

The Line of March

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International Women's Day



A Celebration of Women's Organisation and Resistance

***Fight to Safeguard the Future of the NHS!
For an Alternative Direction for the Economy!
For an Anti-War Government!
No Sanctions! No to War Preparations!***

Contents

HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE BILL

The Fight that the Right to
Health Care Be Guaranteed Page 3

The Challenge that the Workers'
Opposition Faces to Safeguard the
Future of the NHS Page 4

BUILDING THE OPPOSITION TO THE ANTI-SOCIAL OFFENSIVE

The Budget Page 5

Militant Opposition to Public
Sector Spending Cuts Page 6

Gateshead Rally for the
Alternative Page 6

The Need for the Alternative... Page 7

WORKERS' MOVEMENT

TUC tells EU Governments, Jobs and
Justice, Not Austerity Page 7

Workers' Memorial Day and TUC
Day of Action Page 8

ANTI-WAR MOVEMENT

Stop the War Coalition National
Conference 2012 Page 8

Resolutions Page 9

FOR AN ANTI-WAR GOVERNMENT

The Coalition's Commitment to
Regime Change Is a Factor for
Instability and Loss of Life Page 10

Condemn the Continuing
Attempts at Regime Change
in Syria Page 11

COMMENTARY

Thinking About Pensions Page 12

The Effect of Quantitative
Easing on Pensions Page 13

INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY

Women's Leading Role in
Turning Things Around and
Planting the Alternative Page 14

INTERNATIONAL

To Launch a Satellite Is the
DPRK's Sovereign Right Page 15

CONCERT IN MEMORY OF JAMES ALLEN

The World As It Should Be Page 15

No Still Means No! The Fight that the Right to Health Care Be Guaranteed Continues!

Given the concentration of power in the hands of the executive of the Coalition government, and despite the overwhelming opposition of all sections of the people, the Health and Social Care Bill survived the last ditch manoeuvre of an emergency debate in the House of Commons. In the end, having been postponed with the government's "pause for thought" and being subjected to an extended Report stage in the House of Lords and not being further delayed by Lord Owen's contention that it should not be returned to the Commons until the government's risk assessment (the "transitional risk register") for the Bill was published, it was approved by the Commons with indecent haste. The procedure of "ping-pong" was not required as all the Lords amendments, including those supposedly with the Commons' financial privileges attached, were approved. These clearly did not affect the substance of the Bill. It is now to receive the Royal Assent in the next few weeks, and become law in this session of Parliament.

But this is far from the end of the story. The working class and people are not reconciled to the Bill and the struggle to prevent the NHS becoming totally controlled in the interests of the pharmaceutical and health care monopolies will continue. Furthermore, health workers and professionals are very bitter about the arbitrary arrogation of power by the Con-Dem government. This government has reasoned that without an effective parliamentary opposition and with a guarantee of being in power until May 2015, they can ride roughshod over the public good.

Speaking at the Nuffield Trust policy summit last month, health secretary Andrew Lansley had said that as the reforms took effect, NHS staff would realise the worst predictions made about the changes were bogus. This flies in the face of the stark reality. Nor was there any conviction in Lansley's reassurances. The fact is that the Coalition does not require the Bill to be received with any credibility by the electorate.

The Bill is outrageously without a mandate. In fact, the Conservatives fought the election with the promise to end top-down control of the health service. That has proved to be a flagrant lie. Their claim now that the Health Bill is in the public interests is equally outrageous, when it is clear that the health secretary and the government are relinquishing responsibility for the people's health care, and are taking the mantra of competition and the

**NHS Bill
passes:
Hold our
MPs to
account**



internal market to new heights.

Furthermore, the Conservatives fought the election with a promise that there would be no increase in the powers of EU legislation unless there were a referendum. With the provision of "any qualified provider" of health care, there are very serious questions about the Bill as to the impact on EU legislation and the extent to which the European Commission can impose decisions regarding the NHS in the interests of the European monopolies.

And, as is known, the provisions of the Bill have begun to be implemented well before there was a prospect of the Bill being passed. With the business model of the NHS in place, mergers of Foundation Trusts will become the norm, with those not considered economically viable going to the wall. Privatisation is already proving disastrous.

With the welfare of their patients and of a publicly provided health service at heart, health workers will feel the brunt of the cuts that are masquerading as "efficiency savings" amounting to £20bn. These "efficiency savings" amount to nothing more than service cuts and cuts in staff. Indeed, these cuts are set to be followed by a further £20bn-£30bn from 2015.

It is certain that the government's health care reforms will be opposed by health workers every step of the way. The opposition that they and the workers' movement have shown to the Bill all through its passage through Parliament will not disappear. It is the Workers' Opposition who must raise on its banner that healthcare is a right, and fight that this right receive a guarantee. The Workers' Opposition will also have to fight to defend all who do not take up as their own the Coalition's mission to privatise the health service and do the bidding of the monopolies.



Health and Social Care Bill: The Challenge that the Workers' Opposition Faces to Safeguard the Future of the NHS

The Health and Social Care Bill returns to the House of Commons from the Lords despite all attempts to delay it, attempts which reflect the people's opposition to its content. Once there, no parliamentary procedure is now going to stop it becoming law.

The government lost its attempt to keep secret a register of the risks attached to the legislation. However, the Coalition would not agree to its being published before the legislation is passed. At the Liberal Democrat spring conference, it was reported that a clear majority of the delegates refused to support the Bill. Yet Nick Clegg, deputy prime minister and heading this junior partner in the Coalition, pledged his support for the Bill. This is all in the face of the opposition from all sections of society to the Bill over one year of its passage through the Commons and the Lords. Also, more than 100,000 (now over 175,000) people had signed the e-petition calling for the Bill to be dropped which was supposed to entitle the signatories to have their petition debated by Parliament. But it was revealed that the cross-party Commons backbench business committee turned this down sometime at the end of February. The cross-party committee refused to allocate time for this debate.

These events show that the Coalition government had been intent on rail-roading through its Health Social and Care Bill. In so doing, it is abusing its position of political power, as though all that mattered was that it had managed to form a coalition that can command a parliamentary majority, and utilising the de facto position that no amount of debate in the Commons is going to give any effective opposition to its anti-social measures. It has resorted to the most despicable tactics in order to push through this Bill, which sets out to promote private interest over the public good, to assert monopoly right over public right, whatever the opposition of the people. If it had any shred of social responsibility, the government would have made use of its "pause for thought" to seriously take stock of the opposition of health workers, professionals, GPs and the working class and people as a whole. It would have reflected that what gives a government legitimacy is a mandate for its parliamentary programme and being accountable to the electorate. But it has been revealed as another manoeuvre to attempt to neutralise and deflect opposition to the Bill.

Instead, it is the Opposition that was forced to try and use tactics to put an end to the Bill which goes against all the people understand by a health service meeting the people's claims



on society and the understanding that health care is a right in a modern society. No amount of manoeuvres or eloquence was going to move the Coalition from its wrecking of this social programme and the public interest. In other words, this arbitrary power of the executive with which the Coalition is playing fast and loose is a reflection of monopoly dictate over the interests of society as a whole.

It is now being said in some circles that this was the last chance to save the NHS. But for the workers' movement it is a chance to sum up what has been achieved in developing this movement and organising it and what is what. Furthermore, the workers' movement is determined that the battle will continue. Most importantly, the question is what needs to be done in order to take this opposition forward and to build an even more powerful movement than before. The most important question is that this movement for the alternative over two years has shown that there is an alternative to this wrecking of the social economy and the public sector, that the Workers' Opposition can fight both as a movement and as worker politicians and put the alternative at the centre of the political life of the country.

Planting this alternative is the aim of the movement to safeguard the future of the NHS. It is not limited in any way to an outlook that accepts the right of the monopolies to dictate to society as they do now through an illegitimate government which has no mandate for this social wrecking.

The safeguarding of the future of the NHS is about building the resistance and organisation that undermines and overthrows the monopoly dictate in parliament and throughout society. The challenge that the Workers' Opposition takes up is for the prevalence of the alternative; that of public right over monopoly right in the political, ideological and economic life of the country.

Building the Opposition to the Anti-Social Offensive:

Budget Underlines Need for an Alternative Direction for the Economy

The Chancellor in his Budget speech of March 21 claimed that it was a reforming budget. By reform, he made clear that he meant changing the “model” of growth that contributes to the national debt while halving manufacturing.

This is sophistry, not to mince words. The government’s cuts and austerity measures are not intended to solve the problem of building a harmonious economy. Nor was the “doubling” (if we are to believe George Osborne) of the national debt caused by spending on social programmes or investing in the economy.

The economic crisis has not been caused by government’s putting more into the economy than is taken out, but the reverse. Neither is it a crisis of the working people’s own making. The Budget was a political Budget in that it sent a signal that the claims of the wealthy are considered a priority, and that it is the working class and people who must pay for the economic crisis.

Deficits have been run by governments to serve the financiers ever since the Bank of England was established in 1694. What is characteristic of the present economy is the extent and depth to which it is fundamentally geared to enriching the financial oligarchy. Whether it is bailing out the banks, establishing quantitative easing, handing over a significant share of the national wealth to the rich, privatising social programmes, the state Treasury is put in the service of paying the rich.

The main thrust of the Chancellor’s Budget was that the government should accept only the minimum responsibility for the public well-being. Government revenue at the disposal of public projects is to be reduced. The government’s rhetoric may be about “hard-working families”, but it is, to coin a phrase, the “idle rich” the Treasury is concerned with benefiting.

This, far from being a recipe for a harmonious growing economy serving society as a whole and the people’s needs, is a programme for taking more out of the economy and putting in less. This cannot but exacerbate the crisis.

It is the working class who are being made to pay, while cuts in corporation tax will further reduce the amount garnered by the public purse. The corporation tax cuts to 22% by 2014-15 will mean, it is reported, a reduction in revenue to the government by £405m in 2012-13 and £730m in 2013-14. There are to be further tax breaks in “enterprise zones”. In contrast, the higher tax-free allowance for pensioners will be frozen from April 6, 2013, at 2012-13 levels. It is estimated that this will claw back £1bn per annum from the elderly by 2015-16. This is headlined as reducing the burden of the elderly on the younger generation, but again is indicative of the government’s programme to put the priorities of the rich over the necessity to care for claims of society’s members.

Meanwhile, the Royal Mail pension scheme is to be transferred to government coffers with the aim of using the funds of £28 billion to pay down government debt. This is a direct appropriation of the future pension requirements of Royal Mail workers.

These measures show a profound contempt for working peo-



ple and the public good. They are consistent with the twin programme of “austerity” and privatisation that is so damaging to society. This programme of privatisation is further milking the wealth produced by workers in manufacturing, service and public sectors not least through payments to the rich of interest, fees and charges on capital, while a part of this wealth is retained by the rich also as profits.

It is a joke to speak of “pro-growth” policies in this context, when the programme of the ruling elite has caused such devastation to economic growth. It is a joke, when the banks, having exacerbated the crisis to a tipping point, were taken partly into ownership by the state in order, not to invest in the economy, but to rescue their programme of parasitism and the amassing of super-profits.

The government is so arrogant in declaring how this Budget has the goal of a tax system which is “more competitive for business than any other major economy in the world”. The Chancellor’s justifications for these measures do not disguise that they are carried out for the benefit of the most powerful private interests. The contempt shown for public interests is creating a profound crisis which is bound to deepen.

The Workers’ Opposition must resist being made to pay for this crisis with the perspective that an alternative direction for the economy is a necessity. The present direction which serves the rich is increasing the anarchy inherent in the capitalist economy. An alternative direction emphasises the necessity for a coherent economic plan putting the needs of the working class and people who create the national wealth at the centre of considerations. An alternative direction puts public right in the paramount position and restricts monopoly right.

Stop Paying the Rich!

Increase Investments in Social Programmes!

For an Alternative Direction for the Economy Serving the Public Good!

Build the Workers’ Opposition!

Militant Opposition to Public Sector Spending Cuts

On March 1, there was a rally at the town hall steps in South Shields against the next round of public sector spending cuts amounting to £20 million. Representatives of Unison and the GMB trade unions, and members of the Public Service Alliance, gathered on the steps of South Shields Town Hall to express their opposition to council jobs and service cuts. The speakers, Tina Roche, of the borough's Unison branch, Roger Nettleship, of Unison's health branch, and Alan Smith, of the National Union of Teachers, spoke on the impact of cuts.

The speakers pointed out that there is a systematic plan of the Coalition government to wreck public services alongside an already wrecked manufacturing base.

With the increasing economic crisis caused by the pay-the-rich system and when public services are needed the most, the government is turning back the clock on those vital services needed to maintain a civilised society.

More services are to be cut back at district general hospitals. This year it is planned to end long-term acute children's beds and move them from south Tyneside to Sunderland.

The government's Health and Social Care Bill, which has been receiving massive opposition, is turning every health service whether it be trauma care, elective surgery, medicine and community services into a marketable commodity where what they call "any qualified provider" can compete for business.

This is having the immediate effect that all health services, instead of being orientated to the needs of the patient and moulding healthcare to individual needs, are instead being turned into a rationed bite-size commodity following the "internal market" model of health care.



Instead of quality services being provided by the NHS, any "qualified provider" can bid for providing this bite-size health care and there will only be a "choice of services" until those services go to the wall. In other words, the choice that is being promoted by the Coalition is a sham. It is handing over control of the health service to private interests.

There is an alternative to cuts to the social economy, to public services and to welfare benefits. The alternative means re-directing the priority of the economy from serving the rich to investing in those who live and work in it. This is an alternative direction that not only stops paying the rich but changes the direction of the economy to one serving the people's needs with investment, not cuts, in social programmes.

Let us build the resistance and plant the alternative!

These are our jobs, our workplaces, our communities and our public services!

These services are not a drain on the economy as they keep trying to tell us.

It is the rich that are the drain on the economy!

Whose economy? Our economy!

Gateshead Rally for the Alternative

On Saturday, March 10, several hundred workers took part in a march from the Newcastle quayside across the Millennium Bridge to a rally outside of the Liberal Party Spring conference which was being held at the Sage Gateshead. The Northern Public Services Alliance called the Rally for the Alternative to build the opposition to Coalition government's anti-social austerity programme. These included the public spending cuts, privatisation of the NHS, tuition fees, the closure of Remploy factories and other attacks on the disabled and those on benefits all in favour of paying the rich. The rally declared "We say there is an alternative!"

The speakers called on the Lib Dems to hold Clegg to

account for his part in pushing through the Coalition agenda. The Remploy and other union representatives militantly called for stepping up the resistance also. Gateshead Unison health branch was one of the main union health branches participating in the rally.



The Need for the Alternative...

*The following article appeared in 5 News ,
Branch News of the Harrow East Constituency
Labour Party, Issue 1, March 2012*

On January 19, 2012, Branch 5 held a successful fundraising event at The Meeting Palace in Wealdstone. Following a delicious buffet, members, supporters and their guests listened to Dr Hakim Adi, writer and history lecturer at the University of Chichester, set the scene for a stimulating discussion:

- There is a Westminster consensus which advocates that the deficit must be cut. Health, education and other social programmes suffer as a result. Net effect is workers pay for problems they did not cause. There is a demand for an alternative as evidenced by the TUC March on March 26, 2011, and the November 30strike. The alternative is summed up in the slogan – ‘Stop Paying the Rich, Increase Investments in Social Programmes’

- There is a need for an anti war government.
- There is a need for democratic renewal. We need to reshape democracy for the 21st century instead of using a 17th century model.

Dr Hakim finished by stating: “history has shown everything changes and the people are the force which brings about that change.” Debate followed on what shape the alternative could take. Issues as far ranging as Zimbabwe, Palestine, Israel, Sri Lanka and the Tamil issue, Libya, Iraq and the question of intervention were discussed. The alternative described challenged the status quo. The thought of change was uncomfortable for some. Dr Hakim challenged us to think differently about how politics should be organised: “We therefore have the responsibility to organise to bring about this change – we need to become the decision makers, build an economy which favours the interests of the majority, not the rich. We need to build a country which is a factor for peace and stability in the world” In response to questions, Dr Hakim said: “The alternative would also require a modern constitution, discussed and decided on by all, which is based on the principle that people have claims on society, by dint of being human, rights that must be guaranteed, so that government is responsible for providing for these ever-increasing needs. In short the people not parliament must be sovereign and new mechanisms must be established to bring this about.” The thought of a new way of doing things and the responsibility we each would have to take, was difficult to accept as a proposition and the exchanges reflected this. Worth remembering Gloria Steinem : “Power is not given, it is taken and the process of taking is empowerment itself”. Frederick Douglass put it slightly differently: “Power concedes nothing without a demand; it never has and never will.” This event highlights the importance of making space for political debate and encouraging discussion with people who do not normally engage politically. It’s good to talk!

WORKERS' MOVEMENT:

TUC tells EU Governments, jobs and justice, not austerity



Billy Hayes, TUC General Council spokesperson on Europe, today hand delivered a letter calling for jobs and justice, not the new European austerity treaty, to three London Embassies. The main countries pushing for the treaty, which would force Governments to slash services to meet new public sector deficit rules, and would prevent countries implementing the policies needed to avoid or escape recession, are France and Germany.

So Billy took French trade unionist Didier Hotte from FO (in the hat) to the Knightsbridge Embassy of France, and ETUC confederal secretary Claudia Menne, previously at the German TUC, to the German Embassy off Belgrave Square. Then, in solidarity with the people of Greece who are suffering most from EU-wide austerity policies, we called on their Embassy in Holland Park.

The message Billy delivered, which was emailed to all Embassies and High Commissions for the 25 countries still negotiating the treaty by thousands of trade unionists through our e-action, was echoed around Europe by trade unionists taking part in the ETUC Day of Action. And TUC General Secretary Brendan Barber took the message to Brussels when he met with Commission President Barroso and European Council President van Rompuy on Tuesday evening and Wednesday morning respectively.

And we made no jokes about Billy – General Secretary of the CWU and a former postman himself - threatening to do his members out of a job. After all, he only managed to deliver three letters all day!

Workers' Memorial Day and TUC Day of Action to defend health and safety - 28 April 2012

The purpose behind Workers' Memorial Day has always been to "remember the dead: fight for the living" and unions are asked to focus on both areas, by considering events or memorial to remember all those killed through work but at the same time ensuring that such tragedies are not repeated. That can best be done by building trade union organisation, and campaigning for stricter enforcement with higher penalties for breaches of health & safety laws.

Workers Memorial Day is commemorated throughout the world and is officially recognised by the UK Government.

This year the TUC is calling on health and safety representatives, trades councils and safety campaigners to make 28th April a day of action to defend health and safety from the attacks on regulation, enforcement, cuts and refusal to tackle the massive toll that health and safety breaches take on workers. Our health and our safety is under attack like never before and we must defend it, for our sake and that of future generations.

For more information, see: <http://www.tuc.org.uk/workplace/index.cfm?mins=180&minors=124&majorsubjectid=2>

along with a common experience and common aims. What was most characteristic of the conference was the unity around the conviction that the sanctions, military threats and propaganda and the overt and covert operations were in fact acts of war preparations and regime change and not an alternative to war.

In other words, the overwhelming sentiment of the conference was to focus on the politics of the anti-war movement in opposition to the politics of the pro-war Westminster consensus. This was reflected in many contributions to the conference and will be a guideline for its renewed work. Paramount is the work to give coherence to the anti-war struggle and strengthen its character of being the basis for the work to bring into being an anti-war government.

Given this, it seemed quite out of place for certain hoodlum elements to engage in philistine and disruptive activity aimed at creating divisions and raising hysteria under the guise of taking a stand. Everyone knows that what is needed is calm consideration of what is what in order to facilitate discussion, and that it is this way of working that is in step with the times and assists in empowering people to take a stand.

The conference motions that were passed and the main content of the speeches given responded to the fact that Iran and Syria are one of the main focuses of the pro-war agenda of interference and aggression in furtherance of geo-political and imperialist aims.

The resolution from the South Tyneside Stop the War Coalition, "No Sanctions! No to War Preparations! Hands off Syria and Iran!" passed unanimously, focused on recognising that sanctions are a preparation for military action (and a form of covert war), not an alternative to military action, in Iran and Syria. The motion called for hands off Syria and Iran and firmly condemned the sanctions and covert operations and open operations against Syria and Iran as not an alternative to war but as preparations for regime change and war.

That such a warmongering economic and military blockade is being pursued and that such hostile disinformation and militarist propaganda is being broadcast by the US, Israel, the UK and EU powers against Iran is itself an act of war and a crime against peace. The motion called on the Stop the War Coalition to bring the British government to account for its part in these crimes against humanity.

In moving the motion, the proposer pointed out that since the motion was drafted, the Anglo-US powers had held a so-called "Friends of Syria" Conference in Tunisia. This was a conference without the Syrian government and supported the armed opposition which the US and Britain are actively organising as they did in Libya. By doing so, they are trying to stop the Syrian people themselves solving the question of what type of government Syria has, as is their right. Britain is part of the alliance which is preparing to get around the opposition of China and Russia by fostering even more confusion about creating "humanitarian corridors". The Stop the War Coalition, the proposer said, calling on conference to support the motion, must continue with its stand as we are doing today and not let our people be fooled in the way this happened with Libya.

The afternoon focused on the campaigning priorities of the Coalition and building local groups. The resolution from the Stop the War Coalition officers' group spoke of the necessity to step up the tempo, scale and imagination of the work, and to rebuild or set up new local groups.

ANTI-WAR MOVEMENT:

Stop the War Coalition National Conference 2012

More than 250 delegates and activists attended the annual Stop the War Coalition conference in London on Saturday, March 3. It was characterised by both maturity and the mobilisation of new forces.

The conference passed 13 resolutions and elected the national steering committee. The closing speech was given by Vice President of the Coalition, George Galloway.

There were not a few motions condemning the Anglo-US interference and actions against Syria and Iran. This was the conference's strength in that so many of the organised groups came

Resolutions

The main motion and the South Tyneside motion passed at Stop the War Coalition's Annual National Conference



Stop the War Coalition Officer's Group: Motion: The continued threat of war

Conference notes:

1. The continuation of the war on terror, and its extension from the original wars and occupations in Iraq and Afghanistan.
2. The disastrous NATO intervention in Libya last year, which effected regime change and was used to try to rehabilitate the doctrine of 'humanitarian intervention' discredited after the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq.
3. The renewed threat of Western military intervention in Syria and Iran.

Conference believes:

1. That any attack on Iran's nuclear facilities will open a new and even more dangerous period of warfare and instability.
2. That any military intervention in Syria will not be for humanitarian reasons but to prepare an attack on Iran by weakening one of its regional allies and cause greater suffering than Syrians are currently enduring.

Conference resolves:

1. To mount a major campaign around the slogan Don't Attack Iran.
2. To campaign to halt any attempted military intervention in Syria.
3. To oppose all Western intervention in the Middle East, and to defend the right of all the people of the Middle East to determine their own future.

South Tyneside Stop the War Coalition: Motion: No Sanctions. No to War Preparations. Hands off Syria and Iran.

Conference notes:

1. Recognising that the sanctions imposed by US, Israel, the UK and EU powers on Syria have the aim of supporting the armed opposition and not the right to self-determination of the Syrian people.
2. Recognising that the same powers are imposing sanctions on Iran that are in fact an economic blockade of Iran's trade and banking. At the same time surrounding Iran with military hardware and trying to force other nations to isolate Iran.

Conference believes:

1. Recognising that these measures have nothing to do with support for the people in Syria and Iran. But like the sanctions against Iraq they are aimed at preparing for an attack on these sovereign countries. These measures are not an alternative to war but are war preparations.
2. Recognising that these powers are also openly doing propaganda for war against Iran with their statements that all options are available to them.

Conference resolves:

1. Conference calls on the stop the war coalition to call for hands off Syria and hands off Iran.
2. To condemn the sanctions against Syria and Iran as preparations for regime change and war. That such a warmongering economic and military blockade is being pursued and that such hostile misinformation and militarist propaganda is being broadcast by the US, Israel, the UK and EU powers against Iran is an act of war and is a crime against peace.
3. Conference calls on the Stop the War Coalition to bring the British government to account for its part in these crimes against humanity.

<http://stopwar.org.uk/index.php/resources/stop-the-war-coalition-statements/1200-stop-the-war-coalition-conference-resolutions-2012>

FOR AN ANTI-WAR GOVERNMENT:

The Coalition's Commitment to Regime Change Is a Factor for Instability and Loss of Life

The deaths of six more British soldiers in Afghanistan last month was the occasion for a renewed commitment by the main Westminster political parties to the continued military occupation of that country. Indeed the Prime Minister, David Cameron, went so far as to claim that military occupation was successfully leading towards the government's declared aim of bringing stability to Afghanistan and allegedly safeguarding Britain's security. He reiterated the Coalition government's position that the bulk of British troops would pull out in 2014 but added that British governments would continue to interfere in Afghanistan's internal affairs for the foreseeable future. The Coalition's position amounts to a declaration that more crimes must be committed, more lives must be lost, military and other forms of intervention must be continued, and that warmongering and destabilisation of entire regions of the world will remain the preferred policy.

David Cameron also gave evidence regarding the government's warmongering approach to Iran and Syria to the Liaison Committee of the House of Commons, a committee that comprises the chairs of parliamentary Select Committees, who are all representatives of the three main political parties. It was sometimes difficult to believe that sovereign countries were under discussion such as the colonialist nature of the questions put to the Prime Minister, as well as his answers. The discussion was never about whether it was appropriate for a British government to intervene in these two countries, only about what kind of intervention should occur and, in the case of Iran, how soon military intervention, or what was referred to as a military strike should take place.

In regard to Syria, for example, the Prime Minister made it clear that "Britain is not going to give up what we believe is right for Syria", by which he meant regime change or as Cameron put it "we want to see a transition that means that Assad has got to go". For the Prime Minister, "transition at the top" is preferable to "a revolution from the bottom" and he even began to outline what kind of political system his government wished to see in Syria. He admitted that even if the violence in Syria ceased, the Assad government still had to go. He was equally candid about the level of support currently being provided to those rebelling against the government of Syria and made it clear that even military support might be made available in the future if the Arab

League established a more openly interventionist role. In short, the Prime Minister outlined a strategy that could be summed up as preparing the conditions for regime change and more open military intervention both through the UN and by strengthening the Syrian National Council. It is clear that at this stage the government is hoping that a new UN resolution might be agreed that would allow some form of allegedly "humanitarian" intervention in Syria that would be backed by military force.



Protest Against Foreign Intervention in Syria

The Prime Minister also reiterated the Coalition's warmongering policy towards Iran. A policy of economic warfare and other forms of bullying backed up by the threat of a military strike which, as the Prime Minister admitted, has already been openly discussed by the US imperialist and Zionist Israel and was an approach with which his government concurred.

The discussions that take place in Parliament about armed and other forms of intervention in other sovereign states and which openly discuss invasions and "military" strikes against other countries must be condemned and in themselves can be considered crimes against the peace. Rather than upholding international law and maintaining peace and stability the Coalition is acting to plan and incite regional wars and instability which serve the geo-political and other interests of the big monopolies, especially their striving for control of scarce resources and domination of west and central Asia. Far from being in the interests of Britain's security as the warmongers claim, their plans create great dangers for the people of all countries. In these circumstances the anti-war movement must step up its activities, expose the criminal activity of the warmongers and organise so that an anti-war government can be established.

Condemn the Continuing Attempts at Regime Change in Syria

William Hague, the Foreign Secretary, expressed his support for a new round of sanctions launched by the EU against the government of Syria earlier this week. Although the British government has called for all violence to cease in what amounts to a civil war in parts of Syria, it is continuing to attack the Syrian government while increasing its support for those who have taken up arms against it. Acting in this way Britain and its allies in the EU, the NATO and elsewhere are openly flouting international law and the UN Charter. As was the case in regard to Libya, the UN organisation is itself being used as a means to flout the principles for which it was established.

The latest and twelfth round of EU sanctions aims to freeze the assets of the Central Bank of Syria and deny the Syrian government access to the gold and precious metals markets. The EU has also banned cargo flights by Syria's national airline and added to existed sanctions, which target particular members of the Syrian government and other sectors of the Syrian economy. These sanctions constitute an act of aggression against a sovereign country with the stated aim of imposing a stranglehold and bringing about regime change, or what the Foreign Secretary refers to as "a peaceful and more open political system".

Syria's ambassador to the UN condemned the sanctions. He pointed out, "Unjust and unilateral sanctions imposed by some countries on the Syrian people are preventing access to medicines, to fuel in all forms as well as electricity, and are also impeding bank transfers to buy these materials." He added, "We reaffirm to all those alleged friends of the Syrian people that the simple step to immediately help the Syrian people is to stop inciting sectarianism, providing arms and weapons and funding and putting the Syrian people one against the other."

But the British government and its allies who attended the so-called "Friends of Syria" conference are intent on continuing to create instability in Syria with their intelligence agencies and special forces while weeping crocodile tears about the consequences of their action as they did in Libya. The British government has recognised the opposition Syrian National Council as a "legitimate representative of the Syrian people" and Hague has once again reiterated his government's intention of trying to unite, organise and support all those opposed to the Syrian government. Indeed, he lamented the fact that this opposition was not yet in control of any Syrian territory, which was as he put it "a different situation to that we faced last year in Libya". Nevertheless, Hague was confident that with the appropriate support the opposition could make progress. The new economic sanctions are therefore designed not only to weaken the government of Syria but also to create such conditions of instability within the country that will aid the armed opposition groups.



Mass Rally in Damascus to Support Referendum

Hague's statements are evidence of the levels of incitement and organisation being unleashed against a sovereign country and its government, which the Foreign Secretary has already arrogantly declared is "doomed".

News agencies report that over eight million people, nearly 60% of those eligible, voted in the referendum recently held by the government of Syria to decide the future constitution of the country. According to the figures released, over 89% of votes were cast in favour of a new constitution that will end the political domination of the Ba'ath Party in the country and usher in other political reforms. The referendum results were welcomed by the Foreign Minister of Russia, who suggested that they showed the limited influence of the opposition groups, which called for a boycott of the referendum, and called in to question their right to be considered representative of the people of Syria. The results of the referendum, which were also welcomed by the Foreign Ministry of China, are expected to lead to new elections in three months time.

But although the governments of Britain, the US and other countries claim to be those most concerned about the Syrian people deciding their own future and the need for a "Syrian-led political transition", William Hague was scathing in his remarks about the referendum and similar derogatory remarks were made by the representatives of the US government. Far from acknowledging the decisions that appear to have been taken by the majority of the electorate in Syria, the British government and its allies continue to intervene in Syria to incite mutiny and to encourage an armed rebellion to topple the Syrian government. The British government has continued to threaten that those Syrians who oppose its objective of regime change will be held to account. Such an arrogant warmongering approach must be condemned and the anti-war movement must step up its activities in order to hold the warmongers and those who plan crimes against peace to account. This is a matter of principle.

COMMENTARY:

Thinking About Pensions

First published by K.C. Adams

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Pensions are a modern feature of life. They arose as a necessity because of changes in the economic base and the relations among people during the last four hundred years.

The transformation of the economy from petty production to industrial mass production precipitated changes in the objective and subjective conditions beyond the control of any individual. Industrial mass production gradually transformed a mostly rural setting of extended families engaged in subsistence agriculture and other petty production and created a modern urban life of small interconnected families within an extended society consisting of a socialized economy, public education, science, information, public health, mass culture and forms of general welfare.

The many small families of today, some consisting of but mother and child or even single individuals, are joined together in society. Society has become the modern extended family and people are born to that extended family -- society.

The previous subjective outlook reflected the objective conditions of a mostly rural life within a self-sustaining extended family that cared for its members as best it could. The watchword was one for all and all for one within the extended family. The bond of the extended family was nurtured in culture, religion, tradition and fixed in class privilege and rank. Family property, especially productive property such as farmland whether owned or held as a communal or feudal right, and the right of membership in guilds, manors, clans and villages was fiercely guarded and passed on to young family members as the material guarantor of their individual and collective welfare. The old outlook was founded on class privilege and rank, and the belief that the world and social relations were static and ordained by a supreme being and any change contradicted the natural order.

Changed Objective Conditions

The new objective conditions of today demand a modern outlook of members of society that rejects the old one based on class privilege and rank. The objective basis and practices of extended families no longer exist except in the wealthiest families that own social property but soon they too fall apart as inheritance and infighting divides social property, and bankruptcy consolidates ownership of social property in fewer hands.

Most people must sell their capacity to work to gain a living. Inheriting the capacity to work is very different from inheriting a small farm or rank in a protected guild. Successive generations of workers inherit the capacity to work and a claim on the value they produce but not ownership and control of the socialized means of production. Workers depend on a claim on the wealth they produce or service they provide, which in turn is only guaranteed by their capacity to work and whether they can sell that capacity or not. The modern world is fraught with insecurity and crises because the actual producers do not own or control their

means of production. When not working for whatever reason, workers must depend as best they can on the wealth generated by other workers and distributed through social programs, but at this time, that dependency lies beyond their control because they do not control the socialized means of production and the general economic and political affairs of the country.

The wealth workers create through work to transform the bounty of Mother Nature into use-value is claimed partly by workers who are the actual producers, partly by governments and partly by the small number of owners of parts of the socialized productive forces.

The means of production and means of providing services cannot be inherited by the offspring of the actual producers for modern workers only possess their capacity to work, which they sell to earn a living. When workers lose their capacity to work through accident, illness or old-age or when owners of capital refuse to buy their capacity to work for whatever reason and workers' capacity to work languishes unsold on the labour market, they must rely on society to guarantee their welfare, for society is the new extended family of the modern world.

Subjective Outlook Lags Behind the Objective Changes

The changes in the objective conditions from petty production to industrial mass production necessitate a change in the subjective outlook guiding society. The changed conditions should move humanity towards a broader outlook of personal and social welfare resting in the bosom of society. One for all and all for one no longer resides in the extended family but in the broader family of society. Concern for the well-being of all humanity and society itself is paramount for the well-being of each individual. Harmonizing the relations among individuals and between individuals and their collectives and society itself should guide activity.

The well-being of one and all is found in nurturing and developing the human factor/social consciousness and treasuring the collective public property, the socialized means of production and means of providing services. An outlook that reflects the changed conditions would assert the social and political responsibility to defend the security and rights of every individual and the general interests of society into which all are born. This demands as well that the socialized means of production and means of providing services are passed to the next generation of workers in better condition than when they were handed over to the current generation. The rejection of class privilege and the demand for control and inheritance of social property by the actual producers are paramount to a new outlook in conformity with the changed conditions. Guided by a modern outlook, working people can build a society of socialized humanity fit for human beings in which the rights of all are recognized and guaranteed. The right to a decent standard pension equivalent to a standard while working is one of those modern rights.



The Effect of Quantitative Easing on Pensions

In February, the Bank of England expanded its programme of quantitative easing – the arbitrary creation of money via the buying of debt, in particular government bonds – by £50bn, the latest increase in its second round of the programme being carried out over the past six months. This adds to the earlier round begun in 2009 of £200bn, bringing the total to an eventual £325bn.

This expansion comes at a time when quantitative easing has been blamed for a drop in the value of pension funds. The National Association of Pension Funds (NAPF) claims that £90bn has been wiped off the value of final-salary pension schemes.

The Bank argues that its buying of debt results in lowering medium to long-term interest rates through various knock-on effects, reducing the cost for businesses to borrow. Meanwhile the holders of bonds – pension funds, for example – can sell them at profit in the short term while their prices are rising and get richer. This trickle-down “wealth effect” of enriching the rich is supposed to help us all as their confidence to spend and invest rises.

However, in direct contradiction with this claim comes the warning made by NAPF that quantitative easing is eroding the value of pension funds.

Pension funds, which require low risk investments, are a major holder of British government debt, particularly gilts. The quarterly review published by the Debt Management Office in December 2011 shows 27% of gilts (£317bn out of £1.15tn) are held by insurance companies and pension funds. They are consequently especially exposed to changes in the price and rate of return of government debt.

NAPF argues that the effect of quantitative easing – a rise in price and lowering of return on government debt – has made pensions more expensive to fund and increased their deficits. Yields on long-term debt now stand at record lows.

NAPF estimates that the first round of quantitative easing pushed gilt yields down by around 1%, which increased the cost of funding British final-salary pension schemes by about £180bn. It estimates further that the latest round has added a further £90bn to that cost over the past six months, coming to a total of £270bn.

This increased “funding cost” is equated with a drop in the “value” of pension funds: from the capital-centred perspective that views pensions as an investment fund, the value of a pension fund is associated with the rate of return on investments bought with that fund.

Furthermore, this lowering of rates of return has pushed pension funds into a large deficit position.

Official figures compiled by the Pension Protection Fund show how final salary schemes moved from a collective position of £46bn surplus in January 2011 to a deficit of nearly £266bn

in January 2012. The difference of more than £300bn is comparable to the reduction in value quoted above. Over that year, the number of such schemes went down from 6,560 to 6,432.

“Firms are legally obliged to fill the deficits, and that diverts money away from jobs and investment, and will lead to further closures of final salary pensions in the private sector,” said NAPF chief executive Joanne Segars.

The evidence and the arguments made by NAPF are almost exactly the opposite of those made by the Bank in support of quantitative easing. At the very least, this exposes the lack of any sound theory underlying the arbitrary and pragmatic decisions made regarding the economy.



It further exposes how retired workers are paying for quantitative easing. The approximately £300bn of this “money-printing” has resulted in a similar sized reduction in the value of pensions and increase in their deficit. This is translating into lower annuities. According to NAPF figures, a worker retiring with a £26,000 pension will receive £1,320 per year, which is £440 less than what that person would have received on

retiring four years ago. There were 18 annuity rate cuts and just two rate rises in the wake of first round of quantitative easing.

In February, Bank of England deputy Governor Charlie Bean tried to cover over the effect of quantitative easing on pensions.

“Someone with a £100,000 pension pot, who could have expected that to yield an annual pension of a little under £7,000 three years ago, would now get just under £6,000. That is a rather substantial income loss. But it is only part of the story,” he said.

“Those pension funds will typically have been invested in a mix of bonds and equities. The rise in asset prices as a result of QE also raises the value of the pension pot, providing an offset to the fall in annuity rates.”

He clearly does not believe his own propaganda, however, admitting that there are “unwanted side-effects” and that “the immediate consequences may be unpalatable”. His only resort was to arrogantly declare that pensioners should not expect to avoid the burden of the crisis shared by “savers, businesses and employees alike”.

No, we are not “in it together”! Not only do these figures graphically show where much of the wealth behind the money created to pay the rich is coming from – in this case, a reduced claim of the retired on the economy – it also exposes the system of pensions being an individual matter of saving. Pensions should not be investment funds provided by employers, financial monopolies or any other institution. Instead, pensions are a right. As a right, pensions should not be subject to markets. They are a claim on the social product by retired workers, not instruments of investment.

INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY:

Women's Leading Role in Turning Things Around and Planting the Alternative

The theme, as the Party celebrated International Women's Day 2012 on March 8, was that women are in the front ranks of the fight for the alternative in every battle taking place across the country. In discussions organised by collectives of RCPB(ML), it was affirmed that women are defending public right over monopoly right, defending social programmes and public services, defending the rights of all and standing against intervention and war and represent the very best to which the British working class and people have given rise to. Similarly, women all over the world are in the forefront of the fight to provide a way forward for themselves, their families and peoples. Their role in the fields of political, economic, cultural and social rights, and against imperialist war is crucial to turn things around.

Across Britain, women's opposition to the neo-liberal anti-social offensive is part and parcel of the working class movement which is developing its own independent politics so as to resolve the crisis in a manner which favours the interests of the society, not the rich.

In the battles against the attacks on the working people, the women have stood second to none. Through their conscious participation in fighting for the alternative women are learning what more has to be done to turn the situation around in favour of the working class and people.

Women have been in the forefront of the fight against the Health and Social Care Bill which has exposed the reckless aim of the government to impose monopoly right over public right through this Bill. The government has been isolated to the extent that whatever its manoeuvre it continues to face the wrath of the people, with women at the forefront, to drop this Bill.

On the issue of pensions, it has been proposed that pensions be calculated on an average salary basis measured over a worker's entire working life. This means that women taking time out from their jobs to have children earn far less over a life time and will be, as a consequence, materially worse off in their old age. Women are taking the centre stage and taking a very strong stand against these measures on the basis that all human beings must be guaranteed a decent pension in their old age.

In Scotland, Wales and Ireland, women are in the forefront of the struggle of the people to be allowed to determine their own future. The struggle of the Irish people to unite their country and end British colonial rule, the present struggle for the sovereignty of Scotland are all part of the alternative for which the working class is fighting.

In the anti-war movement, the women stand in the forefront of opposing the war preparations and acts of aggression and intervention against Syria and Iran which are disguised as "sanctions" and "humanitarian aid". They continue the fight to withdraw from Afghanistan and the fight for an anti-war government

in Britain.

In the course of the discussions, it was raised that only when confronted by a conscious, organised and determined Workers' Opposition can the global monopolies, the Con-Dem government and other levels of government be held to account. The women are part of the Britain-wide Workers' Opposition to build the resistance and plant the alternative.

The issue had been raised as comrades and friends got together to celebrate the New Year that the question of the mobilisation of women, of ending the discrimination against them, is inseparably connected with the fight for the alternative and strategically with the emancipation of the working class. It was with this consciousness that the women organised in RCPB(ML)



Millennium Bridge, March 8

took on the task of preparing for International Women's Day. The quality of the discussions for March 8 showed the way forward in taking this task to heart. The Party discussions recognised that the challenge for the coming year is that women bring the full weight of their numbers, determination and social consciousness into the class battle so as to be effective in challenging the dictate of the monopolies and of the government acting

in their service. The discussions appraised highly all women fighting for emancipation on the world scale and hailed the increasing participation of women in political affairs.

As always, it was pointed out in the discussions, RCPB(ML) is giving the call for advanced women workers to join the Party. Along with all their fellow-workers, they are seeking the answer to the question of what kind of Party. This is a burning question for the communist and workers' movement, and it becomes ever more crucial as the crisis of working class representation deepens and the call for the democratic renewal of the political process and institutions is rallying the advanced forces to its side. In this too, the women are militating second to none.

As the producers of the wealth society depends on and as those who bring into being and raise the next generation of society, women stake their claim on the wealth they produce and demand it be used to fund the social programmes which are required to provide the rights of all with a guarantee. This includes the right to health care, the care and security of pensioners, childcare, education and recreation for children and youth, and all the things human beings require to flourish.

Women's leading role in all the struggles taking place today is part of a continuous line of march of women's conscious participation in all the important battles since the first International Women's Day in 1911. As women celebrate International Women's Day 2012 they affirm this essence of the day as a celebration of women's organisation and resistance as a contingent in the fight for a society of socialised humanity in which the rights of all are recognised and guaranteed.

INTERNATIONAL:

To Launch a Satellite is the DPRK's Sovereign Right

According to reports in the Korean news agency, KCNA, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) is to launch a working satellite, Kwangmyongsong-3. The announcement of the launch was made on March 16 by a spokesman for the Korean Committee for Space Technology. The satellite has been manufactured by the DPRK itself through its own efforts with indigenous technology to mark the 100th anniversary of the birth of President Kim Il Sung.

After successfully launching two experimental satellites, DPRK scientists and technicians have steadily been conducting scientific research to develop and utilise working satellites indispensable for the country's economic development in line with the government's policy for space development and peaceful use.

Kwangmyongsong-3, a polar-orbiting earth observation satellite, will be launched southward from the Sohae Satellite Launching Station in Cholsan County, North Phyongan Province, between April 12 and 16, lifted by a carrier rocket Unha-3.

A flight orbit has been chosen so that any carrier rocket debris generated during the flight would have not have any impact on neighbouring countries.

The DPRK has said that it will strictly abide by the relevant international regulations and usage concerning the launch of scientific and technological satellites for peaceful purposes. It will ensure maximum transparency, and thereby contribute to promoting international trust and co-operation in the field of space scientific research and satellite launches.

Some hostile forces, including the US, Japan and south Korea, have claimed that it will be a "missile launch", "a serious provocative act of threatening the peace and stability in the Korean Peninsula and Northeast Asia" and "a violation of the UNSC resolution".

However, the DPRK's sovereign right to use space for peaceful purposes cannot be denied. The peaceful development and use of space is a universally recognised legitimate right of a sovereign state. Launching a satellite for scientific research into the peaceful development and use of space and economic development

cannot be a monopoly of any country, and many countries and regions of the world are engaged on such research. The DPRK's satellite launch is a matter pertaining to the sovereignty of a sovereign state.

In fact, the DPRK has sent the necessary information to relevant international bodies according to international regulations and procedures and expressed its desire to invite experts and journalists of other countries to view the launching station. Hostile propaganda will not cause it to cancel the launch.

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