

# workers power

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MONTHLY REVIEW OF THE WORKERS POWER GROUP

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## Kick out the Tories

Vote for socialist candidates where possible and Labour everywhere else

The Greens and Nationalists are no alternative for building a struggle to stop austerity after the election. A big vote for Left Unity and TUSC can help lay the foundation for a new working class party fighting for a socialist solution to the crisis



JEREMY DEWAR

**T**he importance of the 2015 general election is not just that it will be close-run and that new or previously fringe parties are gaining ground. In fact the fracturing of support for all three main capitalist parties reflects something far more fundamental.

Britain is at a crossroads. We can either travel further down the road we have been on for the past five years or more – more privatisation, poverty wages and crumbling services – or the working class can stand up and say, enough is enough!

Decently paid jobs have been destroyed and replaced by zero-hours contracts and part-time, minimum wage jobs. Real wages, after inflation is taken into account, have fallen for seven years in a row, and are now at 6.9 per cent below their 2007 value, the longest squeeze on wages since 1855.

National Health Service waiting lists have grown longer, Accident & Emergency departments are overflowing thanks to cuts elsewhere, and private profiteers have gobbled up over £7 billion of the NHS budget. Two-thirds of our hospitals are in deficit, and therefore targets for closure.

Over 3,000 of our state schools are effectively in private hands, via the academies and free schools programmes, local colleges are in crisis and tuition fees for university students are £9,000 per year. Young people face the biggest cuts to

**We need a Labour majority government that is forced to break with all austerity by a massive working class mobilisation in defence of jobs, living conditions and public services**

benefits, the worst and most insecure jobs and the highest unemployment rate a lost generation.

Racism is on the rise, with anti-immigrant party Ukip gaining a high profile as the voice of scapegoating foreigners for the low wages, job cuts and housing shortages caused by the economic crisis. Employers, the police and even our schools continue to discriminate against black and Asian people.

Yet neither immigrants nor ethnic minorities

have caused any of our problems; the capitalist system has. We need to unite the whole working class in a fight against the real enemy and for the real solution: socialism.

And now Foreign Secretary Philip Hammond and Prime Minister David Cameron are beating the war drums again, this time against Russia. The Middle East is in flames again, a continuing result of the UK and USA's wars of occupation in Iraq and Afghanistan. Nato, egged on by Cameron, is provocatively tooling up the countries bordering Russia for a new Cold War that could turn hot with disastrous consequences for us all.

None of this has achieved the Coalition's stated aim: to cut the debt, eliminate the deficit and achieve a stable recovery. On the contrary, the national debt has nearly doubled from £760 billion to £1.56 trillion, and the budget deficit remains high at £90 billion, due to low tax revenues. The "recovery" is stalled with high levels of personal debt, low productivity due to a lack of new investment and serious problems in global markets.

Austerity hasn't worked. Yet all three main parties, including Labour, pledge to continue down that road. What's the alternative?

The best result for the working class in this election would be a majority Labour government, with a strong showing for socialist candidates from Left Unity and the Trade Unionist and Socialist

Coalition (TUSC).

### Put Labour to the test

Yes, Ed Miliband and Ed Balls are threatening a programme of austerity-lite. But Labour remains the party of the trade unions, and most workers still see it as "their" party, whereas the Tories, as can be seen by their endorsement by 103 major business leaders in the Daily Telegraph, are capitalist through and through. It would be a victory for the working class to eject the bosses' preferred party from government.

Because of Labour's trade union links and its base in working class communities, it is possible for us to push Labour further to the left than their leaders would like to go. But that requires a strong movement of resistance to the cuts, whoever gets into office after the polls close. In the process, we will have to revolutionise the labour movement from top to bottom.

But we can do it. Previous generations certainly did – in the 1880s, the 1940s and the 1970s. We can and must follow their footsteps.

- Stop and reverse all the cuts!
- End privatisation and invest in public services for all!
- Tax the rich and nationalise the banks and big business, placing them under working class control! ●



# 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 Stal-

inist 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!

# Cuts put women on rations

Austerity is reversing the limited gains of working class women



REBECCA ANDERSON

**C**hancellor George Osborne crowed in his 2015 budget speech that the employment rate was at 73 per cent, an all-time high. Those with friends and family struggling to find work will be surprised by this statistic, but the Tories have been very effective at kicking people off benefits.

Job Centre sanctions are forcing unemployed people to take any kind of work offered to them, no matter how few hours are available, what the salary is or how rubbish the conditions. Faced with the prospect of slaving away for free in various dead-end workfare schemes, some are even declaring themselves self-employed: working long hours while paying themselves less than the minimum wage.

Green party leader Natalie Bennett pointed out in the ITV leaders' debate that 80 per cent of self-employed people are living in poverty. Yet women are more likely to be self-employed than men. They are also more likely to work in lower paid and part-time jobs.

It is the recession that has forced women to take worse jobs. Women have been forced to trade relatively well-paid, full-time, permanent posts in the public sector (where women form a majority) for low-waged, part-time, temporary or zero-hours contracts in the private sector. Unsurprisingly the pay gap between men and women has widened after years of narrowing. It now stands at 15.7 per cent.

Tory austerity is also turning back the clock on the gains that women have made in terms of gaining more independence through access to Child Benefit and Child Tax Credit – and all the social advances that are linked to that financial independence.

The Independent Inquiry into Women and Job Seeker's Allowance says: "85 per cent of the revenue saved through changes to the tax and benefit system since 2010 has come from women (£22 billion), and 15 per cent from men (£4 billion)".

The inquiry also points out that those with caring responsibilities are more likely to be

sanctioned by Job Centres, and that people who lose their Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA) are also liable to lose access to free school meals, free prescriptions and Healthy Start milk.

This impoverishes children as well as their mothers, and inevitably makes it harder for women to leave unhappy relationships. The Women's Budget Group reports that lone parents have lost 15.1 per cent of their disposable income – and 92 per cent of lone parents are women. The safety net of benefits that the Tories are eroding has for decades provided women with an alternative to remaining in abusive relationships. Now this safety-net is being shredded.

To compound this problem, the Tories have

"85 per cent of the revenue saved through changes to the tax and benefit system since 2010 has come from women (£22 billion), and 15 per cent from men (£4 billion)"

systematically withdrawn funding to women's refuges and other services providing support to victims of domestic and sexual abuse.

As the General Election looms, we should all be aware of how devastating the cuts have been for women and how much worse the situation could get. The Institute for Fiscal Studies has estimated that there will be a further £50 billion of spending cuts if the Tories win the election.

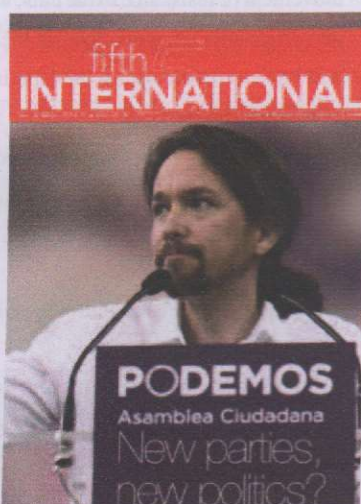
Whoever wins in May, it won't be working class women.

All the major parties are committed to cuts; it's just a question of how much and how fast. If we are to defend our public services and welfare state, win more secure employment and force the government to fund women's refuges then we need to fight.

We need to be organised in trade unions, political parties and anti-austerity campaigns; it almost goes without saying that women are often the majority in these working class organisations (though rarely in the leadership). But the burden of austerity on women also means that we need to organise as women.

A working class women's movement that exposes all the attacks on women's financial and social independence, that launches campaigns in defence of women, and fights for women's liberation could win significant victories against whatever government takes power next month. ●

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# The fight of our lives

We can't afford another Tory government and we can't rely on Labour to defend us



JEREMY DEWAR

**T**his election comes at a crucial time. A quick glance at some facts and figures reveals why. We have just lived through the longest and deepest recession in history. Output did not reach the pre-recession peak of 2007 until 2014. Looking south to Europe, east and west to China and the USA, you'd say we're not out of the woods yet.

Wages have collapsed: the most sustained squeeze on pay since 1855, according to the Office for Budgetary Responsibility.

There were 203 academy schools in May 2010. Today there are 4,548 academies and free schools: 21.6 per cent of the total and the majority of all secondaries.

Seven per cent of the NHS budget now goes to profit-making contractors. Now this is set to explode. Since April 2013, a third of all contracts have gone to private providers, who have won 60 per cent of their bids against the NHS.

Britain has 2 million too few housing units. Last year just 141,000 houses were built in the UK, 60 per cent of pre-crisis levels and way below the 1969-70 peak of 378,000.

As a result 9 million people are now paying astronomical rents to private landlords, 5 million are waiting on housing lists and house prices are a record seven times the average annual wage.

The impact on those at the bottom of society has been the hardest. Women have suffered four-fifths of the cuts, black and Asian people and migrants confront mounting racism and discrimination, young people are denied benefits, a minimum wage and all but the meanest of jobs; the sick, the elderly and the vulnerable have had benefits slashed.

## Labour's dilemma...

If Labour is elected and forms the next government, it is promising some respite.

It says it will raise the minimum wage to £8 an hour – it currently stands at £6.50 for over-21s.

It promises to repeal the Health and Social

Government figures show we have lived through the most sustained squeeze on pay since 1855

Care Act and recruit 20,000 more nurses, 8,000 more GPs, 3,000 more midwives and 5,000 new care workers. Shadow health secretary Andy Burnham wants to make the NHS the "preferred bidder" for all contracts and to spend £2.5 billion a year more on healthcare.

Labour will protect the education budget and freeze the free schools programme. Along with more money to fund apprenticeships, it will cut university tuition fees from £9,000 to £6,000 a year.

The party pledges to build 200,000 new homes a year by 2020, and tax houses worth more than £2 million.

These are the reasons why millions of working class voters will vote Labour. The problem is Labour is also committed to the Tories' eye-watering threat to cut spending by 5 per cent a year for the next two years, and to close the budget deficit by 2020.

It cannot do both.

In fact it points to Labour's historic dilemma: a party committed to the upkeep of the capitalist system, which means its reforms are dependent on keeping profits high. But it also rests on the trade unions for funding, its core working class support at the polls, and working class ideals of equality and fairness – even if it has ditched its socialist goal.

We know from previous Labour governments that the bankers and the bosses, the City of London and the CBI will use all their powers to

House prices are now seven times the average annual wage - the highest on record

force Labour to water down or abandon its spending commitments, while carrying through every one of its cuts.

If the capitalists forced an anti-austerity party like Syriza in Greece to climb down over its commitments to the poor, then imagine how easily they may be able to pressure Labour into more austerity, not less.

That's why Workers Power wants to put Labour in office, where we can mobilise to force Labour not only to honour its pledges, but also to go much further: to close the internal NHS market, to build a million council houses, to bring the academies, free schools, grammar and fee-paying schools under local authority ownership and control, to legislate for a minimum wage of £10 an hour and lift the pay freeze, and to tax the rich and the corporations to the hilt.

To do this, we will have to build a mass movement that can mobilise at the sharp end of the austerity onslaught.

Social housing tenants will need to stop evictions and social cleansing, and join with the millions stuck in private rented accommodation to demand rent controls, secure contracts and more council units.

Local communities will have to rally together with health and education workers to protect hospitals and schools from closure, privatisation or budget cuts.

We will need a wave of coordinated all-out strikes to restore our spending power to pre-crisis

levels, to prevent the destruction of decent jobs and to stop and reverse privatisation. And if this means breaking the anti-union laws, we should do so and demand Labour rescinds them.

Not a penny more to the banks, which are as corrupt as sin and caused the crisis in the first place.

Of course this will raise the question of the trade unions' blind loyalty to a Labour Party in conflict with their members' interests. While the right wing will call for a compromise on the Blairites' terms – also known as surrender – we should demand that the unions break from Labour and put their political funds towards constructing a new mass party of the working class.

## ... or more Tory cuts

Putting Labour to this test would be the best outcome. Because the alternative – an outright Tory government or a Conservative-led coalition – would be far, far worse.

David Cameron, George Osborne and co. won't even say where their cuts are going to fall. Why? Because they know that if they told the truth their vote would crumble.

After all, that's what happened last time, when they – along with the Lib-Dems – whipped out a completely new manifesto after the election as the basis for the coalition.

What we do know however is that there will be even more savage cuts to benefits and pensions, more zero-hours, part-time and minimum wage jobs, less social housing and higher house prices and private sector rents. The NHS and state education will be starved of funds, fragmented, privatised and exposed to the profit-making imperatives of the market.

Then we really will be in for the fight of our lives. All the warnings about needing to mobilise a mass movement of resistance under a Labour administration would apply doubly so under the Tories.

## Revolutionise the movement

Either way, we cannot simply go along with business as usual. It will not be enough to hold big demos every couple of years, to mount the occasional one-day strike only to call off the action at the first whiff of talks or to rely on a political party that condemns strikes and only offers to make "more humane cuts" with a slower tempo and a heavy heart.

Our current trade union leaders are not fit for

purpose. We need to organise all the best trade unionists into a movement to hold them to account, to deliver decisive action from below when necessary, and to replace them with rank and file class fighters.

The various far left socialist groups took the initiative after 2010 in setting up coordinations of struggle: the Coalition of Resistance, the People's Assembly, the National Shop Stewards Network, Unite the Resistance. There was little if any coordination as a result.

All these campaigns were undemocratically controlled from behind the scenes by the Communist Party of Britain, the Socialist Party, the SWP or smaller groups. None of them had any real presence on the ground, in our towns and cities. And none of them united in action. Union leaders came along to speak at big halls and rallies... and walked away scot-free, with no de-

Parliament is a talking shop - we need to rely on mobilising our own collective strength to defend our services

mands effectively placed on them.

This time, we should force the creation of real councils of action at local, regional and national levels. Delegates from workplaces, housing estates, schools and colleges, along with the union branches and campaigning organisations, should gather to discuss, decide on and take action. This is the only way we will loosen the bureaucrats' grip, so we can fight with both hands.

Last but not least, we will have to pose the question of what kind of party we need. The candidates for the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition and Left Unity already call for a new party. That's why we support them.

But others, still committed to Labour, should also be drawn into the debate. However, we should reserve no leading positions for them, nor privileges for MPs and councillors.

Our aim of course should be to take the power, but our focus in the first instance should be on organising resistance. A new workers' party should not make the winning of elections the be all and end all of its programme; elections are a means to an end.

We believe an anti-austerity party needs to be anticapitalist as well, since it is the logic of capitalism that is driving austerity forwards. Only by taking over the banks and mega-corporations and confiscating their assets will we be able to cancel the debt and start planning to rebuild our cities and stop the destruction of the environment.

By basing ourselves on the democratic bodies that have been built up to conduct the struggle, we can fight for a real workers' government that can defy the markets.

Parliament, in the end, is just a talking shop. Real working class power has to rest on millions, ready for action – arms in hand if necessary – when the bosses use the police, the courts and special forces to deny the majority their will.

That's what we fight for in this election and the months and years to come. And that's why, if you agree with us, you should join Workers Power. ●

## workers power

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# Why vote Labour?

Millions of workers know a vote for 'their' party will make a tangible difference



PETER MAIN

Long before the delayed publication of its election manifesto, the Labour Party leadership made very clear what their real priorities in government would be. In a glossy pamphlet called 'A Better Plan for Business' they explained how a whole range of policies would be used to protect profits and reduce costs for employers.

On taxation they would maintain the "most competitive Corporation Tax rate in the G7", and cut, then freeze, business rates for "more than 1.5 million small businesses".

Less taxation will inevitably put even more pressure on public spending and on this Ed Balls and company promised to cap child benefit rises for two years and social security spending in each spending review, in other words, every year. Moreover, they will ensure that, outside "a few protected areas", departmental spending would continue to fall "until we balance the books". This means continuing with the Tory cuts across most of the public sector.

The pamphlet also promised that the manifesto would contain "no proposals for any new spending paid for by additional borrowing" and proudly pointed out that the Institute for Fiscal Studies had identified Labour as "the most cautious" of the three main Parties, and the only one that has not announced an overall net giveaway.

On a broader scale, the pamphlet welcomed the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP), describing it as "a trade agreement between the US and the EU, that has the potential to boost trade and growth, secure and create jobs, and extend choice for consumers".

In reality, TTIP is intended to remove "regulatory barriers" to international trade, meaning the removal of, for example, trade union rights, health and safety legislation and environmental protection laws and the opening of all areas of public provision of services to competitive tendering.

In a further bid to subsidise firms with public money and assets, there is a proposal to introduce "Technical Degrees" at universities, which "will give firms real influence over the curriculum to ensure they can meet their specialist skills gaps".

The message could not be clearer: Labour's priority will be to use both legislation and public assets to boost private profits.

Why, then, does this paper call for a vote for Labour?

There are, essentially, two reasons, one short term the other long term, and they are both related to the character of the Labour Party. Any party that has played a central role in society for any length of time must reflect and express the political ideas and interests of a social class, or section of a class.

Labour was founded, over a century ago, by workers' organisations, primarily the trades unions or, to be more precise, the trade union leaders. That fact sets it apart from other parties, even if there are similarities of policy.

It is why, despite Labour's promises to big business, 103 prominent business leaders wrote an open letter to the Daily Telegraph in which they praised the Tory policies of the present government and warned that any "change in course will threaten jobs and deter investment. This would send a negative message about Britain and put the recovery at risk".

What these business interests recognise is that, while Miliband and Balls may make policy, they do not make it in circumstances of their own

choosing. Because of the historic link to the trades unions and, through them, to the wider working class, Labour in office is subject to very real pressures that mean there are also important differences of policy.

This is why polls repeatedly show that Labour is more "trusted" to maintain the NHS. People remember that, even under Blair, billions were transferred to the NHS to overcome the budgetary crisis inherited from the Tories in 1997.

Moreover, Labour's roots in the working class could also obstruct, delay or alter the implementation of its pro-business policies. In the short term, that could be an advantage to the working class, allowing it, for example, to organise to defend gains made in the past or to force concessions either from government or from employers. However, for the potential to be turned into reality requires a willingness to fight a Labour government and that is by no means guaranteed.

What is guaranteed is that, when the chips are down, Labour will be prepared to force through what the bosses want, even at the cost of attacking its own supporters. This was very clearly the case in the Blair and Brown governments, which not only enthusiastically collaborated with the US in Middle Eastern wars but also introduced student fees, initiated the internal market in the NHS, opened the way to academies in compulsory education and refused to repeal the anti-union laws.

It is obvious that the experience of those governments has seriously eroded Labour's working class base, most spectacularly in Scotland but, to one degree or another, practically everywhere. This brings us to the second, longer-term, reason for voting Labour, even despite that experience.

First of all, disillusion with Labour is far from complete, probably even in Scotland, certainly elsewhere, and, as history has shown, if Labour remains out of office it could recover at least some of its lost support. With Labour back in government, the reality of its policies will erode working class support further.

More importantly, ultimately, disillusion with the Labour Party is not the same as disillusion with "Labourism", or reformism in general. If the decline, or collapse, of the Labour Party were only to result in the formation of a new party with a leadership genuinely committed to trying to reform capitalism, a kind of Labour Party Mark Two, that would not resolve the problem.

For Marxists, the only strategy for the overthrow of capitalism is one in which the working class, a majority of the population in any developed capitalist society, organises itself to take power into its own hands in the form of democratically elected workers' councils.

Building a party committed to that strategy means fighting against the reformist strategy and that is better done with a Labour Party in government than with the same party in the role of opposition, particularly in the context of an unresolved economic crisis such as we have now.

The combination of short term considerations, Labour having to appeal to its working class base, being distrusted by the bosses and at least hampered in its implementation of anti-working class policies, and the longer term considerations of leading the working class to break with reformism as a whole, is why we call for a vote for Labour in the great majority of constituencies where there is no socialist candidate or no representative of ongoing working class struggle. ●



## Why can't I vote

Promises of left wing reforms are worthless

All indicators point to a massive swing from Labour to the Scottish Nationalist Party (SNP) in the coming election. It is possible that the SNP could go from its present 6 seats to more than 40 and so hold the balance of power in a hung parliament.

Because of widespread support for what might be called "traditional Labour policy", it is often said in Scotland that it is not the voters that have turned away from Labour, but the party that has turned away from the voters.

But why, since there has never been a majority for Independence in Scotland, have the voters turned to the nationalists?

Although long derided as "Tartan Tories", the SNP realised long ago that to gain a majority in Scotland, it was Labour's supporters it had to win. As early as the 1960s and the debates over nuclear disarmament, the SNP benefitted from Labour's episodic shifts to the right as disaffected leftists joined the nationalists.

By the late 1970s, boosted by the debates on devolution and the Labour government's rigging of the 1979 referendum, the SNP formally identified itself as a "social democratic" party. However, this did not alter the party's constitution or establish any organic links to working class organisations. Indeed, "social democratic" at that time generally meant the right wing of the Labour Party who wanted to break all links with the unions and went on to split from Labour and join the Liberals.

Thatcher's early imposition of the poll tax in Scotland reinforced the SNP's argument for independence because the Tories by then were a tiny minority of Scottish MPs. The breadth of hostility to Westminster was such that a Campaign for a Scottish Assembly was established

and its proposal for a Scottish Parliament, but with limited powers, was included in the Labour manifesto for the 1997 general election that brought Blair to power.

Scottish Labour formed the government after the first elections to the new Scottish Parliament in May 1999, and then pursued domestic policies that differed from those in England, such as free university education and care of the elderly. This was possible because the long-standing Treasury arrangement by which Scotland was allowed a higher level of public spending was retained.

### Holyrood

Despite this, the SNP, as the opposition, benefited from widespread hostility to New Labour's policies at Westminster. In the 2007 election to Holyrood, the SNP won the most seats and went on to form a minority government.

This meant that after the Tory-Lib Dem Coalition came to power in 2010, but with only one Tory MP in the whole of Scotland, the SNP could present itself as the champion of Scotland's opposition to austerity politics. At the same time, as a minority government in a devolved, not independent, Scotland, that opposition could never be put to the test.

This served the SNP well in the 2011 Holyrood election in which, as well as opposing Tory cuts, it called for a referendum on independence. Although the electoral system had been designed to prevent any party gaining a majority of seats, that is what the SNP did, taking 22 seats from Labour.

In the face of this, the coalition at Westminster agreed to the holding of last September's referendum on independence and, although the No



# The final frontier

A Tory second term will target health and welfare to complete Thatcher's counter-revolution

★  
DAVE STOCKTON



## for the SNP?

without a working class party to fight for them

vote won by a reasonably comfortable margin, it was the referendum campaign that transformed the SNP's chances. Labour's collaboration with the Tories in the No campaign, alongside its failure to lead any fight against austerity across the whole of the UK, served to alienate many of its remaining supporters, even the many who opposed independence.

The momentum built up in the referendum campaign has been deftly used by the SNP, now under a new leader, Nicola Sturgeon. While emphasising the SNP's own policies in Scotland – government investment in 125,000 apprenticeships, £200 million to be invested in renewable energy schemes and further investment in railway development and electrification, a promise of no “efficiency savings” in the NHS in Scotland and a reminder to voters that it removed prescription charges introduced by Labour – Sturgeon has challenged Miliband to agree to collaborate in preventing a Tory government if Labour and SNP have sufficient seats in the new parliament.

That would create a situation where a minority Labour government's survival would be dependent on SNP support, ideal conditions in which to force concessions for Scottish policy and to obstruct austerity measures in the run up to the 2016 Scottish Parliament election.

That, however, is no reason for voting for the SNP. For all its adoption of policies comparable to Labour, it remains a party that has no organic links to the working class that could hold it to progressive policies.

That is what makes the Labour Party supportable, not its policies, which have never represented a programme against capitalism and for socialism. Moreover, the threat of bringing down a Labour government in Westminster in order to

extract concessions for Scotland would immediately dynamise English nationalism.

### Nationalism

At no time has the SNP ever had to take full responsibility for the implementation of its own policies. Even as a majority government it has been able to (and does) blame the cuts that have been made in Scotland on Westminster and Scotland's lack of independence. Its own commitment to an anti-austerity programme, which would bring it into direct conflict with the banks, the major corporations and the international guardians of capital's interests, such as the European Central Bank and the IMF, has never been put to the test.

Whatever the shrewdness of its tactics, the strategy of the SNP, what actually defines it, is clearly nationalism and, in the context of the UK, in which Scotland is not an oppressed nation, that is an entirely reactionary and backward-looking strategy.

Instead of promoting an all-UK fightback against austerity and the capitalism that demands it, mobilising the whole of the working class in its own interests, the SNP has systematically avoided that fight and led its supporters away from united action with other workers.

Were it to achieve its goal of independence, it would find itself governing a small country facing the same demands for austerity, reductions in welfare spending, increased privatisation and wage freezes as others. Nationalism would demand sacrifices in the “interests of the nation” just as it does everywhere else, and Scottish workers would find themselves in a weaker position to defend themselves on their own. ●

“The deficit reduction programme takes precedence over any of the other measures in this agreement and the speed of implementation of any of the measures that have a cost to the public finances will depend on decisions to be made in the Comprehensive Spending Review.”

This was the critical clause of the coalition agreement in 2010. In its name any measure to alleviate the effects of the ongoing Great Recession could be immediately trumped by the priority of reducing the deficit.

Polly Toynbee and David Walker, in their 2015 book *Cameron's Coup*, point out how the Tories' real programme was initially disguised as “socially progressive” or “caring Conservatism”. The Tories were “no longer the nasty party”, they were now “the Big Society” party; voters could “vote blue, go green”, knowing that “the NHS is safe with us”.

In fact, David Cameron, George Osborne, Andrew Lansley, Iain Duncan Smith and Michael Gove were 100 per cent Thatcher's disciples, determined to complete her revolution against “socialism”, i.e. the post-1945 welfare state.

This was built into the very foundations when Osborne decreed that four-fifths of deficit reduction would come from spending and welfare cuts and only one-fifth from tax increases.

The Tories talked of a Big Society, of charity replacing Labour's “entitlement culture”. Yet, when charity, in the form of food banks, appeared all over the country, they hated this too. Employment minister Lord Freud sneered at “an almost infinite demand for a free good”, ignoring the fact that access was limited via vouchers issued by local councils and Job Centres.

The 2012 Health and Social Care Act – presided over by Andrew Lansley – fulfilled pre-election commitments to the health business sector to introduce full-blown market competition, realising Thatcher's dream of an insurance-based system where care was the business of profit-making companies.

With education it was the same story. The Coalition Agreement for Stability and Reform promised to “break open the state monopoly in schooling”. Here the Tories and their Lib-Dem bag-carriers were as good as their word.

During thirteen years of New Labour, 203 state schools were transformed into Academies. Under Gove and his successor Nicky Morgan, this has risen to over 4,000.

Under the mantra of parental choice, the free schools are fostering religious segregation, social exclusion, lowering of professional standards and a narrow, conservative curriculum. In addition, state funding has been siphoned into them from the budget for state schools.

The underlying aim of these reforms was to make it virtually impossible for any future progressive government to restore the welfare state that was built up by the central government and local authorities and paid for from rates and taxation for over half a century.

Now the Tories want to finish the job.

The Conservative Manifesto was drawn up by William Hague, Theresa May, Michael Gove, Patrick McLoughlin and George Osborne. All of them are hardened Thatcher revolutionaries. Once again, their central pledge will be to eradicate the deficit by 2018 and secure an overall budget surplus by 2019-20.

This will be done by cutting £12 billion from welfare spending, not by raising taxes, while promising to increase NHS spending with an extra £2 billion in frontline services.

So far, the Tories have refused to spell out their cuts but the BBC has outlined some of the most likely.

- Carer's Allowance could be restricted to those eligible for Universal Credit – launched in 2013 to replace six means-tested benefits and tax credits. This would mean 40 per cent of claimants would lose out, saving £1 billion.

- All disability benefits – Disability Living Allowance, Personal Independence Payments and Attendance Allowance – would cease to be tax free, making them effectively means-tested. It is predicted that £1.5 billion annually could be saved by this measure.

- Changes to the contributory element of unem-

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ployment benefits – Employment Support Allowance (ESA) and Job Seekers Allowance two (JSA) – could see 30 per cent of claimants, over 300,000 families, lose about £80 per week. Total predicted savings would amount to £1.3 billion in 2018-19.

- Child Benefit could be limited to the first two children, with savings estimated at £1 billion per annum.

- The Industrial Injuries Compensation Scheme “could be replaced by companies providing industrial injury insurance policy for employees.” (BBC). The DWP predicts that this could save £1 billion.

- Freezing benefits for working-age people for years would save £3 billion. They could propose the withdrawal of Jobseeker's Allowance from young people after six months, unless they take part in “community projects”. All 18 to 21-year-olds would lose their entitlement to housing benefit.

Commenting on the leaked proposals, the Institute for Fiscal Studies declared that, even if all of them were implemented, they would not meet the target of £12 billion. That would require far deeper cuts.

Then come the political pledges aimed at pandering to the racist Tory media and Ukip. They will probably pledge once again to bring net immigration down to below 100,000 people a year (it currently stands at 243,000). Migrants will have to wait four years before they can claim tax credits, Universal Credit, or gain access to social housing. And the Tories want to remove migrants who have failed to find work after six months.

Beyond this, there can be little room for doubt that state education and the NHS would be destroyed.

To sum it all up, the unspoken central goal is to complete the Thatcher Revolution by destroying the remnants of the welfare state. That is why every worker and young person across Britain should vote to kick the Tories out and then act to keep them out – for good! ●



# A working class answer

The 2015 general election comes at a time when workers in Britain – and across Europe – are facing a crisis of confidence in the political establishment.

**T**he financial crisis of 2007-08 exposed to millions that the system wasn't working, that capitalism was facing a historic crisis.

The long recession and the austerity that followed were the bosses' answer to that crisis: make the poor pay. We need a working-class response, one that is as uncompromising and combative as the bosses' attack.

And we need a mass movement of the kind we have not seen for decades: as militant as the miners' strike, as big as the anti-poll tax movement. Here we present our ideas on how to build such a movement and what it should fight for.

We believe the best possible conditions for such a battle would be under a Labour government. The unions and the millions of working-class Labour voters could force Ed Miliband and Ed Balls to the left – and forge a new mass socialist party if they don't.

For this reason, we place many of our demands on a future Labour government, although they remain demands that we still need to fight for from below.

## Full employment on proper contracts and a living wage

Two million people have been thrown on the scrapheap, rotting away on the dole.

Yet British workers have the longest working week in Europe, with millions working six, seven, eight hours overtime every week, often unpaid. Four million self-employed workers often slave away for even longer, earning on average just half the minimum wage.

A Labour government should introduce a maximum working week of 35 hours, sharing out the available work, with no loss of pay.

Two million are struggling on zero-hours contracts, a throwback to the days when people had to turn up at the docks every day to compete for a day's work. Ed Miliband says Labour would outlaw the use of such contracts for longer than 12 weeks. We say ban them completely and offer all workers permanent contracts with full employment rights from day one.

Labour also promises to raise the minimum wage to £8 an hour, but this is not enough. We support the TUC demand for £10 an hour now – and so should Labour. In the USA, there is a vibrant campaign for "\$15 Now", launching strikes at fast food joints to secure it. The unions here should follow suit and turn the whole of Britain into a living wage zone.

## Stop the attacks on the sick, the poor and the vulnerable

The official unemployment figures mask the real picture, as millions seeking work are hidden from the statistics because of harsh sanctions by the Department of Work and Pensions.

They should end the punitive regime at Job Centres, which regularly stops the benefits of claimants for minor mistakes, like missing an appointment by a few minutes or forgetting to bring a document to an interview: six weeks' sanction for first "offence", 13 weeks' for a second and three years' the third time round.

Increasingly, the jobless are made to work for up to 30 hours a week, stacking shelves for Tesco and the like on workfare schemes – for free, and with no guaranteed job at the end. The only alternative is to lose their benefits.

The prospects for disabled people are even worse. The constant testing of disability claimants at the hands of Atos and the like is rightly infamous. In the Coalition's first term, 10,600 claimants died while undergoing assessment, 1,300 of whom were still designated "fit for work" even as they were dying. Over 30 people have committed suicide because of the stress.

Falling real wages and the proliferation of low paid work now means that most of the ben-

efits bill is directed to working people, with taxpayers subsidising miserly employers.

A Labour government should reverse all the cuts to benefits and end the sanctions regime immediately. They should raise benefits and pensions to a level that allows everyone to live with dignity. We support direct action by activist groups like Disabled People Against Cuts (DPAC) to highlight this crime against the most vulnerable.

## Save the NHS

The National Health Service is being cut and privatised by stealth. The Coalition has cut £20 billion from the NHS and is outsourcing resources and procedures to profiteers like Serco, Circle, Virgin Care and even Sainsbury's.

Four out of five hospitals are in deficit. More unit closures, longer waiting lists, more unnecessary deaths loom.

Now the government is handing over Manchester NHS to a new super-authority. This will break up the NHS and turn it into even more of a postcode lottery than it already is.

Labour's promise of more money and staff is welcome but will not stop the rot. Its pledge to repeal Andrew Lansley's Health and Social Care Act is a step in the right direction, but it needs also to:

- Tax the rich to fully fund the NHS
- Reverse the cuts, privatisation and abolish the PFI deals
- Put the NHS under workers and patients' democratic control.

We can pile on the pressure not to backslide by mounting local and national campaigns, like the ones in Lewisham, Ealing and Shropshire and Keep Our NHS Public, as well as by supporting the health unions when they strike against cuts, closures and wage restraint.

## Education is a right

There are now 3,904 academies and free schools, including a majority of secondary schools, a ten-fold increase in just five years. Whereas before, state schools worked together and were controlled by local authorities, now they compete against each other, and answer only to the Education Secretary in Westminster.

Not only are academies not raising standards, they are also re-introducing selection criteria on the sly, creating preferentially treated schools for sharp-elbowed middle class parents and sink schools for the rest. And they are open to profiteers; the head and director of Durand primary school in Lambeth cream off £940,000 a year from the education budget between them.

No wonder teachers are so overworked and stressed that four out of ten new teachers resign in their first year. What a waste!

So what's the answer? Return all academies and free schools to the local authorities, end selection and run them under the control of teachers, parents and school students themselves. Reinstate the Building Schools for the Future programme and fund their modernisation.

Labour knows this makes sense, but it is hamstrung by Tony Blair's previous championing of academies. We need to make them do the right thing, while supporting strikes and campaigns, like the one in Lewisham, to resist the imposition of academy status on our schools.

Further education colleges also need to be brought back in-house and the funding gap with secondary schools eliminated. The Education Maintenance Allowance (EMA) for over-16s should be restored and updated, and tuition fees abolished.

## Housing for all

There are 5 million people stuck on housing waiting lists, far outstripping the 120,000 homes built each year. Up to a third of council homes are deemed unfit to live in, in them many of the



3.6 million children living in poverty.

Margaret Thatcher's "right to buy" policy destroyed much of the housing stock, while councils were forbidden to use the revenues to build more units. Scandalously Labour continued this scheme, while the Tories threaten to extend it to housing association tenants.

Far from encouraging "owner occupancy", it has created a new breed of private slumlords, owning dozens of ex-council dwellings and charging three or four times council rents. "Buy to let" landlords have pushed house prices way out of the range of most working families and have sent rents spiralling out of control.

The final straw is the demolition of perfectly good social housing so that developers can build luxury flats, socially cleansing our neighbourhoods in the process. The infamous "bedroom tax" has added to this by pricing families, two-thirds of them with disabled members, out of their homes.

A Labour government should do what the 1945-51 government did: build a million new council homes and let them out at a quarter of market rents. It should restore rent controls and grant all tenants full rights, including the right to run their estates democratically.

To make sure Labour does this, tenants need to launch militant campaigns, including rent strikes and occupations, like the "Focus E15 Mums" in East London, and the union movement needs to back them up with strikes if necessary.

## Save the planet

Capitalism poisons the planet with fossil fuels, the main cause of climate change. Last year was the hottest ever in the UK, and severe weather events like the floods in Somerset and the Midlands are becoming more common. Yet the Tories' response is to advise those affected to take out exorbitant private insurance, while riding

roughshod over local people's objections to introduce fracking across the UK.

Instead of giving sweeteners and price guarantees to private nuclear power providers like EDF, we should be investing in renewable energy. Currently Britain only relies on renewables for 5 per cent of our energy needs, compared with 51 per cent in Sweden.

- Labour should:
- Nationalise the energy companies without compensation and slash household bills
  - Phase out nuclear power, stop fracking and end our reliance on fossil fuel
  - Invest in renewables, like wind, tidal and solar, and in flood defences

## Seize the banks – give us back our money

In 2008-09, Gordon Brown handed over £1 trillion of taxpayers' money to save the banks from collapse because they were "too big to fail". Instead, our social fabric – our ability to look after the young, the elderly and the infirm – was made to "fail".

Suddenly, from being a kindly benefactor who saved the banks, the state became an indebted "borrower" who had to "pay back" the bondholders. These shadowy bondholders, rather conveniently, turn out to be the same fund managers and bankers we saved in the first place.

This giant swindle means that working-class people are being made to pay for the capitalist crisis. We say, no more: cancel the debt now.

We know from Syriza's experience in Greece that this would lead to all sorts of threats from foreign governments and international institutions, not to mention the banks themselves.

But rather than be blackmailed and forced to climb down, a government committed to work-



# Power to Britain's crisis

across Europe – are asking whether there is an alternative to capitalist austerity



ing-class interests should go on the offensive. It should nationalise the banks, merge them together and democratically allocate their vast assets to renewing our communities and rebuilding our social services. Strict exchange controls could stop the rich from hiding their money or shifting it overseas.

Alongside increasing local and national taxes on the rich, taking the poorest out of taxation altogether and ending the scandal of tax avoidance and evasion, this could allow a workers' government to democratically plan production and services to meet people's needs, through local and national assemblies.

## Combat police violence

The horrendous extent of police violence, snooping and lawbreaking has been revealed over the past five years.

From the daily harassment of (mainly black) youth through stop and search to the unpunished deaths of over 1,000 people at the hands of the police since 1990, Britain's law enforcers are inextricably linked to violence.

And we can add to this the undercover surveillance of protest groups, including Stephen Lawrence's family, which even saw agents starting families with their targets; the cover-ups by senior officers over their conduct at Hillsborough and Orgreave, despite the lives they ruined and the tireless campaigns to get to the truth; and the mass surveillance of our phone-calls, texts and emails by spy centre GCHQ, conducted even behind Parliament's back.

The conclusion is simple. A Labour government should:

- End stop and search
- Bring all those responsible for police racism, violence and cover-ups to justice

- Disband all armed police and surveillance units – shut down GCHQ

## No tolerance for racism – immigrants welcome here

Racism is still rife in Britain. Black people are 26 times more likely to be stopped and searched, and are then more likely to be arrested, charged, to receive a custodial sentence and to spend longer in prison.

The same discrimination can be found in jobs and education. Despite being just 5 per cent of the population, 25 per cent of long-term unemployed youth are black; and in general, black workers are twice as likely to be unemployed. Black students are less likely to achieve five good GCSEs; less than 1 per cent of students in the top universities are black.

Perhaps even more acute is the racism directed at immigrants and Muslims – though many in these groups are also black.

Successive governments have whipped up racist fears and sought to blame immigrants for everything from the lack of housing to NHS waiting times, mass unemployment and low wages.

Every atrocity by an Islamist group is blamed, not on Britain's occupation of Iraq and Afghanistan, but on "extremism" within Britain's Muslim minorities. The actions of a tiny minority do not cause British imperialism to be placed under the microscope, but instead cause every single Muslim in the country to be suspected of harbouring a zealous contempt for human life.

Why is all this still with us? Because dividing the population by "race" or ethnicity helps prevent working-class people from coming together to fight the real enemy: capitalism and imperialism. And we have more in common with migrant workers than with the bosses who exploit

them.

We say:

- Self-defence is no offence – for organised resistance to racist attacks
- Open the borders – grant all who want to live and work here full citizenship rights
- Combat every instance of racism, however it manifests itself
- For trade union and community monitoring of racist incidents, and direct action to end them

## Nations and institutions

The great recession has certainly opened a constitutional crisis in Britain. The Scottish people came close to breaking away; the Tories, egged on by Ukip, question the UK's membership of the EU; and Prince Charles' secret letters pose the question of the role of the monarchy.

Our starting point on all these questions should be to fight for the greatest unity of the working class.

The Scottish people are not oppressed as a nation. Scottish workers are as exploited as the rest of us, but their best chance of ending this is alongside the workers of England and Wales. Therefore we say, no to Scottish independence and yes to a united fightback against austerity.

Backbench Tories and Ukip want Britain out of Europe for racist reasons. An "independent" Britain would still attack the working class. On the other hand, the EU is a bosses' club designed to drive down workers' wages, conditions and rights. We say, neither independence nor the EU, but a socialist united states of Europe.

Abolish the monarchy and the House of Lords, both hideously undemocratic relics of a feudal past. For a workers' republic!

## Oppose British imperialism

Britain is the sixth richest nation in the world. It didn't achieve this position peacefully, or maintain it that way either. In fact, Britain is one of a handful of robber nations that uses its financial muscle and military might to secure privileges over other peoples.

British troops occupied Afghanistan and Iraq for a decade or more, leaving behind a legacy of sectarian division, torture and economic destruction. Britain still denies the right of the Irish people as a whole to determine their future, and claims sovereignty over the north-east of Ireland.

The City of London and British multinational giants, like HSBC and BP, are at the centre of a web that systematically appropriates resources from around the world and that denies poorer countries the right to develop their own economies with their own natural resources.

- Not a penny or a person for the defence of the system
- Troops out of the Middle East, Ireland and all foreign bases – Britain out of Nato
- For the defeat of Britain in any armed conflict – the main enemy is at home

## Transform the labour movement

None of these demands can be achieved without rallying people on the streets, in schools and colleges, and in our workplaces. Strikes and occupations, mass demonstrations and direct action must be at the heart of any strategy to beat austerity.

While we should demand that a Labour government carries out measures in defence of the working class, we know that they will only do so if faced with a mass movement.

The lesson of the last five years of stalled struggles is that, given a strong lead, millions will respond to a call to action; but also that our current leaders have no stomach for a real fight.

Instead of strikes remaining at the level of one-day protests, we have to escalate them, to

all-out indefinite strikes if necessary. Instead of union bureaucrats deciding when we should strike and for how long, elected and accountable strike committees, made up of the workers who are taking the action, should call the shots.

Instead of "coordinated action" led from above (that quickly becomes un-coordinated once the pressure from below has died down), we need to link our struggles together from below and fight for a general strike.

Of course the union leaders should endorse these tactics, but we need organisations at the base to force them to do so – and to deliver action without them if necessary.

Let's unite in councils of action in every town and city, where delegates from all the campaigns, neighbourhoods and workplaces can come together to decide on action and carry it out. Let's group together the best trade unionists into a rank and file movement to democratise the unions and win them to decisive action.

Last but not least, we know that Labour – in office or in opposition – will not lead the resistance to austerity. The Blairite right wing will tear the party to shreds before that happens.

We therefore need to fight for a new mass working-class party, one that does not regard winning elections as its be all and end all, or grant privileges to party leaders, MPs and councillors, but that sets as its aim the overthrow of the capitalist system – by any means necessary.

## From resistance to revolution

The most urgent task facing us in this election is to rally the forces that can stop the cuts. Whoever wins, the next government will attack us, with 40 per cent of the planned cuts still to come. Only this time, they plan to wipe out every gain the working class has made since 1945.

While socialists should campaign for a Labour victory, we should have our eyes fully open to Labour's record and policies. Labour has denounced strikes, accepted the Coalition's cuts and its spending limits for the next two years, and joined in the attacks on benefit claimants.

Labour has always accepted that reforms must come second to profits, that it will make concessions to working-class interests only when capitalism is thriving. This makes it a bosses' party at core, despite its working-class support. We need a new party, one uncompromisingly committed to the fight for socialism.

But even if such a party had a majority of MPs in Parliament, with an anticapitalist programme like the one outlined here, it would meet resistance from the unelected parts of the state, the international markets and the other imperialist powers.

We have seen what these forces have done to the Greek anti-austerity government. We know what they do to our picket lines, our demonstrations and our communities. We remember the crimes of British imperialism in Iraq, Afghanistan and Ireland. Just imagine what they would do if their power and wealth were fundamentally challenged.

Only a revolution that breaks up the machinery of repression, wins over the rank and file of the army, arms the people and creates a workers' militia will be able to impose its will on today's ruling class of capitalists and billionaires.

To make sure a revolutionary government does not in turn produce a new elite, it will need to be based upon national assemblies of elected and recallable delegates, elected by local and regional councils of action representing all working people, without privileges for anyone.

On this basis it will be possible to plan the economy democratically, and take giant steps towards eliminating poverty, exploitation and inequality. Such a revolution would be a beacon to working-class across the world, encouraging them to take on their own ruling elites, and opening up the possibility of building a new, socialist order. ●



# Learning the lessons

The last five years provide invaluable lessons of how not to organise an effective resistance



BERNIE MCADAM

No sooner had the Con-Dem coalition been sworn in than it delivered an £83 billion programme of spending cuts. Despite Tory promises not to axe frontline services, it quickly became clear that they were out to slash hundreds of thousands of public sector jobs, freeze pay, cut pensions and launch a mammoth attack on our welfare state: the biggest cuts in British history.

And this was all to pay for the £1.3 trillion bailout of the banks during the 2008 credit crunch. Working-class families would pay for the billions lost by the capitalists, whose system caused the crisis in the first place.

So what did the leaders of the Labour Party and the trade unions do in response?

First up was Ed Miliband. Elected Labour leader thanks to trade union votes, he lost no time in reassuring big business that he would not obstruct the cuts. He denounced “irresponsible” strikes and insisted that he was not going “to oppose every cut the government comes up with”.

Then came Ed Balls, asserting that there would be no reversal of the cuts and no return to “tax and spend”. He remains committed to the Tories’ spending plans, explaining that “for us to come along now and say we will plan to spend more in 2015-16 would be completely irresponsible”.

Most union leaders took their cue from Labour. They prefer to “wait for Labour” to return to power over stopping the cuts in the here and now. It took nearly a year for the TUC to organise a demonstration against the cuts on 26 March 2011. And while hundreds of thousands of angry union members responded to this call, the TUC leaders had no intention of using it as a springboard for action.

In fact, the first real opposition to the cuts came with the student and youth rebellion against hikes in university tuition fees and the scrapping of the Educational Maintenance Allowance at the end of 2010. The Coalition was shaken by tens of thousands of students on the streets and by the occupation of the Tory party headquarters.

Student assemblies held in occupied campus halls led these mobilisations, in direct conflict with the official student union leaders. And they posed the question: if students can mobilise, then why not workers?

## Pensions debacle

It took the government’s attack on public sector pensions for the unions to make their move. The first coordinated national strike over pensions was called on 30 June 2011 by four unions: the NUT, ATL, UCU and the PCS, organising teachers, lecturers and civil servants. This was followed by another one-day strike on 30 November 2011, in which 29 unions brought out 2 million workers across the public sector, a fantastic mobilisation that showed how determined people were to fight. That message however clearly alarmed their leaders.

Within a fortnight this alliance had fractured. The leaders of the largest public sector unions, Dave Prentis of Unison and Paul Kenny of the



GMB, signed no-strike agreements to pursue scheme-by-scheme talks that produced few new concessions.

The smaller, left-led unions had no response. They had peddled the myth that by striking over a “legal trade dispute”, they could cajole the right-led unions into supporting coordinated action without confronting the anti-union laws. In fact, the “rights” simply decoupled the disputes, leaving the “lefts” in the lurch. The self-styled Marxists of the Socialist Party (SP) and Socialist Workers Party (SWP) had disgracefully gone along with this wheeze.

Faced with disaffection from below, the TUC leaders then launched a cynical consultation over whether a general strike was “feasible”. For a whole year, the architects of the pensions defeat pretended to search for a way to call for class-wide action. Unsurprisingly, when the year was up, the idea was quietly dropped.

This debacle was repeated three years later when public service unions finally woke up to the clamour to fight against the three-year pay freeze. Public sector salaries have declined 15 per cent in real terms under the Tories, leaving many having to claim benefits to top up their measly earnings.

Coordinated action in July 2014 saw one million strike across local government, schools, colleges, the civil service and fire stations. Talk of NHS staff joining the walkout in October, however, was too much for some union leaders, with lecturers, railworkers and finally and decisively local government officers being told to step down.

At no point did the larger of the far left groups warn that the traitors leading our movement would betray us, let alone organise to defy their sell-out.

The Health and Social Care Act (2012) represented the biggest attack yet on the National Health Service. It undermined the principle of free, universal and comprehensive healthcare, outsourcing most of the NHS budget to GPs. Meanwhile cuts continued to produce hospital mergers, the loss of beds and the closure of

A&E departments.

Scandalously this Act was passed without the unions or the Labour Party even holding a national demonstration. Our leaders’ passivity emboldened the Tories.

In the absence of a national lead, many vibrant local campaigns were set up, like the successful campaign to save Lewisham Hospital. However, more determined national action could have stopped the Tories in their tracks. A general strike to save the NHS could have torn apart the coalition, with any attempt to ban it amounting to political suicide.

## Grangemouth

The private sector had its own rhythm of struggle, though no different conclusion. Militant action by individual groups of workers showed what could be done.

Hovis workers in Wigan fought off zero-hours contracts and a two-tier workforce by launching wave after wave of week-long strikes and mass pickets. Cinema staff at the Ritzy in Brixton won a similar dispute and a 26 per cent pay rise with 13 strikes in quick succession.

Electricians on construction sites, the Sparks as they became known, faced new contracts with a 30 per cent pay cut. Rank and file organisation, weekly demos, occupations and pickets helped them pick up members and momentum. The mere threat of a strike forced the bosses to back down.

But the big set-piece battle was at Grangemouth, near Falkirk. Here Unite the Union had defeated an attack on pensions back in 2008. But billionaire owner Jim Ratcliffe was out for revenge. Having provoked a strike ballot by victimising a convenor, he threatened to close the petrochemical plant for good.

While shop stewards refused to blink, Unite’s “left” leader Len McCluskey did. The strike was called off, a no-strike agreement signed and jobs were given away. Britain’s biggest union sacrificed one of its best organised bat-

talions without a fight.

## Anticuts campaigns

If the union leaders presented the biggest obstacle to a struggle against austerity, then what role has the far left played? Though small, it could have offered an alternative way forward. Instead, the last five years have witnessed a divided and directionless anticuts movement.

No less than three rival national anti-cuts campaigns have been set up: the National Shop Stewards Network (NSSN), backed by the SP; Unite the Resistance (UtR), backed by the SWP; and the Coalition of Resistance (CoR), courtesy of Counterfire, the Communist Party of Britain and Socialist Resistance.

What a mess! The bosses and the Tories must have been laughing their heads off. The best chance of uniting them came and went with the launch of the People’s Assembly Against Austerity in June 2013. But it also has no effective strategy for halting the cuts.

Just holding rallies, demonstrations and carnivals while echoing the unions leaders’ complacency is not enough. What we needed was one umbrella group, where delegates from union branches, campaigns and student organisations could have discussed and agreed on a united course of action.

But these sects would rather be lord over their own little campaign, rather than unite to fight the cuts.

## The fight goes on

Whether we have an austerity-heavy Tory-led government or an austerity-lite Labour one, we will need new methods of struggle and new organisations to defend our public services and our living standards.

Common to all the union leaders is a refusal to make their struggles against the effects of the cuts on their members’ wages and conditions into a class-wide political struggle against the government. They prefer to keep on the “right” side of the anti-union laws, which ban “political” strikes and enforce a narrow definition of what constitutes a legitimate “trade dispute”.

So we need a new fighting leadership of the unions, based on rank and file organisations within every union and across the unions. We need coordinating councils of action drawing in all the strands of struggle into an almighty fist to clobber the bosses. We need to build on the positives from the likes of the Hovis and Ritzy workers, and the Sparks.

A militant fight back will also mean taking on the pro-Labour ideas of many of our union leaders. We should demand that Labour refuse to implement austerity, but the idea that we can win Labour for the unions – as Len McCluskey would have it – let alone socialism is wrong.

The unions should break with Labour and hold a democratic conference to form a new anti-austerity and anticapitalist working-class party. This could completely revitalise the labour movement, and hasten an end to austerity and the capitalist system that demands it. ●



# Labour of Sisyphus

Each election is a chance for the centrist left to rehearse tried and failed approaches



MARCUS HALABY

In this year's General Election, we support candidates of the socialist left as part of a project of building an alternative to the Labour Party. In particular we call for a vote for Left Unity, which we are part of, and for the Trade Union and Socialist Coalition (Tusc), which is supported by the rail workers' union RMT and by the two largest groups on the British far left: the Socialist Party and SWP.

Everywhere else we call for a vote for Labour, despite its commitment to Tory spending plans and its poor record in opposing the Con-Dem coalition's austerity policies. This goes alongside our raising demands on Labour to break with its policy of austerity-lite, and to take measures in defence of the interests of its millions of working class voters.

The logic behind this position is simple. Millions of working class people will be voting Labour, whatever we or anyone else on the far left have to say on the matter. They will do so because they quite rightly sense that their most immediate, vicious and deadly enemy is the Con-Dem coalition – and that a new Tory or Tory-led government would be the worst possible outcome.

While striking a united front to secure a Labour government, we still warn voters that the struggle against austerity will not end with a Labour victory. But it will take the experience of a Labour government in power for millions of the party's core voters to learn this.

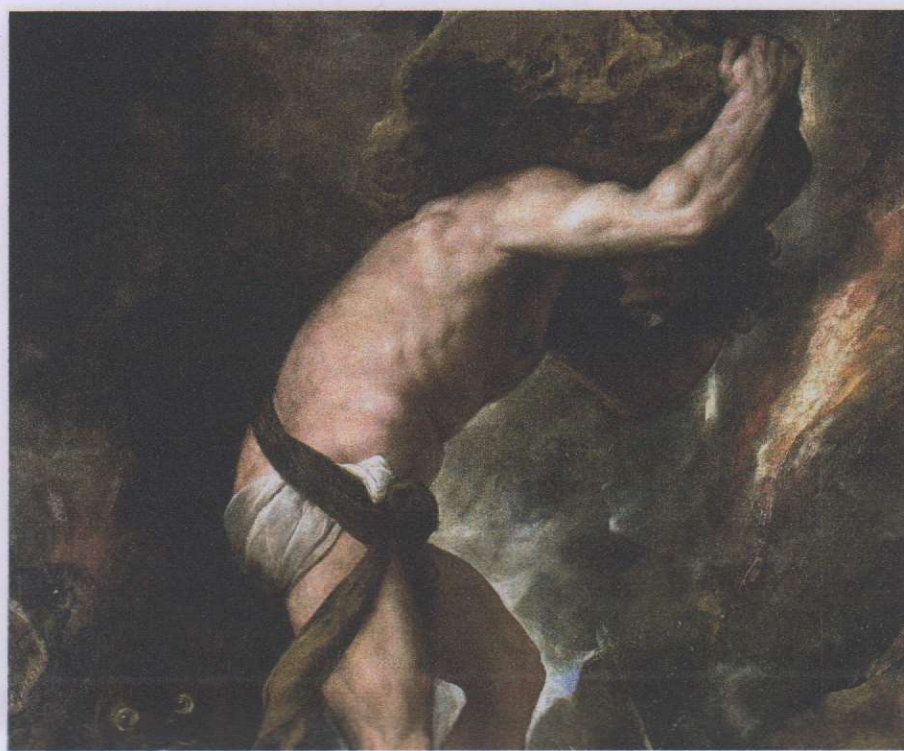
At the same time, a sizeable minority of working class people already understand that Labour is not just an inadequate instrument in the struggle against austerity and capitalist crisis, but a huge obstacle to that struggle. To them we say: join us in the fight for a new mass party of the working class, by joining Left Unity and by supporting the Left Unity and Tusc candidates in this election.

## Socialist Party and SWP

As straightforward as this sounds, there is no consensus on the left. The largest far left group, the Socialist Workers Party (SWP), is part of Tusc and fielding a number of election candidates through it. Its paper argued in January that Labour "gives no alternative" to the Tories and called on its readers to "vote for socialists in May". It has called since for people to support Tusc candidates in the general election and to "build a socialist alternative".

But the SWP has nothing to say about Left Unity's candidates – or indeed about Labour outside of the 136 constituencies where Tusc candidates will be standing. And unlike Left Unity, Tusc is not an organisation with local branches that people can join, making it a problematic vehicle for building a "socialist alternative".

Even more hostile to Labour is the SP, the other main affiliate to Tusc. In an editorial in its newspaper, its deputy general secretary Hannah Sell notes that Labour lost 5 million votes under Blair and Brown, with present Labour leader Ed Miliband failing to win most of these votes back since, and faces a melt-



REPEATING THE SAME ERRORS AND EXPECTING A DIFFERENT RESULT

down in Scotland.

She argues that: "At root this is because Labour today is a capitalist party. Unlike in the past when old Labour, though it had a capitalist leadership, was nonetheless a workers' party at its base. It could, via its democratic structures, be pressured by the working class. In the past when Labour had been defeated, particularly after 1979, a strong leftward move developed in the ranks of the Labour Party. Following 2010 this has been completely absent. Labour's pro-austerity programme has been accepted by the party with barely any protest."

Noting that "Labour's democratic structures have long since been destroyed", Sell concludes that we need "to build a new party of the working class", and that if "a significant section of the trade union movement had taken this path during the last five years we could face a very different political terrain today". True enough, but in the course of this argument, she suggests that calling for a vote for Labour is to "foster illusions that Labour offers a real alternative", and that doing this "entails taking some responsibility for the actions of a future Labour government".

What's wrong with this argument? For a start, Sell paints a rose-tinted view of what Labour was like in the past, when the Socialist Party's predecessor the Militant Tendency was committed to a strategy of remaining inside the party at all costs. It's not a true picture.

In the 1980s, Labour denounced the miners' strike, in the 1970s they pushed through pay restraint while inflation was riding high, even the famous 1945-51 Labour government sent soldiers to break strikes. Always – from Ireland to the far east and the south Atlantic – Labour has followed an imperialist foreign policy.

But the SP rewrites history for a reason. When they were in Labour, they camouflaged themselves as left reformists, insisting that a Labour government could implement a socialist transition without the need for revolution. Now they are outside, they campaign for a new reformist party, peddling the same illusion... so they have to claim that Labour is no longer a reformist party.

Nor does it follow at all that calling for a vote for Labour means promoting illusions in it or taking "responsibility" for its actions in power.

Millions of people will be voting Labour, the majority of them without reading a single leaflet or editorial from the far left. Some will swallow Labour's rhetoric whole, others with longer memories will be more cynical.

But almost all have "illusions" that Labour will act as a shield against the worst aspects of austerity – illusions we seek to dispel by placing concrete demands on Labour. If Sell thinks that without far left support, Labour's vote would collapse, she has another think coming.

Of course, the SP and SWP are both responding to a real problem, that Labour has moved so far to the right that parties, like the Greens and the SNP, with no connections to the labour movement at all, look well to the left of Labour.

But while we recognise that Labour has no intention of offering a real alternative to capitalist austerity, we must also understand that the struggle to force Labour to do just that is at one and the same time the struggle to assemble the forces that can provide that alternative.

## The AWL

On the opposite pole of this debate, the Alliance for Workers' Liberty (AWL) have

launched the Socialist Campaign for a Labour Victory (SCLV). They argue: "For all its woeful inadequacies and shameful betrayals, and despite changes in its structure, Labour remains supported, funded and organisationally tied to workers' basic class organisations, the trade unions".

They continue: "Because Labour remains linked to the unions – because they could use their voice in the party to shift its course, if they chose to – we should support the election of a Labour government. But if we are going to avoid becoming footsoldiers for the Labour leadership, we need to do more than that."

The "more than that" the AWL propose, however, consists merely of a demand that "the unions stop covering politically for the Labour leadership, and start fighting for workers – in the first instance, by actually campaigning for union policies".

The SCLV therefore supports campaigns to change Labour's policies on tuition fees, the renationalisation of the railways and other issues, and advocates "a workers' plan of demands to remake society in the interests of the majority" by "taxing the rich, expropriating the banks" and creating "a workers' government".

But the AWL, despite acknowledging that the best course of action would be a "strong slate of class struggle socialist candidates, to champion workers' interests, raise the profile of socialism and put pressure on Labour from the left", nevertheless dismisses the efforts of both Left Unity and Tusc.

They claim that standing left of Labour candidates "is not on the cards" as they "will be weak both organisationally and politically". This will be news for the SNP, which is on the verge of wiping Labour of the map in Scotland precisely by standing to its left.

Undeterred, however, the AWL says that "the TUSC effort for 7 May" is an "inferior way to build socialist awareness than the SCLV", describing TUSC as "a cartel of the SP and the leading officials of the RMT union" and Left Unity as "a small group pretending to be a 'broad left' party like Die Linke in Germany, and neither politically nor organisationally better than TUSC".

Whatever the genuine limitations of Tusc as a coalition without individual membership or an active internal life, or of the Left Unity leadership's strategy of filling the space to the left of Labour by invoking the "spirit of 1945", the AWL's approach provides no political framework and no organisational form for forcing Labour to implement any of the demands that it places on a future Labour government.

Is it really "inferior" to support candidates who openly say Labour cannot be reformed and the British working class needs to build a new party committed to the fight for socialism? Is it really "superior" to peddle the illusion (yet again) that Labour can be won to socialist policies and party democracy? Dream on!

In fact the emergence of a real alternative to Labour's strategy will have to be built outside of the party. Which means that the struggle to put Labour to the test of office and the struggle to build an alternative to it will have to go hand in hand. ●



## greece

# The turn of the screw

For the Troika, democracy must be no obstacle to making an example out of Greece



DAVE STOCKTON

The government of Greece, elected after years of popular resistance to austerity, has immediately been subjected to the blackmail of the institutions of international finance capital and the European Union.

They want to make an example of Greece in order to intimidate any other countries that might think of voting to reject the destruction of living standards and public services. Supporting the demand to break the EU rulers' stranglehold on Greece is immediately linked to breaking the hold of austerity across the whole continent.

Faced with the threat of the withdrawal of all financial support and expulsion from the Eurozone, which would have triggered a collapse of the country's economy, Greece needs the practical support of workers, youth and all progressive forces across the continent.

## Imperialism

Those responsible for these threats sit in the governments of the most powerful EU states and on the boards of the banks and financial institutions, in Berlin, Frankfurt, Paris and the City of London. To aid Greece means striking back at them; they are the enemies of all workers across the continent.

Wolfgang Schäuble, Germany's Finance Minister, has been brutally frank. "Elections change nothing" was his response to the Greek government's democratic mandate to end austerity.

The smaller and weaker states and economies count for little in a European Union dominated by a handful of rich and powerful states. This domination of the weak by the strong has a name: imperialism.

The EU is an imperialist trading block, dominated by a few "big powers", with a common currency tailored to the needs of their banks, industrial and commercial corporations. It is thus able to trample on the democracy of the smaller states and to impose a stranglehold over their economies and the social welfare of their citizens.

The Troika, now referred to as "the Institutions", is determined to force the Syriza government into a humiliating surrender and continuation of the austerity imposed by the previous three governments in Athens.

## IMF medicine

The so-called Greek "bailouts" are not bailing out the Greek people at all. They are bailing out the country's northern European creditors, the bank shareholders and bondholders who, like the worst loan sharks, lured Greek governments into massive debt to offset the economic subordination of Greece to Germany. Greek governments only kept within the Eurozone by massive borrowing in the northern European capitals. And the banks were only too happy to let them.

For ten years Wall Street big names like Goldman Sachs helped to conceal the regulation-busting scale of Greek debt. When the bailouts began in 2010, €310 billion had al-



SCRAP THE TROIKA

ready been advanced to the Greek government by the European banking and financial sector, much of it from Germany and France. They had expected decades of lucrative interest payments but then came the great crash of 2008-09.

Since then, the "Troika" has lent a further

elections  
change  
nothing

WOLFGANG SCHAEUBLE,  
GERMAN FINANCE MINISTER

€252 billion to the Greek government. This did not go into funding wages or social services for the Greek people, as the gutter press likes to suggest. €149.2 billion of it went on repaying the original debt and the interest on it, €34.5 billion went to "compensate" private lenders for the 2012 debt restructuring, and €48.2 billion went to bail out Greek banks and their foreign investors.

The results of this "aid" have been catastrophic. Since the imposition of the Memorandum, Greece's economy has shrunk by 28.7 per cent. Some 27 per cent of its workers are unemployed, a figure rising to over 50 per cent for under-25s. Some 200,000 young Greeks have left the country in search of work in the north. Popular consumption has fallen by 40 per cent and 40 per cent could not afford to heat their homes this winter.

But Greece was not the only country to suffer the austerity poison. Nor have they taken it without resistance. In the years 2008-12, there were fight backs against these policies in the form of mass demonstrations, occupations and general strikes, in Greece, Spain, Portugal, Ireland and other countries across Europe. Then came the rise of left or socialist parties, in par-

ticular Greece's Syriza and Spain's Podemos, which grew dramatically precisely because they promised to end austerity altogether.

## Capitalist crisis

The origins of austerity policy do not lie solely in the thirty year dominance of the economic doctrine called neoliberalism. Nor do they lie solely in the fact that the EU is an institution dominated by a few major imperialist powers, headed by Germany and the European Central Bank in Frankfurt, or that rivalry between the emerging three global imperialist blocks results in beggar-my-neighbour policies that harm everyone apart from the super-rich.

Ultimately, they originate in a capitalism in decline, mired in a deep, prolonged historic crisis. This crisis drives states, as well as industrial, commercial and financial institutions, to unload the burden of recovering their profitability onto the working class at home, and onto weaker states and economies abroad.

And this is the reason why the election of reformist governments like Syriza is insufficient to stand up to a global capitalism determined to make the working class in Greece (and in Britain) pay the full price of restoring their profit rates.

Syriza, for all its radicalism and the enthusiasm of its voters, came to power as a reformist government, one without the backing of a mobilised working class ready to enforce its measure and keep it under their control. That is why prime minister Alexis Tsipras and finance minister Yanis Varoufakis tried to persuade the EU to relent, rather than setting out to force it to do so by mobilising the Greek workers as the agents of their own liberation. The strategy of negotiation, of trying to divide the governments and institutions of the European Union, has proved fruitless.

Now Varoufakis has said Greece will meet "all obligations to all its creditors, ad infinitum." If Greece does, this will prove an abject surrender and a scandalous betrayal of the

workers and youth of Greece.

Syriza must be stopped from going down the path of PASOK and previous Greek governments. If they surrender now, then Syriza will collapse like a pricked bubble, and the desperate masses could turn to the far right. It is vital that revolutionaries and the militant trade unions remobilise the organisations of the workers, the small farmers and the youth to halt any such betrayal.

In doing so they can create a force capable of overthrowing the power of the European and Greek billionaires and their politicians and generals. What Greece needs to survive is nothing less than a revolutionary workers' government, backed up by workers across the continent.

A campaign to come to the aid of Greek workers and youth should start with a Europe-wide day of mass demonstrations, supported by all the trade union federations, and by their rank and file and workplace organisations if the union leaders drag their heels. The political parties of the left, great and small, must be urged to take part along with their MPs and national leaderships. Here, too, a militant minority in the membership must take the lead from below, if there is no leadership from above.

We need a day of militant mass demonstrations in all the major cities of the EU as a first step, to break the spell of the media and politicians' lies about the "lazy Greeks".

This in turn needs to be escalated, as rapidly as possible, into a Europe-wide day of action, including strike action, and direct action against the "Institutions", and against governments who continue to threaten and rob Greece.

This needs to be linked to the demand for an end to austerity in every EU country, including those not in the Eurozone, and for the ripping up of the treaties and agreements that impose "balanced budgets" and limits on social spending while preventing the taxation of the bankers, CEOs and mega-corporations.

We need to expose the racket of debt repayment, showing that the money "saved" by cutting health and education and by selling off state assets ends up boosting the fortunes of the rich, which have risen to dizzying heights at the same time as wages have plummeted. We need to open the books of the banks and financial institutions and put a stop to their profiteering. In short, we need to make the rich pay for their crisis.

We urgently need a Europe-wide assembly to plan and organise such a movement, with delegates from all the above-mentioned organisations, similar to those mounted by the European Social Forum and the antiwar movement in the early 2000s.

Can we do this? Yes we can! Indeed, we must!

- Solidarity with the working people of Greece
- An end to Austerity – in Greece and Europe-wide
- Cancel the Debt in its entirety
- Open the accounts of the national banks and the ECB to workers' and public scrutiny and control
- Reject privatisations across the continent
- For a Socialist United States of Europe. ●



# Radically irresponsible

Podemos is chasing votes and ditching principles in its bid for respectability



KD TAIT

Spanish anti-austerity party Podemos (We Can) won 14.8 per cent and took 15 seats in elections to Andalusia's regional parliament, doubling last year's vote in the European elections. The meteoric rise of the fledgling party which is leading opinion polls ahead of general elections this Autumn has provoked intense debate across the European left.

With the victory of Syriza in Greece earlier this year, many people are taking inspiration from parties that appear to have overcome the inability of the old reformist left to present any coherent anti-austerity programme, and to win elections on that basis. Such a development is welcome, not only because this could alleviate the worst austerity measures, but because it poses the question of what kind of government is needed to put an end to austerity.

It poses the question but does not yet answer it, as Syriza, caught on the horns of a dilemma, is demonstrating. The dilemma: to defy the blackmail of the forces of international capital and break free from its controls, or to act as its agents in imposing austerity.

And Podemos is repeating, in a compressed version, Syriza's trajectory from the radical fringes towards government, in the process transforming its anti-systemic programme of opposition into a programme of "responsible" reforms.

## The political turn

As with Syriza in 2012, when the party was catapulted from obscurity to prominence following a wave of social struggles against austerity, Podemos represents an attempt to give the square occupations, strikes and mobilisations on the streets a political expression: a struggle for power.

The failure and the limited objectives of economic struggles pursued by the trade unions, particularly the UGT, linked to the Spanish Socialist Party (PSOE), discredited the economic and political institutions dominating the labour movement. This was a major factor in the Indignados' understandable but ultimately self-defeating ban on party-political debate in the square occupations.

The Podemos project is an attempt to marry the political theory of "post-Marxist" Ernesto Laclau with the political practice of Latin American populism, the "socialism of the 21st Century" of Hugo Chavez, Evo Morales etc.

The group of professors from the Complutense University of Madrid around Pablo Iglesias and Juan Carlos Monedero linked up with Izquierda Anticapitalista, the Spanish section of the Fourth International, in an effort to replicate in Spain the tactics that brought about governments with radical reform agendas in Venezuela, Bolivia and Ecuador.

From Latin America comes the idea of mass participation of "the People" in local structures ("circuitos", a concept lifted from Venezuela) that provide a base of support for a charismatic leader who can mobilise them as required against the common enemy.

From Spain comes the co-option of the "15-M" movement's rejection of a right-left paradigm and, as a chosen enemy, the "caste", a

concept whose strength as a mobilising tool is drawn both from the corruption of the establishment parties, and that also targets the nexus of state-EU-IMF links that imposes austerity whatever government is elected.

In this way Podemos aims to become a means of mobilising at the ballot box the potential power of a politically atomised movement that originally built itself under the slogan "united the people do not need parties".

## Responsible radicals

The rise of Podemos in the polls to highs of 27 per cent has been enthusiastically documented. Less enthusiastically documented, but no less important, are the political concessions that Podemos has made to try and maintain its position against the new right-populist rival Ciudadanos (Citizens), and to position itself as a responsible party of government.

In its economic programme drawn up in December by two professional economists – and not by the party's structures – Podemos abandoned many of the pledges that won it support in the EU elections. Since December it has jettisoned even more.

The proposal to reduce the retirement age to 60 has been replaced with a commitment to maintain it at 65, down from 67. The 35-hour working week is now described in the language of "changes" in the labour market to allow Spain to "better compete". The universal income policy has been replaced by state aid for "those in need", and the demand to nationalise the banks and utilities softened by a proposal to establish "public control" through "a majority stake". The abolition of private employment agencies has disappeared without a trace.

The flagship policy of a citizens' audit of the debt with the renunciation of the "illegitimate state debt" has been ditched in favour of the Syriza model of negotiations. In the words of party economists Vicenç Navarro and Juan Torres López, the new objective is "negotiating with the markets flexible payments of debt", "grace periods" and "partial 'haircuts'".

The leaders of Podemos think they will have more success than Syriza because, according to Iglesias, "Spain is not Greece. We are the fourth economic power of the EU, and our capacity for negotiation is greater."

In an interview on the American CNBC channel Iglesias explained that "We assume that the market economy is a reality", but that "it has its limits."

In his view, these "limits" could be overcome by "a patriotic government" that for example could say to the pharmaceutical companies that they cannot make profits "at the expense of people of my country dying".

Fine sentiments, but profiting at the expense of people's misery is the reality of a market economy, and rejecting the tools of radical economic and social reform that puts the working class in control of making their own economic reality is not going to change that.

In an interview with The Guardian's Giles Tremlett, Iglesias said that: "In the short term we are limited to using the state to redistribute a little more, have fairer taxes, boost the economy and

start building a model that recovers industry and brings back sovereignty. We accept that the euro is inescapable."

Podemos is able to get away with this backsliding because of an undemocratic leadership structure that guarantees tight control of the organisation by the clique around Iglesias and Monedero. The centrality of a caudillo-style leader, resting on a plebiscitary leadership election and appearing to stand above factional squabbles was emphasised in the European elections when, Iglesias' face was used to represent the party on the ballot paper.

When denouncing a rival proposal to institute a collective leadership against Iglesias' proposal to concentrate power in the hands of the general secretary (himself), he said "Heaven is not taken by consensus, but by storm."

## Caste or class?

Podemos claim their success is attributable to their rejection of the "old" symbols and language of the left, as in the Indignados slogan "We are neither right nor left, we are coming from the bottom and going for the top".

Confronted with criticism that Podemos does not propose an assault on the "heavens", Iglesias insists "The answer to that is: 'And where are your arms for getting rid of capitalism?'"

This rejection of the "language of the left" is a rejection of 150 years of experience and lessons learned the hard way: that society is divided into antagonistic classes, and that the state does not sit above them as a neutral set of institutions to be purged and used for the benefit of one or the other, but is in fact the honed mechanism of capitalist class rule. That today there are supranational and international institutions only makes the prosecution of the class struggle on the international plane more vital.

By trimming its programme to present themselves as responsible candidates for government, Podemos's leaders are cultivating irresponsible illusions.

Winning elections on the basis of a narrative that suits everyone in the end primarily suits the established "caste". The idea that the interests of workers and bosses can be squared by cooperation between "patriotic" capitalists and a government that rests on the working class is a populist dogma.

By not exposing which class has state power, they disarm the only other class that can remove that class from power. By not challenging the sacred rights of property and private profit they obscure the mechanism by which one class perpetuates its rule over the others. The workers of Bolivia, Ecuador and Venezuela know that "people's" or "popular" power is not the same as workers' power – a fact that the lessons of 1931-37 express perfectly well in Spain.

In using imagery designed to attract people disenchanted by the left, this populism abandons the struggle to revitalise, renew and reclaim the historic legacy of the international working class struggle for the overthrow of capitalism.

The problem of a populist rather than a class approach to dealing with the crisis of capitalism is exposed by Podemos's less than principled ap-

proach to the question of women's liberation. The 2014 European election manifesto gave prominence to the issue of abortion, but this has been deleted from the new manifesto.

Why? Polls show that the majority of Podemos's support comes from people disenfranchised with the political system, meaning that its leadership must tailor its programme to a voting base that is disconnected from the working class struggle for social emancipation. Abandoning the open and uncompromising defence of women's liberation for base political calculation is a damning indictment of populism as an obstacle to the struggle for social liberation.

## Conclusion

In Britain the Scottish National Party's populist adoption of "old Labour" policies and its presentation of the referendum on independence as a referendum on austerity, alongside the rise of the Greens in England and Plaid Cymru in Wales show that an anti-austerity message can win support, even when presented by parties outside of the labour movement.

But if we abandon the historic "language" and "symbols" of the left then we also abandon the analysis and the methods of struggle that these represent. And that means abandoning the most important struggle of all: the struggle for the working class to create for itself a political leadership that prosecutes the class struggle in the most uncompromising way.

We need a party that expresses the ability of the working class to take political responsibility for its historic struggle against capitalism.

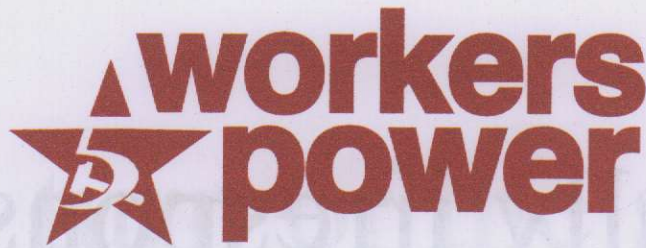
But as the example of Syriza shows, although the rise of new anti-austerity parties creates opportunities for the class struggle, their desire to pursue a capitalist route out of the crisis necessarily assigns a secondary role to the working class people whose support they rest on.

A breach in the austerity consensus opened up by these parties opens a small window of opportunity. It is the duty of socialists to warn of the limits of this breach, and to organise the most militant workers to take advantage of it, explaining that these parties' programmes will ultimately transform them into instruments for sealing off that same breach that their rise has opened.

The election of parties, however radical, that seek to "renegotiate" the terms on which capitalism's crisis is to be resolved carries great dangers. A party like Podemos that draws its support from a cross-class alliance might win elections, but it cannot maintain this alliance indefinitely.

When faced with intransigence from the capitalist class that exploits not only Greece and Spain but the whole world, Podemos will have to choose which class to obey. Iglesias and company's post-modern sneering at the very idea of attacking capitalism, and at the "old" language of class struggle indicate they have already made that choice. The new Podemos populism is but the old PSOE reformism writ large, but without even the link to the mass organisations of the working class movement. Workers, women and youth of Spain, beware. ●





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# Marxism and elections

A two-part history of how revolutionaries learned to use elections as a weapon against capital



DAVE STOCKTON

**T**o understand how classical Marxists developed their tactics towards elections, we need to understand their analysis of the class nature of the state and of its political forms and how these effect the working class struggle for power.

Marx and Engels in the Communist Manifesto, stated the goal of the working class very generally:

"The immediate aim of the Communists is the same as that of all other proletarian parties: formation of the proletariat into a class, overthrow of the bourgeois supremacy, conquest of political power by the proletariat." And:

"...the first step in the revolution by the working class is to raise the proletariat to the position of ruling class, to win the battle of democracy."

"Winning democracy", as Hal Draper pointed out in *The Adventures of the Communist Manifesto*, was no simple matter of winning elections but the revolutionary conquest of universal suffrage, the abolition of monarchies, aristocracies, police, military and bureaucratic states, etc.

As for existing parliaments Marx was, however, aware of the need to participate in elections no matter how unlikely they were to win seats in them:

"Even when there is no prospect whatsoever of their being elected, the workers must put up their own candidates in order to preserve their independence, to count their forces, and to bring before the public their revolutionary attitude and party standpoint."

At the end of the revolutionary period of 1848-51 and even more so during the Paris Commune of 1871, Marx developed a more radical view of seizing power:

"If you look at the last chapter of my Eighteenth Brumaire, you will find that I say that the next attempt of the French Revolution will be no longer, as before, to transfer the bureaucratic-military machine from one hand to another but to smash it..."

Engels in the *Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State* explained the bureaucratic machine as the inevitable consequence of a society split into social classes, into exploiters and exploited:

"This special, public power is necessary because a self-acting armed organisation of the population has become impossible since the split into classes... This public power exists in every state; it consists not merely of armed men but also of material adjuncts, prisons, and institutions of coercion of all kinds..."

Engels in 1875, when he asserted bluntly that the Paris Commune "was no longer a state in the proper sense of the word" because the working class was armed in the National Guard, the Commune acted both as legislature and executive, and the former state bureaucrats and church authorities had fled.

What Marx and Engels were discovering – learning from the revolutionary activities of the Paris workers themselves – was that the bourgeois state, the instrument of force that protected capitalist private ownership of the means of production, had to be demolished in the course of a revolution, and that elections to a National Assembly or parliament could never transfer real power to the exploited.



THE PARIS COMMUNE TAUGHT EARLY LESSONS ABOUT THE NATURE OF THE STATE

Moreover in order to enact and enforce a programme of transition from capitalism to a socialist society, a radically different type of democracy – a democracy of recallable delegates, non-permanent officials paid the wage of an average worker and a people's militia, not a standing army was required.

**The immediate aim of the Communists is the same as that of all other proletarian parties: formation of the proletariat into a class, overthrow of the bourgeois supremacy, conquest of political power by the proletariat.**

This unparalleled degree of democracy for the workers and poor farmers would at the same time have to be a dictatorship over the formerly ruling and exploiting classes. It would be, as both Marx and Engels said many times, the dictatorship of the proletariat.

However the great lessons of the Commune began to fade in the era of the Second International (1889-1914) as universal (male) suffrage was won in a number of European and North American states. But, despite the growth of mass workers' parties, most notably the German Social Democracy (SPD), rather than becoming immediately an instrument of class emancipation, parliamentarianism evolved into a means of "spiritual enslavement" of the lower middle class and sections of the working class too.

Later in 1919, in *Terrorism and Communism*, Trotsky well described this apparatus of ideological enslavement – putting the following words into the mouth of the bourgeoisie:

"While I have in my hands lands, factories, workshops, banks; while I possess newspapers, universities, schools; while – and this most important of all – I retain control of the army: the

apparatus of democracy, however, you reconstruct it, will remain obedient to my will. I subordinate to my interests spiritually the stupid, conservative, characterless lower middle class, just as it is subjected to me materially. I oppress, and will oppress, its imagination by the gigantic scale of my buildings, my transactions, my plans, and my crimes.

"For moments when it is dissatisfied and murmurs, I have created scores of safety-valves and lightning-conductors. At the right moment I will bring into existence opposition parties, which will disappear tomorrow, but which today accomplish their mission by affording the possibility of the lower middle class expressing their indignation without hurt therefrom for capitalism. I shall hold the masses of the people, under cover of compulsory general education, on the verge of complete ignorance, giving them no opportunity of rising above the level which my experts in spiritual slavery consider safe.

"I will corrupt, deceive, and terrorise the more privileged or the more backward of the proletariat itself. By means of these measures I shall not allow the vanguard of the working class to gain the ear of the majority of the working class, while the necessary weapons of mastery and terrorism remain in my hands."

In the years that followed the death of Marx (1883) and Engels (1895) a debate broke out amongst the followers of the two founders. This saw Karl Kautsky, the principle theoretician of the SPD, and Rosa Luxemburg ranged against Eduard Bernstein, who argued that once universal (male) suffrage had been won, as in Germany, socialism could be achieved on the road of a peaceful incremental reform, not by a revolution, that would destroy the state.

Bernstein, who lived in Britain for two decades, came under the influence of the Fabians, Sidney and Beatrice Webb and others, whose slogan was "the inevitability of gradualness". They argued that gradual series of reforms, won via parliament, local councils, cooperative stores and trade union collective bargaining, would inevitably replace capitalism with a socialised world.

But for this purpose it was enough to "per-

meate" existing bourgeois parties with socialist reforms (municipal housing, libraries, hospitals, state insurance, old age pensions, etc.). Logically they were at first opposed to the formation of an independent Labour Party.

These ideas logically led Bernstein to the view that the final goal (socialism) meant nothing whereas the movement (Social Democracy and the trade unions) was everything.

Rosa Luxemburg replied to this in her unsurpassed critique of such views, *Reform or Revolution*:

"People who pronounce themselves in favour of the method of legislative reform in place of and in contradistinction to the conquest of political power and social revolution do not really choose a more tranquil, calmer and slower road to the same goal, but a different goal. Instead of taking a stand for the establishment of a new society they take a stand for surface modification of the old society."

In the years 1899-1909 Karl Kautsky was at the height of his authority as "the Pope of Marxism", the champion of orthodoxy against revisionism. Indeed in the period of the 1905 revolution he found himself in close collaboration with Rosa Luxemburg, often supporting Lenin against the Mensheviks.

But by 1912 he had already begun his retreat, approaching Bernstein's views. He was now arguing that the proletariat could not set as its goal "the destruction of state power but only a shift in the relation of forces within state

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power".

He continued:

"The objective of our political struggle remains what it has always been up to now: the conquest of state power through the conquest of a majority in parliament and the elevation of parliament to a commanding position within the state. Certainly not the destruction of state power."

After the catastrophe of the outbreak of the First World War and the collapse of the Second International, Lenin re-excavated Marx's views on the state. Eventually published as *State and Revolution* after the Russian revolution, Lenin revived Marx's emphasis on the necessity of smashing the state:

"The words, 'to smash the bureaucratic-military machine', briefly express the principal lesson of Marxism regarding the tasks of the proletariat during a revolution in relation to state. And it is precisely this lesson that has been not only completely forgotten, but positively distorted by the prevailing, Kautskyite 'interpretation' of Marxism!"

As Lenin wrote "It is natural for a liberal to speak of 'democracy' in general; but a Marxist will never forget to ask: 'for what class?'"

To be continued next month ●