is the promise to create 300,000 new jobs and rehire 10,000 civil servants illegally sacked by the last government – a victim of Syriza's new promise to "identify cost-saving measures through a thorough review of spending by every ministry."

One area where they could save costs and carry out their programme is the promise to dis-

We will squeeze blood out of stone

FINANCE MINISTER YANIS VAROUFAKIS EXPLAINS HOW HE PLANS TO REPAY IMF LOANS DUE THIS MONTH

band the riot squads, and to merge the special DIAS, ZIRA and DELTA squads. It seems that here too, reforms have been kicked into the long grass.

Syriza pledged unequivocally to halt privatisations of ports, airports and energy utilities. This is now hamstrung by a commitment not to roll back privatisations that have been completed, and that "where the tender process has been launched the government will respect the process, according to the law."

Because this concession has roused the most opposition within Syriza, indeed within the cabinet, Varoufakis now has to juggle with words, talking of "creative ambiguities" in the terms of the agreement. He states:

"The law gives the government possibilities to both change the terms of the procedure and at some point to check the legality of this procedure. [...] Our position is very simple. The sell-off of family silver at rock-bottom prices and in a way that doesn't lead to development for the economy must stop."

Economy Minister George Stathakis, is bolder still: "We will cancel the privatisation of the Piraeus Port. It will remain permanently under state majority holding. [...] The deal for the sale of the Greek airports will have to be drastically revised. It all goes to one company. There is no way it will get through the Greek parliament."

The Institutions will certainly try to enforce the letter of this agreement, but opposition within Syriza will push the government to bargain for the "best deal". This is better than abject surrender, but it is not enough.

Workers facing the threat of privatisation should not put their trust in the diplomatic word games and manoeuvres of Syriza ministers but in their own collective strength. If the government won't stop privatisations and renationalise industries, then occupations, and opening the accounts to public scrutiny should be used to force the government to choose sides.

Bad cheques

Despite the government's retreat Syriza can still rely on a huge reservoir of goodwill amongst a population enthused by a government that has taken, if only rhetorically, a tough line in negotiations. The reforms outlined in the proposals accepted by the Eurogroup are limited, but the extent to which they will make an immediate improvement to the terrible conditions of thousands should not be dismissed lightly.

Free electricity for 300,000 households under the poverty line and food subsidies for the same number of families with no income have been maintained. Pledges to provide free medical care for those without insurance or jobs and a

ban on repossessions for those in mortgage arrears have not yet been reneged on.

Syriza's problem is that it has not set out how these measures will be funded. Syriza has committed to ensuring relief measures have no "negative fiscal effect", that is, that all increases in spending will be compensated by cuts elsewhere. This means that the only way it can fund them is through extra income derived from reforms to the tax system, anti-corruption measures and the collection of unpaid taxes. Paul Mason, Channel 4 News economics editor, sums up this dilemma neatly:

"There are no costings for the Greek programme, and therefore no way of calculating how much 'fiscal space' Greece has won from the former troika. 'Fiscal space' in the Greek crisis is the codeword for non-austerity: how much relief from austerity did the Greek electorate gain by putting the Syriza-ANEL coalition into power?"

**IMF repayments due in March: €1.8 billion
Cost of Thessaloniki programme: €1.8 bn**

"We won't know the answer until a crucial blank space is filled in. Greece is supposed to run a primary surplus on its budget – i.e. the opposite of a deficit – to the tune of 4 per cent of GDP. As the economy is tanking due to uncertainty, and tax receipts dried up in the last two months of the old government, that is impossible – and to achieve it would only require even further cuts to public spending."

Enter Finance Minister Varoufakis, who has a cunning plan. Since the agreement contains no specific figures, there is apparently room for "interpretation". In the words of Varoufakis: "What we all did was to find common ground. And the way you find common ground when you start from quite disparate positions is by using terms that allow for multiple interpretations in order to create room for disagreement."

The response of German Finance Ministry spokeswoman Marianne Kothe, insisted that any concessions were made only for 2015: "That means that the target agreed in the program – the figure of 4.5 percent of gross domestic product is important here – still goes." Summoning all his creative powers, Varoufakis replied: "This is not my understanding of what we agreed to".

Here one is reminded of an exchange in Lewis Carroll's *Through the Looking Glass*: "When I use a word," Humpty Dumpty said, in rather a scornful tone, "it means just what I choose it to mean – neither more nor less." "The question is," said Alice, "whether you can make words mean so many different things."

"The question is," said Humpty Dumpty, "which is to be master – that's all."

Does professor Varoufakis really believe he can out-interpret the ECB, the IMF or the German government? Or is he just trying to quiet the growing alarm of Syriza's supporters? In any case it is sure that the Institutions will – sooner rather than later – show him who is to be master.

Flawed strategy

The strategy of the Syriza leadership was to court the political class of Europe, themselves under pressure from electorates opposed to austerity, and persuade them that it was in their interests to abandon austerity in favour of a Keynesian growth programme.

They severely miscalculated both the ability and the willingness of the political elites to abandon a strategy that every party of government has been wedded to since the onset of the Great Recession.

Worse, in their tour of European capitals, Syriza met in secret negotiations with the chief representatives of the ruling class but spurned the organisations and campaigns of the labour movement, the only forces to express unconditional solidarity with their declared aims.

It is true that Syriza's negotiating team was blackmailed by the ECB's decision to restrict access to liquidity for Greek banks. It is true that the German government demanded unconditional surrender backed by threats to kick Greece out of the Eurozone.

But it was no secret that Germany, as the hegemonic force in Europe, commanded the unflinching support of not only Finland and the Netherlands, but also Spain and other countries whose governments were embroiled in inflicting the same poisonous "medicine" of austerity on their own peoples. All were desperate to see the hope of an anti-austerity government strangled at birth.

Syriza hoped that separate bilateral negotiations with each EU government would allow it to divide its opponents. But this was never likely to sway the hard faced bankers, bureaucrats and politicians who imposed "technocratic" regimes on Italy and Greece when they proved unable to pass austerity budgets.

Syriza opened negotiations by abandoning its strongest cards. It refused to go over the heads of pro-capitalist presidents and unelected bankers to appeal directly to their working classes to rally in support of the first government elected on a programme of ending austerity. By publishing the secret agreements and negotiations it could have exposed the extent to which Germany and the Troika have blackmailed and extorted the Greek people.

It even ditched its demand for a European debt conference to discuss a common reduction or write-down of national debt. Its insistence on remaining in the Eurozone suggested that it would do so at any cost.

Syriza's capitulation was not merely that of a naive new government being taken to the cleaners by experienced political operators. It was the logical outcome of the strategy of a political current that claims to stand for "socialism" and "Marxism", but that rejects the idea that the working class can organise to advance

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Fight or flight?

a revolutionary alternative to the crisis of the capitalist system.

Or, in the words of Varoufakis:

“[T]he question that arises for radicals is this: should we welcome this crisis of European capitalism as an opportunity to replace it with a better system? Or should we be so worried about it as to embark upon a campaign for stabilising European capitalism?”

“To me, the answer is clear. Europe’s crisis is far less likely to give birth to a better alternative to capitalism than it is to unleash dangerously regressive forces that have the capacity to cause a humanitarian bloodbath, while extinguishing the hope for any progressive moves for generations to come.”³

It is true that without forces willing to organise the struggle for a “better alternative” (socialism), then a “humanitarian bloodbath” (barbarism) will doubtless ensue. The working class of Greece and Europe must become the intransigent opponents of Varoufakis’s project of saving capitalism from itself.

As long as the Syriza leadership remains committed to acting within the limits of capitalism, limits enforced by the imperialist muscle of “the Institutions”, then only austerity and social catastrophe await the people of Greece.

The urgent task now is therefore to prevent the potential embodied by Syriza’s mandate for radical anti-austerity measures from being squandered by a leadership that has no confidence in the power of the working class.

This means organising a vigorous campaign within the party and within the wider labour movement in Greece and Europe to implement Syriza’s programme in full, and to defend it from the sabotage and attacks of its class enemies at home and abroad, and thus to open up a struggle not just against austerity and its neoliberal political advocates but against capitalism itself.

Left opposition

Syriza has several organised currents critical of the majority line. The biggest is the Left Platform, whose role is significant both in terms of its size and its lack of a credible alternative strategy.

At a meeting of the Syriza parliamentary fraction on 25 February, debate raged for twelve hours as MPs criticised the deal presented by Tsipras. In a non-binding vote, around a third of MPs present voted against or abstained, demonstrating that opposition extends beyond the Left Platform’s ranks.

The party’s Central Committee met over the weekend of 28 February to discuss a proposal from the pro-Tsipras majority to ratify the Agreement. A critical amendment from the Left Platform opposed the deal and called on the party to “take the initiative of implementing steadily and as a matter of priority its commitments and the content of its programmatic governmental statement,” and to do this “despite the agreements of the Eurogroup”.

It called on the party to “rely on workers’ and popular struggles, to contribute to their revitalisation, and to the continuous expansion of popular support in order to resist to any form of blackmail.”

This amendment was defeated by 92 votes to 68, with 6 blank votes or abstentions. This nevertheless represents a growth in opposition to the majority line, confirmed by the 64 votes secured by Left Platform candidate for party secretary Alekos Kalyvis, against 102 for Tsipras’s candidate Tasos Koronakis.

But a major weakness in the Left Platform’s amendment is that it did not spell out any concrete proposals for mobilising workers, party members and the left outside Syriza, to carry out Syriza’s programme. The acid test now will be whether they break ranks and vote for the Communist Party (KKE) bill in parliament, which calls for the scrapping of past



MASS PRESSURE NEEDED TO FORCE SYRIZA TO CARRY OUT ITS PROGRAMME

loan agreements and the repeal of all regressive laws passed as part of previous memoranda. And they should do so, paving the way for a united front of the working class and the left to reject austerity measures in their entirety.

The drachma panacea

Tsipras’s setback at the hands of the Eurogroup and Varoufakis’s admission that a further bailout may be necessary has put wind in the sails of those who advocate withdrawal from the Euro.

The academics Stathis Kouvelakis, reader in political theory at King’s College London, and Costas Lapavistas, professor of economics at SOAS are two prominent advocates of this perspective.

According to Kouvelakis, a member of Syriza’s central committee, “...defeat was inevitable and marks the end of the strategy of ‘a positive solution inside the euro,’ or to be more accurate ‘a positive solution at all costs inside the euro.’”⁴

He explains that: “In the Left Platform’s view, the government has to break out of the confines of the accords that it has signed and implement some of its key policies without first seeking permission from the institutions. And with an eye to June’s negotiations, it has proposed an ‘alternative plan’ that doesn’t shy away from taking ‘unilateral’ measures, including — if there is any more blackmail over the country’s financing — breaking from the euro framework.”⁵

Despite the enthusiasm of its supporters, Syriza’s narrow horizons limit its options

Lapavistas, now a Syriza member of the Greek parliament, also insists, “The most vital step is to realise that the strategy of hoping to achieve radical change within the institutional framework of the common currency has come to an end.”⁶

The success or failure of the strategy that Syriza pursues in the months ahead won’t be determined solely by internal party struggles, nor by clever diplomatic manoeuvres, let alone through the exploitation of “creative ambiguity”. It depends ultimately on the attitude the mass of workers and unemployed.

A poll for the Syriza-affiliated Avgi newspaper, published on 25 February, shows the majority of Greeks are under no illusions about how dependent Greece is on Europe: Some 76 per cent of respondents had a “positive” view of the euro, with 75 per cent considering exit from the euro “not possible”. In a referendum on the euro, 73 per cent would vote for retaining it, while just 18 per cent considered a return to the drachma to be a “positive” step. And 61 per cent had a “positive” view of the EU, while 43 per cent thought the EU should be Greece’s main ally, with Russia a distant second on 13 per cent.⁷

It is clear from the popular support for Syriza’s negotiations and its rise in the polls that a major mobilisation could be organised to demand that Syriza be permitted to carry through its programme, within the Eurozone — and against the wishes of the EU leaders.

It should be clear that any attempt to impose Syriza’s programme courts the risk of Greece’s expulsion from the Eurozone. However to conclude, as the Left Platform does, that Greece should simply exit the Euro on its own terms would be a major tactical mistake.

It would place all the responsibility for the consequences of Grexit on Syriza itself, letting the eurocrats off the hook. It would also alienate the mass of people who don’t want to be the guinea pigs for a left-nationalist experiment in economic autarky.

A new currency — the drachma or other — would plummet against the euro, wiping out savings and devaluing wages and pensions. Interest rates and bankruptcies would rocket. Greece’s dependence on imports would force the rationing of food, medicine and basic goods.

A policy of national autarky or alliance with other imperialist powers also presupposes the abandonment of Syriza’s programme. Russia or China might be willing to bankroll some social reforms in the short term, but only if they were sure of recouping their pound of flesh with interest.

An independent Greek state that doesn’t break with capitalism could only compete in the world market (and therefore grow its economy and deliver on its promises of future repayment) if the rate of exploitation of its working class was sufficient to make its industries competitive. And the state would have to become the tool for enforcing this, meaning either that Syriza would have to do away with its programme, or that the state would do away with Syriza.

Syriza won the election with the message that it wanted an exit from austerity and not from the European Union — and that it wanted this for all the working people of Europe and not just for Greece. This message was a rallying point for the European working class. The bullying of the Institutions and of German capitalism exposed the fundamentally undemocratic nature of the European Union.

The left in Syriza and in Greece should point out that the real enemy is not merely the neoliberal policy of European capital, but the dictatorship of the capitalist class itself, which tramples on formal democratic rights whenever they present an obstacle to its class interests.

The Left Platform is right to insist that the government needs to be forced to carry out its Thessaloniki programme in full, and to warn that confronting the EU means preparing for the EU to cut off credit to the country’s banks and start the process of kicking it out of the Eurozone.

The only way to counter these moves is to prepare the working class now to take the necessary measures of self-defence against capital. How? By the expropriation of the banks, by imposing a monopoly on foreign trade and by putting power into the hands of working class assemblies and a popular militia.

By these measures, Syriza and the working class of Greece would be demonstrating the way forward for all of Europe’s workers. Just as there is no progressive solution for the workers of Greece in an “independent” capitalist Greece, so they will need to appeal to the European working class to carry out similar measures against their own governments to stop them sabotaging Greece.

This perspective, which insists on the ability of the working class to seize the moment of capitalism’s historic crisis to be the agents of its own emancipation is infinitely preferable to the cynical lie that we are not “ready”. After all, if not now, when?

The best defence against capital if offense. This means creating fighting bodies that can organise millions in this struggle: assemblies, strike committees and action committees to coordinate it. It means the total disbanding of the brutal police squads and their replacement by workers’ defence guards. It means the nationalisation under workers’ control of all privatised industries and the banks, to prevent capital flight and sabotage. In short, it means a workers’ government that can fight against Greek and foreign capital.

The weeks and months to come are full of potential. If the Greek workers lead the way in imposing their power on rapacious European capital, then this can lead workers across the continent to begin a revolutionary refoundation of the entire European project, one that breaks with capitalism and that unites hundreds of millions of workers in the construction of a radical new future, a socialist united states of Europe. ●

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Nato escalation risks Russia war

The antiwar movement must act now to stop Nato's reckless military build-up in eastern Europe



DAVE STOCKTON

After 15 years of war in Afghanistan, Nato chiefs have signalled they have no intention of acquiescing to war-weariness and beating their swords into ploughshares.

An existential Russian threat to European order and stability is being conjured up in order to bounce politicians into ramping up arms spending and deploying troops to Europe's eastern frontiers.

The pretext is the year-old civil war in Ukraine, presented as an act of naked Russian aggression. This is despite the fact that the conflict is indisputably the result of the Western imperialists' own attempt to drag that unhappy country into their orbit through a "colour revolution", with American and German funded NGOs as their conduits.

The "revolution" was in fact a coup carried out with fascist muscle, which ousted the elected pro-Russian president and replaced his regime with personnel handpicked by US Assistant Secretary of State for European and Eurasian Affairs, Victoria Nuland. Far from being hatched in the Kremlin, the conflict in Ukraine was hatched in the White House and the Pentagon, with Berlin providing the democratic veneer of "European democracy".

The scenario according to Nato is simple. Putin's "little green men" are poised to infiltrate the states of Eastern Europe from the Black Sea to the Baltic. Since the existence of large ethnic Russian populations in these states apparently provides a pretext for Russian invasion, these minorities must be regarded with the utmost suspicion.

Supreme commander of Nato, US General Philip Breedlove is planning an advanced deployment of weaponry and forces along the borders of Russia, with a major deployment in Poland ready to mobilise at a moment's notice.

As a statement of intent, Nato forces from the US, UK, Holland and others staged a provocative military parade through Narva, Estonia, just yards from the Russian border posts.

It is no accident that Narva has an 87 per cent Russophone population, and that 37 per cent of its residents are Russian citizens. It is the easternmost town in Estonia, only 85 miles from Saint Petersburg.

Nato's new strategy

At the September 2014 Nato Summit in Newport, South Wales, a new cold war strategy was thrashed out. This was followed by a February 2015 meeting of Nato defence ministers, which created a "spearhead force", dubbed the Very High Readiness Joint Task Force (VJTF), for the existing Nato Response Force.

This will initially consist of 5,000 troops backed by air, maritime and special operations units. Two further brigades will be on standby to reinforce it; in total the enhanced Nato Response Force will total around 30,000 troops.

The ostensible purpose of this rigmorole is to deter the supposed threat from Putin's Russia. The number of manoeuvres on the eastern flank of the world's biggest military alliance has increased, with more than 3,000 air sorties in 2014, compared to just 200 by Russia.

The rationales provided by our political leaders would not win prizes for sophistication of analysis. In a speech to Nato's political leaders last September, David Cameron likened Putin to Hitler: "We



NATO FLAUNTS THE STARS AND STRIPES ON THE RUSSIAN BORDER

run the risk of repeating the mistakes made in Munich in '38. We cannot know what will happen next. This time we cannot meet Putin's demands. He has already taken Crimea and we cannot allow him to take the whole country."

Michael Fallon, UK Defence Secretary, has said that there is a "real and present danger" that Putin will launch a campaign to destabilise the Baltic states. Consequently Nato must be prepared to repel Russian aggression in "whatever form it takes".

A parade of senior military figures have been wheeled out in the media to warn of the dangers "we" face. Just as turkeys don't vote for Christmas, so generals don't have a tendency to talk up prospects for peace. So we get Deputy Supreme commander of Nato, General Sir Adrian Bradshaw, claiming that in "an era of constant competition with Russia" the latter represented "an obvious existential threat to our whole being."

Air Commodore Andrew Lambert told the Daily Mail that the Royal Air Force would likely be overwhelmed by sheer numbers in the event of a Russian attack. Sir Michael Graydon, a former Chief of the Air Staff, thinks "They have got us more or less at their mercy."

Any credible journalist should of course dismiss these ludicrous claims as the hyperbole of people who still think they're fighting the USSR. Yet the BBC, Channel 4, the Daily Mail, The Times, The Economist, The Guardian and The Independent parrot this line without demur.

It is the absolute unanimity of the propaganda war that indicates that a serious and fundamental change in the policy of the Western imperialist bloc has taken place.

A new bipolarity

The financial crisis of 2008 and the long recession since have altered the economic balance of world forces against the USA and the European Union. As a result, we are now witnessing a long march to conflict between the two real superpowers: the USA and China. Although by far the world's hegemonic economic and military power, the preeminence of the USA is beginning to wane and its rulers know it.

China's dynamism has obliged the USA to de-

clare South East Asia its priority strategic region, in what has come to be called the "Pivot to Asia". Military bases in South Korea, Taiwan, the Philippines, Indonesia and Malaysia are now more carefully maintained than ever before. Japan has been encouraged to upgrade its military and adopt a more aggressive stance.

In response, China's president Xi Jinping announced a strategic change of course in November 2014. China no longer considers relations with the United States and Europe a priority. That position is to be replaced by a reorientation to the "BRIC" states, especially Russia, and to neighbouring Asian countries, as well as to Africa.

At a time when Russia is beset by Western economic sanctions and the slump in oil prices engineered by US ally Saudi Arabia, China has concluded several gigantic energy contracts with Russia's state-owned Gazprom and Rosneft. In time, these can compensate for the threatened loss of exports to Europe. The two countries are building two new gas pipelines together, and increased use of the yuan in bilateral trade is likely to stabilise the beleaguered rouble.

If China is the USA's long term rival for domination of the global economy in the 21st century, then Russia is its short term obstacle to preserving its hegemony in key areas like Europe, Central Asia and the Middle East. When Russia recovered from its prostration at the hands of Yeltsin and Western imperialism in the 1990s, and emerged under Putin as a new imperialist power, it inherited certain assets remaining from the Soviet Union. Amongst these were its nuclear deterrent and its veto on the UN Security Council, but also strategic allies in the Middle East.

Through its alliances with Syria and Iran, and through the latter, Iraq, Russia poses a major obstacle to US hegemony over the Middle East. Russia's military power, its UN veto and its nuclear capabilities make it the most powerful regional military opponent of the US empire. The shift in the relative balance of military force in the region has even provoked restiveness amongst the USA's oldest allies there: Saudi Arabia, Israel and Egypt.

Nevertheless, the world's largest superpower can still impose its will on its Nato and Seato allies. This gives it a greater ability to intervene globally than any other military power. In addition it has

proven adept at drawing its allies into its conflicts, even against their own interests, as with Germany and Japan, who have good reasons to pursue closer economic ties with Russia and China respectively.

The main enemy

The phoney character of the USA's "Russian threat" narrative is revealed in a recent interview given by US President Barack Obama, in which he argued that "we don't have a peer in terms of a state that's going to attack us and bait us. The closest we have, obviously, is Russia, with its nuclear arsenal, but generally speaking they can't project the way we can around the world. China can't, either. We spend more on our military than the next 10 countries combined."

And in any case, as Obama said in his State of the Union speech in January, "Russia is isolated with its economy in tatters," due to sanctions. He is right. Russia, as a much weaker imperialist power, remains at the mercy of the USA's influence over world markets, and is confined in its ambitions effectively to the surrounding parts of the Eurasian land mass. It is not seeking to dominate or conquer Europe (it couldn't), but to ally itself with a German-led European Union to its west, as well as to build links with the economic powerhouse of China to its east.

Or at least it was until recently. Thwarting a resurgent Russia and reining in Germany's appetite for trade and investment openings to the east via Russia are the real driving forces behind the USA's intervention in Ukraine, and behind its policy of reviving Nato as a cold war instrument needed to "protect" Europe from the consequences of Nato's own provocations.

Of course, the USA's allies have their own agenda, and they do not always willingly submit to policies whose consequences would hurt them far more than they would the USA. As Obama stated: "we occasionally have to twist the arms of countries that wouldn't do what we need them to do if it weren't for the various economic or diplomatic or, in some cases, military leverage that we had — if we didn't have that dose of realism, we wouldn't get anything done, either."

Such aggressive talk, reinforced by the real threat of actual aggression does not come from a position of unassailable strength, such as the USA enjoyed in 1945. Instead it is the bravado overlaid with arrogance that is symptomatic of a declining power. But this does not make the USA's new cold war any less dangerous, but more so, since it is forced to take ever greater risks to maintain its position.

It is the duty of socialists to expose the plans of our own imperialist rulers as plans prepared and enacted to defend the interests of our ruling capitalist class at home and its allies abroad. These plans, if unchecked, will lead to more regional wars as in Ukraine, Iraq and Syria today. They will lead ultimately to a world war, as the major powers are drawn into defending their own regional allies and proxies.

In Britain, the USA, Germany, France and Russia we need to rally opposition to our rulers' war drive by raising the slogan of the German Communist Karl Liebknecht and the Russian revolutionary Vladimir Lenin: the main enemy is in our own country. ●