

The Line of March

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Hands Off Syria! No to Imperialist Intervention! No to NATO! Fight for the Alternative! Fight for a Bright Future!

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THE COALITION'S AGENDA FOR THE NEXT PARLIAMENTARY SESSION

A Refusal to Address the Problems of the Polity

The Queen's Speech of May 9 showed a deep-seated contempt for the problems facing the polity and the all-round crises facing society.

This coming session of Parliament covers the year until May 2013. It follows the extremely long parliamentary session since the Coalition assumed power.

During this time, the Coalition has attempted to remove itself from accountability to the electorate through the Fixed-Term Parliaments Act. It has pushed through an agenda of capital-centred measures aimed at ensuring the interests of the monopolies are held sacrosanct. In this period, the watchword of the working class and people has become, There Is An Alternative! However, the present legislative programme shows no indication that the Coalition has acknowledged that this banner has been raised.

It follows that the movement to build the Workers' Opposition to the Coalition's agenda must be intensified. The government is not even recognising that the interests of society are paramount, and continued to ignore the problems of the polity. Instead there is an emphasis on the interests of business, on attacking social programmes and unloading all the burdens of the crisis onto the people. This is the context of the 2012-13 legislative programme.

It is worth remembering that the Coalition's first legislative programme was based on the notion of "freedom, fairness and responsibility" because this programme has exposed in very practical terms what these notions represented. "Freedom" has meant the dismantling of public services and social programmes. "Fairness" has meant that "we are all in this together" and therefore the working class and people must continue to shoulder the burden of society paying the rich. "Responsibility" has meant that there would be no alternative to "austerity" measures, cuts to social programmes and "reducing the deficit".

The programme has been anti-worker, anti-social, as well as pro-war. The agenda of the coming programme is based on taking this programme further and consolidating it. The Queen's Speech defined it as being based on "economic growth, justice and constitutional reform". Taken at face value, these words do represent fundamental issues which require addressing in society. A new direction for the economy is necessary, the rights of the people need to receive a legal guarantee and a constitution to vest sovereignty in the people and enshrine their rights is urgently required. These are some of the most fundamental problems facing the polity. But, although it is shocking, it is no surprise



that the Coalition's programme will intensify the agenda that is been causing havoc in these crucial fronts in society.

The programme goes in the opposite direction to what the alternative demands. The attack on the rights of the working people will not provide economic growth, but on the contrary will further wreck the economy. It is capital-centred irrationality. Similarly with the attacks on pension rights, and the further dismantling of public services. The programme to attack the conception of public services and the demand that the individual must fend for themselves is unacceptable, and will not be accepted. The government is also caught with its programme of constitutional reform, which is aimed at furthering the arbitrary power of the executive under the guise of democratisation.

As the 2012-13 parliamentary session gets underway, it is essential that the working class and people get further organised in order to discuss the alternative, a different direction for the economy and society, and go further into the opposing outlooks which are contending in society. This goes hand in hand with getting further organised in order to develop ways of resisting the Coalition's programme which is causing such damage to society. The Queen's Speech has confirmed that the government is determined to avoid accountability for the fate of society and is acting in the interests of the owners of monopoly capital. It remains the responsibility of the workers' movement to unite the polity in effective opposition to this programme and to fight for the alternative.

THE QUEEN'S SPEECH:

Addressing the Interests of the Owners of Capital, not the General Interests of Society

To look at the proposals for the Coalition's legislative programme for 2012-13 outlined in the Queen's Speech is to wonder what it has to do with the movement for the alternative, for serving the general interests of society and solving its problems. Rather it addresses the interests of the owners of capital. Because it is based on this outlook, all the problems facing society are bound to intensify over the coming period. It is not far off the mark in these circumstances to call for a future that works, rather than one based on irrelevance and irrationality, as represented by the Queen's Speech.

The Finance Bill 2012-13 (Bill 1) was originally introduced in the 2010-12 session of Parliament, having had its second reading then, and so is now being debated in Committee. It is the customary bill dealing with the rates of tax and the raising of public revenue. However, it makes no recognition of a modern conception of tax, based on the respective claims of government and people on the added-value that working people create. Even within its own parameters, it does not address the question of tax justice, whereby the burden of tax should fall on corporations and not the individual, and small businesses should be taxed less than the monopolies. It does no more than scratch the surface of tax avoidance, and does not address the issue of tax havens. It does not redress the injustice of VAT, which proportionately falls heavily on the poor.

The Financial Services Bill 2012-13 (Bill 2) was also introduced in the 2010-12 session. It has now been taken to the House of Lords (as HL Bill 25), and receives its second reading there on June 11. The House of Commons Research Paper states: "The focus of this Bill is to establish a new framework for financial regulation in the United Kingdom. Many reasons have been put forward as to why the financial crisis, which started in 2008, happened. The Coalition Government believes that regulatory failure played some part. The Bill puts the Bank of England back at the centre of the supervisory system; establishes institutions for 'macro-prudential regulation' and two new regulators that concentrate on the prudential regulation of large institutions and business conduct respectively."

The Queen's Speech alluded to a Banking Reform Bill in this connection also, to implement the recommendations of the Independent Commission on Banking.

The premise of these Bills is that the City of London should remain the world's financial centre, after the debacle of 2008 and the consequent bail-out of the banks. Rather than tackling the issue of the banks being a law unto themselves, and that the state has been acting to safeguard the interests of the financial oligarchy, the proposed legislation is based on instituting the "macro-prudential" tools of regulation, including giving the Chancellor of the Exchequer pre-eminence during a financial crisis.

The Civil Aviation Bill 2012-13 (Bill 3) is yet another bill introduced in the 2010-12 session. It has been taken to the House of Lords (as HL Bill 26) and receives its second reading there on June 13. The basic premise of the Bill is that of increased competition in the aviation industry, including among airports, and the consequent issue of a strengthened regulatory body, and the reduced responsibility of government, under the guise of putting "passengers at the heart of airport operations".

The Local Government Finance Bill 2012-13 (Bill 4) is the fourth bill to have been introduced in the 2010-12 session. It is Bill 24 in the House of Lords, due to receive its second reading on June 12. The Communities and Local Government website states that the Bill "takes forward proposals designed to encourage local economic growth, reduce the financial deficit and drive decentralisation of control over local government finance". Put in this way, its measures can be seen as being part of the neo-liberal agenda, which includes austerity measures to "reduce the financial deficit".

Bill 5 is the Defamation Bill, amending the law of defamation. It is due to receive its second reading in the House of Commons on June 12. It extends to England and Wales only. The Draft Bill was first published in March 2011. The bill would introduce new statutory defences of "truth and honest opinion" to replace the common law defences of "justification and fair comment".

Bill 6 is the Electoral Registration and Administration Bill 2012-13. It already received its second reading in the Commons on May 23, and the date for the Committee stage is yet to be announced. The Bill does not address enshrining the fundamental right to elect and be elected. Rather, it focuses on the individual registration of electors as opposed to household registration. The opposition amendment stated that "the Bill speeds up the introduction of IER [individual electoral registration], and downgrades the Electoral Commission's role, with the result that there will be no independent arbitrator with the power to halt the process if it is deemed to have resulted in a sharp drop in registration levels; notes that the 2015 parliamentary boundary changes will be based on the new electoral register which will potentially be inaccurate, risking illegitimate new constituency boundaries; believes the proposals would mean the young, the poor, ethnic minorities and disabled people would face an increased risk of being unregistered and thus excluded from a range of social and civic functions; further regards the proposals as flawed as they risk making the list from which juries are drawn less representative; concludes that because the evaluation of the second round of data-matching pilots will not be published until early 2013 an assessment of the likely completeness of the register is in effect prevented; and deplores the fact that

the Government has not published secondary legislation and an implementation plan for the introduction of IER.”

The Enterprise and Regulatory Reform Bill 2012-13 (Bill 7) is due to receive its second Commons reading on June 11. This bill primarily deals with employment law with the justification that restricting the rights of workers is the way to make business successful in terms of being competitive. It further increases the disequilibrium between the workers and the owners of capital. It facilitates the sacking of workers and makes it more difficult for them to seek redress, for example on the basis of race or gender discrimination. It attacks the industrial tribunal system by dispensing with the current model of a three-person panel, including a trade union representative, in favour of a judge sitting

alone to consider claims for unfair dismissal. Sacked workers would have to access a dispute resolution service prior to approaching a tribunal and so-called “vexatious claims” are to be weeded out. Fewer health and safety inspections are envisaged under the fraudulent guise of lifting the burden of red tape from business.

The Bill therefore is attacking the exercise of workers’ rights in the name of making business competitive in the global market. But this completely ignores that running the economy for the public good is necessary to begin to solve the entrenched economic crisis.

(To be continued, dealing with the Bills yet to be published and those commencing in the House of Lords)

House of Lords Reform Draft Bill

After much speculation, the House of Lords Reform Bill, currently in draft form, made it into the Queen’s Speech.

All of Britain’s political institutions and processes – the Houses of Lords and Commons, the Cabinet, the monarchy and its relationship with Parliament and the “unwritten constitution” – are thoroughly outdated. The Lords, with its basis in directly representing the feudal aristocracy, a basis with which it has never entirely settled scores, is manifestly anachronistic.

However, the core feudal remnant, the sovereignty of Monarch-in-Parliament armed with the Royal Prerogative, founded on the Divine Right of Kings, underpins the entire parliamentary system.

This remnant of feudal absolutism is a block to realising a modern set of arrangements where sovereignty lies with the people. This definition of sovereignty is consistent with the requirements of the present and underpins the demand for all-round democratic renewal.

The party-dominated system of representative democracy bars people from political power. Power is exercised via the big parties, which act as the gatekeepers of power. This status quo is under threat.

The issue of reform of the House of Lords has been raised repeatedly over the past 15 years, particularly since the coming to power of New Labour in 1997. This point represented the maturation of the cartel-party system.

The Lords, embodying elitism and privilege, played the role of scapegoat as the government attempted to paint itself as a great democratic reformer. Labour at the time had agreed a programme of constitutional reform with the Liberal Democrats, who now have their own similar agreements with the Conservative Party.

However, the Lords were also a thorn in the side of the government, which wanted to railroad through its sweeping changes in every sphere. This has become particularly acute with the launching of the “war on terror” and the drive to enact all kinds of rule by exception. The autocratic nature of the political system lay particularly exposed with the invasion of Iraq. The Lords became an annoyance to the government, which began to view

the official political theory and its doctrine of “checks and balances” with contempt.

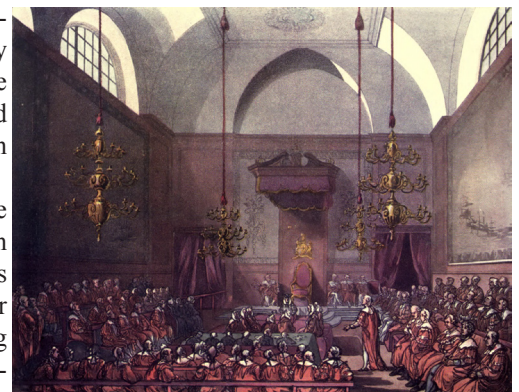
Experience has shown how Blair’s reforms, rather than dealing a blow to feudalism, as was his claim, have not brought democracy

any nearer. Rather, they redistributed privilege in such a way as to increase Labour Party support within the House of Lords.

The reforms proposed in the House of Lords Reform Draft Bill are along the same lines. The use of a Single Transferable Vote system, attempting to create a “balance of parties” in the second chamber will further entrench the party-dominated system. All three big parties, which all had reform of the Lords in their 2010 election manifestos, though they have their self-serving disagreements over the composition and role of Lords, come from this same standpoint. The aim is to rearrange the Lords in such a way that the power of the executive is further unchecked.

In its current form, the House of Lords Reform Draft Bill proposes an 80% elected House of Lords, though a wholly elected House is not ruled out. The draft Bill also proposes that the members of the Lords be elected using the Single Transferable Vote (STV) system, a form of proportional representation, but again does not exclude other systems from consideration.

The draft Bill dramatically cuts the size of the Lords from a current 789 members to 300. In an 80% elected House, 240 of these members would be elected and 60 appointed, together with 12 Church of England Bishops sitting as ex officio members (there are currently 26 such “Lords Spiritual”). The link between the award of a peerage and membership of the second House of Parliament would end.



The Privileged Classes Holding the Governement to Account.

The Bill does not suggest a change in the function of the House of Lords, but a continuation of what has been established through the earlier Parliament Acts and by convention. Similarly, no formal change is proposed to the constitutional powers and privileges of the House, and the Lords would remain secondary in relation to the Commons.

Members of the House of Lords would serve for a single non-renewable term of three normal election cycles (15 years). Elections would take place at the same time as general elections, and would be staggered elections so that 80 seats – a third of the House – is contested at each election.

In an 80% elected House of Lords, the unelected members would be nominated by a statutory Appointments Commission and recommended by the Prime Minister for appointment by the Queen.

Members of the House of Lords are currently unpaid. The draft Bill proposes to introduce a salary, allowances and a pension for members, according to the government's expectation that members of the reformed House would be "full-time Parliamentarians". The draft Bill therefore also proposes that members would be subject to a disqualification regime modelled on that in the House of Commons. Furthermore, members of the House of Lords would be able to vote in House of Commons elections.

The changes would take place via three-phase transition period during which some existing peers would remain as transitional members. The draft Bill aims at the first elections being held at the time of the next general election in 2015.

It is clear that nothing in these proposals resolves the fundamental contradiction over whether reforms will empower people or bolster the status quo.

The draft Bill is a pragmatic muddle of clauses to increase its democratic legitimacy just enough to placate the governed, but limit that legitimacy to keep the Lords itself in check.

All this does is further expose the lack of legitimacy of the Commons itself. No institution of governance should lack democratic legitimacy, which should be judged by how well the mechanisms express the popular will. Rather than the shifting around of privilege, or the creation of new levels of party-dominated parliament, the need is to deprive all privileged elites of power. The demand is for a modern constitution, subordinating the executive to legislature, which is in turn subordinated to the people as a whole, in whom sovereign power is vested. A new kind of parliament, or legislative assembly, is required where power is shared between the people and their direct representatives, and the ruling elite are deprived of their power to keep the people disempowered.

AGAINST BRITAIN'S INTERNATIONAL INTERVENTIONS AND INTERFERENCE:

Britain Must Stop All Interference in Syria

The Foreign Secretary, William Hague, was one of several senior government ministers from NATO countries who have been quick to condemn what is reported to have been a massacre of civilians in the al-Houla area of Homs Province in which over ninety people, including women and children are said to have lost their lives.

William Hague immediately blamed Syrian government forces for the massacre, which took place only a few days before the visit to Syria of the UN envoy Kofi Annan. According to the Foreign Secretary, "our urgent priority is to establish a full account of this appalling crime and to move swiftly to ensure that those responsible are identified and held to account. We are consulting urgently with our allies on a strong international response, including at the UN Security Council, the EU and UN Human Rights bodies. We will be calling for an urgent session of the UN Security Council in the coming days." Hague also announced that Syria's chargé d'affaires would be summoned to the Foreign Office to be informed of "the UK's condemnation of the Syrian regime's actions". News agencies reported that leaders of other NATO countries and the League of Arab States have issued similar statements of condemnation of what a White House spokesperson called a "vile testament to an illegitimate regime".

However, the Syrian government has denied that its forces

were in any way responsible for the massacre and a foreign ministry spokesperson referred to a "tsunami of lies against the Syrian government".

The spokesperson also condemned the massacre in the strongest possible terms, pointing out that it was part of a wider "terrorist attack" in the area. He called on the UN Security Council to discover who is arming, funding and instigating such attacks. He noted that it was suspicious that these attacks took place just before the visit of the UN envoy, adding, "We regret that foreign ministers of some countries have rushed to level baseless accusations in such forums as the UN Security Council and the EU, based on statements by opposition figures or biased media."

The crocodile tears that are shed by Hague, Clinton and others do nothing to divert attention from the fact that they are openly instigating and supporting the opposition forces in what



Syrians vote for People's Assembly, May 7, 2012

can almost be described as a civil war in Syria. The so-called Friends of Syria grouping was specifically established for this purpose and there are also constant reports that NATO is supplying the Syrian Free Army and others with weapons through third parties. The policy of Hague and his friends is to encourage and support the opposition forces, which are using violence to realise their aims, while condemning the measures taken by the government of Syria to maintain the integrity and sovereignty of its country and the security of its citizens. Although Britain and the other big powers are clearly manipulating the UN to further their own interests, including ousting the al-Assad regime, the UN envoy Kofi Annan's peace plan has actually called for the "cessation of violence" by both government and opposition so that "an inclusive Syria-led political process" can commence. Informed commentators have pointed out that no cessation is likely while outside forces continue to arm and instigate violent actions by the opposition. Since in such circumstances the government of Syria has found it impossible to implement the measures proposed in Annan's plan it is further condemned and attacked by Britain and the other NATO countries.

It is in this context that Hague and other government ministers are attempting to find new ways to interfere in Syria, calling for new sanctions against members of al-Assad's government and even Syria's Olympic delegation, while also trying to gain international support for their plans for even more hostile measures including external intervention. It is in this context that

Hague is cynically announcing that "time is running out" for the Syrian government to implement the Annan plan without making any such demands on those who have taken up arms against Syria's government. What must be condemned is the cynical interference in Syria's internal affairs by Britain and the other big powers, which has created all the conditions for even further bloodshed and instability not just in that country but throughout the region.

The working class and people must be very vigilant about taking the apparent outrage of Hague and other NATO personages, as well as the monopoly media, at face value. These politicians at the helm of imperialist states are not going to turn into friends of the people and of revolution overnight. The opposite is the case. Their civilised veneer is a cover for the most obscene plots and interventions directed against peoples and their sovereignty. They have their geo-political and economic strategies that are directed at bringing countries, regions and whole continents under their domination. These are strategies for which people are paying with instability, attacks on their identities and indeed their very lives.

Hands Off Syria!

No to NATO and Imperialist Intervention!

Redouble the Efforts to Bring into Being an Anti-War Government in Britain!

Government's Human Rights and Democracy Report

At the end of April, Foreign Secretary William Hague presented the Foreign Office's annual report entitled Human Rights and Democracy to Parliament. According to Hague's foreword, "the promotion and protection of human rights is at the heart of UK foreign policy." He added that "we are determined to pursue every opportunity to promote human rights and political and economic freedom around the world. Individual demands for a better life can only truly be satisfied in open and democratic societies." The report, which contains nearly four hundred pages, therefore constitutes a major summary of the values and thinking that underlie the foreign policy of the current government, although it must be stressed these are the same Eurocentric values that are defended by all the major parties and by previous governments.

From the outset, Hague's makes it clear that for the government and the Westminster consensus the concept of human rights is one which is to be defined and manipulated in order to serve the predatory interests of the financial oligarchy, or what is commonly referred to as the foreign policy of the British government. It is to be noted that the report was issued at a time when the current government is refusing to recognise and make reparation for the violation of human rights carried out for many years by the British colonial authorities in Kenya and Malaya

and covered up by successive British governments.

In the case of Kenya, the government and its Labour predecessor claim that it is the present government of Kenya which must answer for any abuses against Africans carried out by the colonial government on orders from Westminster. In regard to Malaya, attempts by relatives of 24 unarmed plantation workers massacred by British troops in Batang Kali in 1948 to have an official enquiry have repeatedly been denied. Previous governments have even sought to intervene and prevent enquiries in Malaya itself. The present government is still rejecting demands for an enquiry into what a lawyer for the relatives termed a "gross human rights abuse".

The government's Human Rights and Democracy report makes no mention of such cases and others too numerous to mention. Rather it is designed to provide a justification for the government's intervention around the world today and for its promotion of what the report refers to as "British values", that is, the values of neo-liberal globalisation. It is for this reason that a special section has been added at the start of the report on the so-called Arab Spring. As the Foreign Office report makes evident, British government did nothing to aid the long-suffering people of Tunisia, Egypt and other countries in North Africa and western Asia. Indeed, quite the opposite was the case;

the British government and its allies have been and remain the greatest supporters of the region's feudal rulers and reactionary regimes. The uprisings in the region have mainly been directed against the political and economic diktat of the big powers and their local lackeys and their Eurocentric values, but the government claims that the contrary is the case and that it is the greatest defender of those struggling for progress and freedom. Here championing "human rights" has been used as the justification for military intervention in Libya, interference in Syria and continuing threats against Iran. It is in this context that the government claims that it has a "values-based approach" to the "Arab

Spring". and that "human rights are indivisible from our foreign policy".

The government is continuing to present the view that intervention is akin to liberation, that it is the greatest guardian and defender of human rights, and making a big fuss that it has a "foreign policy with a conscience". However, there can be no justification for its warmongering and interventionist activities around the world. The recent announcements in the Queen's Speech regarding continued meddling in North African, western Asia, Iran, Afghanistan and the Horn of Africa must be totally condemned.

FIGHTING FOR THE ALTERNATIVE:

May Day Demonstrations

May Day celebrations continue to be held on various days in different parts of the country. Whether demonstrations were held on May 1 or some time over the Bank Holiday weekend, the focus in the workers' movement this year has been genuinely to fight for the alternative, the world as it should be.

In London, the May Day demonstration called by SERTUC (the South East Regional TUC) and GLATUC (the Greater London Association of Trades Union Councils) upholds the internationalist tradition of May First. For many years now it has assembled on the historic Clerkenwell Green, from where Karl Marx himself organised demonstrations, and is the site of Marx House which houses the Marx Memorial Library.

The demonstration of a few thousand was representative of the working class and people's movement and of its organised and internationalist character. Trades Councils, trade union branches, fighting organisations, communist and revolutionary contingents, banners from Stop the War, national minority communities and revolutionary organisations, youth and the Occupy movement were all represented, under the leadership of the organised working class. The slogan of Build the Workers' Opposition was also raised on the demonstration. The May issue of The Line of March with the May Day call of RCPB(ML) was sold and distributed in large numbers. Along the route also were trade union contingents with their banners upholding the dignity of labour.

At Trafalgar Square, all speeches were delivered with militancy and with the spirit of resistance. The affirmation that there is an alternative to the Coalition's programme of austerity and paying the rich continued to ring out.



In Newcastle on Saturday May 5, the demonstration militantly marched through the city. The contingent of RCPB(ML) set up a stall with the banner Fight for the Alternative!, Stop Paying the Rich! For an anti-war Government! They engaged many people in serious discussion especially on the need for an anti-war government and on fighting for the future of the NHS. In accordance with the mood of the workers' movement to fight for the alternative, this year's demonstration was one of the most successful, larger than ever and a lot of youth were involved.

May Day 2012 demonstrated that the space for change is to be occupied by the working class and people fighting for the alternative, and that the future lies in expanding this space in mobilising the youth and the conscious workers for modern communism. This is a decisive moment for the advance of the communist and workers' movement. The TUC is to organise a mass demonstration in London under the banner of "A Future That Works" on Saturday, October 20, 2012. A march through central London will culminate in a rally in Hyde Park.

A Future that Works

On March 26, 2011, the TUC's March for the Alternative attracted 500,000 people to a march and rally in London.

TUC General Secretary Brendan Barber said: "The tide is turning against austerity. We were told that spending cuts were needed to get the economy growing, yet they have driven the UK back into recession. We were told that we were all in it together, yet Mr Cameron's main purpose at the G8 summit seemed to be protecting the banks against the growing international support for a Robin Hood tax – and the last Budget's centrepiece was cutting the 50p tax rate.

"It is becoming ever clearer that this government does not have the policies – or even much of a commitment – to build a prosperous economy that can generate the jobs and industries we need for the future.

"Rather than bold policies for investment and growth, the best that ministers can do is half-baked proposals to make it easier to sack people.

"That is why we expect a huge turnout from the growing



numbers that want a future that works."

(Trades Union Congress)

M10 Strike as Solid as N30

The strike on May 10 by public sector workers across Britain against Coalition plans to cut their pensions was well supported, with many areas saying that the mood was as strong as during the November 30, 2011, mass strike.

The Coalition's plans – announced in the Queen's Speech – to legislate to impose an increase in pension contribution and raise the retirement age for public sector workers flies in the face of the right of all workers to a decent pension.

PCS said an overwhelming majority of its 250,000 public sector members have joined the strike.

All business was suspended at the Welsh Assembly and Labour and Plaid Cymru AMs promised not to cross the picket lines. All national museums in Wales closed.

At Manchester Crown Court 95% of staff were on strike. At the Metropolitan Police contact centre in east London, PCS said just 10 of 60 civilian workers have crossed the picket line. Police officer colleagues brought pickets tea.

Strike rallies took place in many cities around the country at lunchtime.

Hundreds of prison officers defied anti-union legislation which prevents their going on strike, by walking out of prisons across the country to take part in pensions protest meetings.

Speaking outside the British Museum in London where PCS and Unite members took strike action, Unite regional officer Carolyn Simpson said: "The government's aim is to try to split the unions into smaller groups. So today, it's about the civil service and NHS pensions – and we're holding the line. Unless the government participates meaningfully in negotiations about

pensions, we're going nowhere. [Cabinet Secretary] Frances Maude may say the strike will make no difference – he would say that. He wants us to stop. Well, that's not going to happen. He probably doesn't need a public service pension. Our people do, so we'll be fighting on."

Leaders of trade unions not on strike sent messages of solidarity to those who were.

UNISON general secretary Dave Prentis wrote: "I am writing to express Unison's full support and solidarity for your union's day of action. We pledge to fight and campaign alongside other public services unions to secure an acceptable outcome to the ongoing discussions with the Coalition Government on public sector pensions.

"No worker takes the decision to strike lightly and this is an important battle for us all. Our campaigns against Tory cuts are more crucial than ever and we look forward, through the TUC, to build and mobilise a strong, effective and high profile demonstration to show our solidarity in fighting for a fair deal for all our members."

NUJ general secretary Michelle Stansistreet said: "The National Union of Journalists sends support and solidarity to the thousands of trade unionists who will take part in the strike on Thursday 10 May. We are proud to support the campaign against cuts to pensions – it is simply not acceptable for the government to make ordinary workers pick up the tab for an economic crisis of the bankers' making. We are urging our members to show support for the strike by attending local picket lines, rallies and events." (Pete Murray, Tim Lezard, UnionNews)

COMMENTARY:

Results of the May 3 Elections

As well as the elections for local authorities across England, Scotland and Wales held on May 3, a number of referenda also took place on whether to create new directly-elected mayors in certain cities. Mayoral elections, where such mayors currently exist, were held on the same day.

The Big Parties

In terms of council control across the three countries, the results show an increase for Labour of 32 councils and a decrease for the Conservatives of 12. The Liberal Democrat share fell by 1, who now have their lowest level of local government representation since the early 1990s.

The change in share of the vote paints a somewhat different picture. Labour increased its share slightly by 1 point to 38, the Conservatives decreased by 3 points to 31 and the Liberal Democrats actually increased by 1 point to 16.

The reason for these seemingly conflicting figures is that England, which outnumbers Scotland and Wales combined in number of councils, only had on average about one third of its seats up for election, in less than half of its councils.

The longer-term trends reveal a general fall in the vote for the Conservatives and Liberal Democrats and a general rise in the Labour vote from 2009, a year before the Conservative-Lib Dem coalition came to power. The biggest change came at the last local election in 2011. The present election represents an incremental change broadly in line with these general trends.

Since the 2010 election, the combined Lib Dem and Conservative vote has dropped by 14 points, while Labour has risen by 11 since 2010. The net change is dominated by a swing to Labour over the past two years. Nevertheless, the vote has not simply transferred to Labour. Green Party candidates, SNP and Plaid Cymru in Scotland and Wales, smaller parties and independent candidates have also played a role to varying degrees.

Small Parties and Independents

The Green Party of England and Wales increased its share of council seats by 11 to 34. Their London mayoral candidate came third, ahead of the Lib Dem candidate, who narrowly avoided being pushed into fifth by the large vote for independent Siobhan Benita.

Building on their success in the Bradford by-election, anti-war party Respect won five seats in Bradford, ousting council leader Ian Greenwood of Labour.

Meanwhile, the British National Party vote collapsed. The party lost all six of its seats in England and gained no new councillors.

It could be said that, where a small party or independent candidate connected with the alternative has arisen and generated a profile on this basis, they have met with success.

Scotland and Wales

Almost all council seats were up for election in Scotland and Wales. The Welsh results imply a large swing to Labour, who

gained 231 seats, taking their total to 576. Second party Plaid Cymru, however, fell by 41 to 158 seats. The Conservatives, Lib Dems and others also dropped.

The Scottish result was quite different, where local elections were held in the context of ongoing attacks by the Westminster coalition government on the right of the Scottish people to full sovereignty over their affairs, in particular surrounding the referendum on independence.

The SNP drew into first place through a significant rise in its share of the vote compared with the last local elections in 2007. Votes for independents also rose slightly. The Labour vote also increased substantially, while that of the Conservatives dropped and that of the Lib Dems halved.

Mayoral elections and referenda

The London mayoral election provided a swing away from the Liberal Democrats, whose candidate experienced a drop in the share of first preference votes from 9.6 to 4.2 per cent. Boris Johnson of the Conservatives increased his share of the vote, though the significant rise in the Labour vote for Ken Livingstone meant that the result was much closer than the last mayoral election.

Mayoral referenda were held in ten English cities to decide on whether to create new directly-elected mayors. Only one of the referenda received a “yes” vote, 53.3% in Bristol. The average “no” of the remaining nine authorities was 60.0% (ranging from 53.2% in Manchester to 65.0% in Sheffield).

Doncaster voted on whether to retain its existing elected mayor, receiving a 62% “yes”.

Turnout

The overall turnout in the local elections of 32% was the lowest since 2000. The fact that over two thirds of the electorate did not participate shows that people are not engaged by the political process.

In Britain, there is not only a widespread, outright opposition to cuts or so-called “austerity”, but also a growing, developing movement for the alternative, both economically and politically. Where people *have* voted, the sentiment was to vote against the coalition parties. This has not been manifested in a whole-hearted swing to Labour, which cannot be said to represent the alternative. Rather, disaffection with the mechanisms of representative democracy is evident in results and turnout.

Conclusion

The local elections underline the need to take forward the building of a strong opposition to the dictate of the owners of monopoly capital and the big parties in government and so-called opposition that represent the interests of the privileged few. This opposition of the working class and people is built around the workers’ independent programme to stop paying the rich, increase investments in social programmes and for democratic renewal of the political process.

INTERNATIONAL:

Suspension of Civil Liberties in Quebec

On May 22 in Montreal, a mass demonstration of half a million took place to mark the 100 days of the Quebec student strike to protest against the fee increase which the Quebec government of Jean Charest decreed. Rallies and pickets also took place in various Canadian cities. These demonstrations also protested against the suspension of civil liberties in Quebec on May 18 when the Charest government made a desperate move to pass draconian legislation to declare the student organisations, which have not been accused of any crime under the penal code, let alone found guilty, of their legally sanctioned official status. The law does this by declaring that all organisations which have been on strike in violation of injunctions against the strike are to be deprived of their dues and offices and any assistance whatsoever. Anyone who assists them or defies the special legislation is also liable to draconian fines. It includes making gathering of 50 or more persons illegal unless prior notice has been given to the police. The law, which is in effect a war measure, gives the Ministers of Education, Justice and Public Safety broad discretion to change any laws so as to make sure there is compliance with this law.



"We won't negotiate social retrogression!" "Defend public right!"

Since this Special Law which suspends civil liberties was adopted by the Quebec National Assembly on May 18, the opposition to and defiance of the law has been very broad. Besides the students, organisations of Quebecers from all walks of life have issued statement after statement denouncing the law and they too have joined the protest movement. Every night, demonstrations continue in Montreal as well as in Quebec City and other cities across Quebec. It is said that this has become the broadest socio-political movement in the history of modern Quebec. Throughout the government's campaign to criminalise the right to resist and protest, the students have remained firmly committed to their just cause against the fee hike. Now, in the wake of the first night of protests to challenge the Special Law, the representatives of the Quebec Federation of College Students (FECQ) and of the Broad Coalition for Student Union Solidarity

(CLASSE) point out that the movement to oppose the fee hike has become much broader to challenge the Special Law as well.

Demonstrations in which thousands of people participate have been held every night. The students and people come there peacefully but the demonstrations became violent to the extent the police decide to attack the demonstration and the actions of their own agents provocateurs cause certain mayhem. Everyone points out that it is remarkable that the masses of people participating remain as calm as is possible under the circumstances and stick to their peaceful expressions of protest despite these police assaults.

The mayhem caused by the police is such that business owners are being randomly arrested right on the premises of their businesses, for wearing the red square. Bars and terraces are being purposely gassed and the police invade the premises assaulting patrons calmly sitting having a beer.

Because the youth boldly persist in holding demonstrations every night, the pattern of police provocations and violence has become well established in the minds of the population who can see through their own eyes and through their own presence, what takes place there. Demonstrators by now are well aware of the methods used by the police to trap the students, declare the demonstrations illegal by provoking incidents, etc. It is the police and even their horses which are masked, and it is the police who are armed and throw tear gas, people point out, while the demonstrators who have to protect themselves against being bludgeoned and gassed are criminalised for wearing bandanas peacefully expressing their opinion.

Throughout the downtown core where the demonstrations are held, residents continue to express enthusiastic support for the

students and those opposing the Special Law. They too are affected by the vast amounts of tear gas which enters everyone's residence, causing problems for people with asthma while the police are also denounced for flying their helicopters throughout the night, causing everyone stress and adding to the mayhem which people blame on the police, not the youth.

In this vein, the massive opposition has deflated attempts to suggest that Quebecers stand behind the Charest government's Special Law. On May 18, the newspaper *La Presse*, owned by Power Corporation, published big headlines claiming a poll showed that 66

per cent of Quebecers support the government taking a "hard line." However, the unscientific character of the poll, conducted amongst a small group of people made up by a list in the possession of the polling company, was found lacking by commentators. Throughout the day, its unscientific character was exposed. A commentator on Radio-Canada pointed out, it is not possible to comment on the poll because it is not scientific. She noted that it was produced by polling people via the internet without having any of the necessary demographic information (where they come from, age group, etc.). People have been shocked by this



misleading poll, suggesting that such activities must have arisen from Liberal Party circles.

All kinds of initiatives to defeat the Special Law have been brought forward and the outpouring of support for the students and opposition to the Special Law has now gone into a new phase of civil disobedience. Montreal's Arcade Fire appeared with Mick Jagger on "Saturday Night Live" on May 19 wearing the symbol of the student movement, a red square, and Quebec artists wore the red square at the Cannes Film Festival.

(The Marxist-Leninist Daily)

No to NATO, Hands off Syria and Iran, Troops Out of Afghanistan

An international day of action saying No to NATO was held on Saturday, May 19, with demonstrations in London and Chicago against the NATO conference in Chicago.

A rally was held outside the US embassy in London. Newcastle Stop the War Coalition held a protest at the Monument in Newcastle.

The protests were to oppose the continued occupation of Afghanistan and the growing threats against Syria and Iran in recent weeks that have been backed up with increased sanctions. These threats are a prelude to war, not an alternative to it. There

are signs of covert intervention already in Iran, as there are in Syria.

The protests opposed all covert and overt military intervention from the western powers in the region, for which there is absolutely no justification.

Hands off Syria and Iran!

Troops Out of Afghanistan!

No Intervention in the Middle East!

Britain Out of NATO!

Nakba Day, May 15, 2012

In Palestine and among the working and oppressed peoples around the globe, May 15 is marked as Nakba Day. It is the Day of Catastrophe, the day on which an entity known as the State of Israel was declared and imposed on Palestinian territory by Zionist gangsters which used the Security Council of the United Nations to achieve its aim.

On Nakba Day, Palestinians throughout occupied Palestine and the refugee camps of the region, and Palestinians throughout the world reassert their right to return to the lands and homes of which they have been stripped by Israel. Supported by the Obama Administration in the US and the British government, Israel continues to refuse to acknowledge any right of return for Palestinians.

Far from receding into the past, the events of the Nakba and the Palestinians' determination to overturn the genocidal verdict of the imperialist powers concerning their continued existence as a people continue to stir world opinion. During the 60th commemoration of the Nakba in 2008 and since, for example, Palestinians have taken to massing as close as possible to the truce lines between Israel, Lebanon and Syria. Typically the monopoly media in the US and Britain, report these confrontations as "riots", giving sympathetic details about Israeli army casualties. But the world's peoples are by no stretch

ing the Second World War. One of them, the United States, was rising at the time and two of them, Great Britain and France, were nearing collapse. On Palestine and a number of other matters, these Great Powers used the permanent seats they occupied

on the Security Council of a newly-minted United Nations to rewrite some parts and disappear other parts of customary international and humanitarian law and on this

basis establish the post-war arrangements and give their own meaning to the right of nations to self-determination. The artificial, externally-imposed and consciously anti-Palestinian and anti-Arab character of the so-called "State of Israel" ushered into existence by this bloc actually continued and further developed a "Creation story", originally cooked up during the First World War by the British imperialists in cahoots with French colonialists, for something called the "Jewish national home".



of the imagination ready to dismiss the entirely just struggle and sacred national aspirations of the Palestinian people. In Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories, Palestinians this year are marking Nakba Day amid an unprecedented mobilisation of support for hunger strikes which started in March and were transformed into a mass hunger strike in mid-April by more than 2,000 of their brothers, sisters, fathers, uncles and aunts who have been held without charge for years at a stretch under "administrative detention" in Israeli prisons.

Israel was the creation of a handful of Great Powers follow-

This notion of a "Jewish national home" was a cover story for the British and French colonialists' bid to exploit the collapse of Russian influence on the diplomacy of the Ottoman imperial court. The notion itself was first put forward in a letter dated November 3, 1917 from British Colonial Secretary Arthur Balfour to Baron Edmund Rothschild subsequently dubbed the Balfour Declaration – which the Palestinian national movement labels "the First Nakba". At that time, the Rothschilds' pan-European banking system was bank-rolling the armaments manufacturers on both sides of the Great War on terms premised on the "balance of power" that existed at the outbreak of the war. At this time too, however, on the eve of the Bolshe-

vik Revolution, Russia was in a state of collapse and no longer in a position to help hold in check the forces of rebellion roiling whatever remained of the eastern Ottoman empire. In its Arab regions, the Ottoman empire was an entity whose four centuries of cruelty had "dried men's eyes with rage", as the Palestinian historian Sami Hadawi would later write. It was with the view of filling this vacuum and denying that rebellion its victorious culmination that Balfour wrote his imperialist paymaster that His Majesty's Government would "look with favour" on the creation of a "Jewish national home" in Palestine.

The Syrian, Lebanese and Palestinian peoples who rose up in rebellion at the time were victimised by a ruthless secret diplomacy managed from London and Paris, rigged up with various Arab sell-out “leaders”. For example, nothing was ever said explicitly about whether Balfour’s reference to a “Jewish national home” meant support for a Zionist state. That omission enabled any compromised Arab parties to these dirty deals to complain later that they “didn’t know”. Similarly, Balfour gave no hint of the agreement forged a year earlier by British and French diplomats Mark Sykes and Jules Picot respectively on behalf of their governments, to carve up the territory of the “Greater Syria” portion of the Ottoman empire at the end of the Great War. France would grab Syria and Lebanon while Britain would capture Palestine including Jerusalem. Despite the secrecy of the deals, it eventually became known that the foreign ministry in France was in correspondence with a number of prominent Arab leaders about the outlines of this scheme.

The eventual robbers’ deal struck among the Great Powers presented in the form of the Balfour Declaration was given the patina of “international law” in 1919-1920 by being incorporated into the League of Nations Covenant – the founding document of that body. The Rothschild banking system proceeded to finance one of the first mass human smuggling schemes of modern times, providing 1,001 props and back doors to facilitate the movement to Palestine over the next 15-18 years of tens of thousands of Jews mostly from the war-ravaged zones of the former Austro-Hungarian and Ottoman empires in eastern and south-eastern Europe. The profits from such human smuggling were assured by the fact that such emigration undertaken without official British authorisation was banned under the “Mandate” London was granted over Palestine by the League of Nations.



Meanwhile, as Balfour himself later admitted, the strategic common interests of the Rothschilds and the British Empire greatly outweighed any humanitarian concerns about the injustice being done to the Palestinian Arabs as a result of propping-up this Zionist emigration scheme. These interests centred on retaining British imperial control over the Suez Canal – whose construction and operation the Rothschilds had financed – by preparing conditions for giving rise to a European “Palestine” statelet positioned at the closest available proximity to the Canal.

In the discussions at Versailles to formally end the First World War, the United States opposed the Anglo-French bid to



extend their colonial system into the eastern reaches of the former Ottoman Empire. However, they did not publicly oppose the “Jewish national home” idea. They wanted only to block its being accepted and used to ramify the stealthy assertion of Anglo-French colonial stewardship over Greater Syria. To this end, the US unofficially supported the organisation and despatch of the so-called “King-Crane Commission” to travel the region and take evidence from Palestinian and other Arabs of the region, rejecting any further colonial interference in their struggles to assert their right to national self-determination.

On May 15, 1948, the unilateral proclamation of the State of Israel which erupted into the brutal Palestinian Nakba or Catastrophe was also catastrophic for the UN, ringing the death knell for its stature and authority.

Like medieval kings, the US and Israel employed the UN to be its fool running around with a cap o’ bells and sceptre (rendered useless by US veto) beginning with the 1947 Resolution 181, passed on 29 November by members (under coercion) recommending the partition of the British Mandate of Palestine into Jewish and Palestinian states which was understandably rejected by Palestine but accepted by Israel as a step toward its Zionist expansionist goal for the full realisation of a Jewish Eretz Israel.

The Nakba marks the onset of Israel’s systematic ethnic cleansing strategy with the destruction of over 500 Palestinian villages and the forced expulsion of over 700,000 Palestinian civilians fleeing Haganah, Irgun and Lehi units that carried out the savage and systematic military offensives codenamed Plan Dalet.

Forced to leave their cherished lands, the Palestinian exodus dispersed to 58 squalid refugee camps in Gaza and the West Bank as well as in Lebanon, Syria, and Jordan. All 4.9 million Palestinian refugees come under the authority of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNWRA). Its provision of health, education and humanitarian aid is vastly inadequate to the needs of the camps’ three generations of desperate people.

UNRWA is funded mainly by the US, the EU Commission, Britain and Germany. This cabal of collaborators which has ig-

nored Palestinian human and political rights since 1948, are in fact, the camps' prison guards perpetuating the normalisation of the Israeli occupation thus relieving Israel of its obligation to honour the Palestinian right of return set down in Resolution 194 (December 1948) of which Article 11 reads;

"(The General Assembly) Resolves that the refugees wishing to return to their homes and live at peace with their neighbours should be permitted to do so at the earliest practicable date, and that compensation should be paid for the property of those choosing not to return and for loss of or damage to property which, under principles of international law or in equity, should be made good by the Governments or authorities responsible."

Israel dismissed Resolution 194, and then flagrantly legislated in 1950 The Law of Return that gives all Jews the right to emigrate to and settle in Israel (aliyah) and obtain citizen-

ship. Billions of dollars are spent promoting aliyah, the zenith of Zionism, and spent establishing 200 illegal colonies for over 500,000 illegal, mainly thuggish, colonists on occupied Palestinian land protected by the nuclear might of the Israeli military.

Within days after Palestine's failed bid to have its right to membership of the UN passed in September 2011, Israel insolently announced a further 1100 units to be built in the Gilo colony, and weeks later announced the future expansion of 50,000 illegal Israeli houses in Palestinian East Jerusalem. In April 2012, another three colony outposts, Bruchin, Rechelim and Sansana were approved flying in the face of Palestine's prime condition for resuming the 'peace process' – that Israel stops colony expansion.

(Nathan J. Freeman, *The Marxist-Leninist Daily*, May 15, 2012; Vacy Vlazna, *Palestine Chronicle*, May 13, 2012)

Cuba Reaffirms Denunciation of US Blockade at UN

Cuba reaffirmed on May 24 at the United Nations its denunciation of the US blockade and the difficulties caused to the Island in fulfilling its financial commitments.

It also criticised the unilateral coercive measures and other actions carried out by the UN host against several members, in violation of its obligations in this regard.

While ratifying his country's commitment to multilateralism

despite difficulties, Deputy Permanent Representative of Cuba to the UN, Oscar Leon Gonzalez, recalled in the Fifth Commission of the General Assembly that Cuba has suffered for over 50 years the consequences of the unfair economic, commercial and financial blockade imposed by the government of the United States.

The Cuban diplomat insisted on the need to put an end to the US blockade against Cuba.

DPRK EYEWITNESS REPORTS

Friends of Korea Chair Andy Brooks and Vice-Chair Dermot Hudson visited the Democratic People's Republic of Korea in April this year. This was at the time of the vivid centenary celebrations for President Kim Il Sung, as well as the important conference of the Workers' Party of Korea and the World Juche Congress in Pyongyang, the capital of the DPRK. They witnessed the advances made by the DPRK and its people in so many fields since they last visited the country.

All who are interested in finding out more about these tremendous advances are warmly invited to this meeting of Friends of Korea, at which eyewitness accounts of the visits will be given. There will be ample opportunity for questions and discussion in order to break through the disinformation about the DPRK which is propagated by the monopoly-controlled media.

MARX HOUSE
37A CLERKENWELL GREEN, LONDON EC1R 0DU

SATURDAY, JUNE 23, 2012, 2PM

THE MEETING WILL INCLUDE A BUFFET, A RECENT FILM OF EVENTS IN THE DPRK, AND A PHOTOGRAPHIC EXHIBITION.

friendskorea@yahoo.co.uk <http://friendsofkorea.blogspot.com>



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