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International Women's Day 2015



**Defeat the Coalition and the Austerity Agenda on May 7!
Solidarity with the Role of Women in Taking a Stand
for their Rights and the Rights of All!**

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International Women's Day 2015

The Fight for the Affirmation of Women Women Are at the Forefront of the Fight for a New Society

This year, International Women's Day comes two months before a General Election in Britain. The role of women in society is being hotly debated. It is a fact that women have been taking the lead in many struggles against the fraudulent austerity agenda, which is devastating society. The proponents of this agenda are imbued with philistinism, arbitrariness and irresponsibility. Women have been taking a stand in opposing this agenda. Women are fighting for democratic renewal, enlightenment and a new society in which the role of women is second to none and the rights of all are recognised simply by virtue of being human. Women's dignity, security and future lies in the fight for the rights of all.

Today's society attempts to downgrade women as human beings, to put them in subordination to men, to reduce their participation to so-called women's roles. And yet despite this, and in direct contradiction to this promoted view, women are very much at the forefront of all the struggles going on in society. In fact, women as a collective are a force in society who are taking up and leading the fight to defend the rights of all. Women lead the fight to defend the NHS, women are at the forefront of the anti-war movement and in fighting for an anti-war government, and women are demanding that social programmes be defended and placed centre stage. Women are showing what it means to be po-

litical by being at the forefront of the various struggles being waged. Women are at the forefront and the centre in all aspects, and women are taking their place as second to none.

Women are fighting for a just society and in all areas they are taking a just stand.

Women are showing what their right to be actually is, and are showing that it is consistent with opening the door to progress, to a new society.

Those that are exercising the dictate over society in imposing the anti-social offensive, which is today expressed in the form of the fraudulent austerity programme, are mouthing words that they are listening to women, or are concerned about the violence and abuse against women and young girls. Yet these forces stand for escalating the conditions which give rise to all the abuses against women. In fact, women are bearing the brunt of this anti-social offensive.

Women are giving the lie to this propaganda through their very actions in fighting for the rights of the whole society. They are taking a courageous stand against the perspective which is being pushed that the issue is to realise individual women's ambitions to break the "glass ceiling" and take their place as equal partners in the exploitation of society by the big monopolies and the warmongers. Women are taking a crucial stand that No means No! not just on the abuse and exploitation of women and women workers, but on all attacks on society and the public good. The fact is that all over Britain women are taking up leading positions in the struggles of the people against the anti-social offensive and for the victory of a pro-social programme.

In a modern age and a modern society, the most enlightened



thinking is needed and this enlightenment demands that women are at the forefront of solving the problems of society alongside everyone else. What is needed is democratic renewal where the new conditions bring commensurately new arrangements. It is wishful thinking to think that societal change can be made without resisting the neo-liberal agenda; and this is why the affirmation of all the struggles to fight this agenda and to take up the building of the new is so important. And this is why, within this context, that the affirmation of fight of women to take up their place in the fight for an anti-war government and in the fight for the rights of all, is so important.

The conclusion is that women must create the conditions for them to take their place in all spheres of society, and in practice, against all the odds that the status quo of capitalist exploitation places on them, they are doing so. In the political battle represented by the present election campaign, women are getting organised at the forefront of the struggles to block the agenda of the big monopolies which have usurped power by force and to put a stop to governments which are in their service, such as that of the Coalition. And in taking up these struggles, women are also fighting for a change in the direction of society, they are demanding a decisive say in the running of society.

Defeat the Coalition and the Austerity Agenda on May 7!

Solidarity with the Role of Women in Taking a Stand for their Rights and the Rights of All!

Building the Workers' Opposition is a Central Question Facing Women in Society

Today, what is being increasingly recognised in the movements of the working class and people is that because there is no serious organised political opposition in Westminster to the "austerity" agenda of the cartel party system people have to take matters into their own hands. This necessity is to build an organised Workers' Opposition out of the resistance that the working class and people are waging. This means that to be political the workers have to take up their own politics. Which means not that they have to support one party or another, but the workers have to fight for their own interests, they have to fight for what is characteristic of their collectives, the public good, the interests of society as against monopoly right which imposes the rights of a handful of individuals, of the financial oligarchy, above all things.



Essentially, this also means the necessity for the working class to affirm and uphold the rights of women as a collective at a time when women are not only bearing the brunt of the anti-social offensive but are more and

more engaged in, and increasingly taking a lead in, the resistance of the working class and people. At the centre of this is the necessity to put the question of the rights of all at the centre of all struggles. Whether in the health service with the right to health care, in education with the right to education, in the rights of all regardless of religion, race, and so on, and in the recognition of the claims the people have on their economy and to make the decision in society, this is the case.

Building the Workers' Opposition is a central question facing women as it is for every other collective of the working class and people. Women are at the centre of the resistance and taking a leading role, especially in the public services and in health and education. At the same time, women are also fighting within the trade unions and other organisations of the people to affirm themselves. They fight for their rights and for the public good under the most difficult circumstances. The class oppression effects them deeply in society with the anarchy and violence and exploitation that is meted out against women in the most barbaric form, which is reflected in the way women are portrayed in monopoly media and culture which champions the medievalist retrogression and degradation of women in every way. Women face huge obstacles within the working class movement itself to affirm themselves against the influence of this medievalist retrogression imposed by the ruling elite on society. In the health

service for example the vast majority who work in the service are women yet the class oppression continues to discriminate against the right of women to participate fully in the health service and society by refusing to fully recognise their right to child care and all their needs for themselves and their families. First to go in the Coalition government's fraudulent "austerity" and massive cuts to health budgets has been most of the few concessions won over many years for child care and special leave. On top of this, women who fight to take a lead in the struggles at work in the trade unions are subject to the diktat imposed on society by the ruling elite and have obstacles placed in their way by the old consciousness within the working class movement itself that often applies double standards against women who take up leading positions and who make the decisions that affect their lives and those of their members.

Today, women are entering into the battleground of the election by preparing to stand genuine anti-austerity candidates that stand for the rights of all, to defeat the Coalition government and bring about a situation in favour of their rights and interests and



of the whole of society. Women making their contribution to building the Workers' Opposition as a genuine opposition to the cartel party system of government is the way forward in settling scores with the old consciousness, and affirming the collective rights of women in the whole movement. Building the Workers' Opposition is a powerful front of work at this time!

Activities on International Women's Day

All around the world on March 8 this year, there was a buzz of excitement and a celebration of International Women's Day that marked a heightened consciousness of the struggle for women's affirmation and of the achievements of women at the forefront of the struggle for the rights of all.

The website of internationalwomensday.com listed 362 events for the UK. In many and various ways, events were held marking the struggle against the austerity agenda, including women's unemployment, underemployment, and precarious and poor quality, as well as low paid, work. There were book launches, meetings, discussions, socials and other events which affirmed the right to be of women.

On March 8 the World March of Women began its 4th International Action. Under the slogan "Women On The March Until We Are All Free" women of the 96 countries where the movement is present were organised to continue denouncing the causes that oppress and discriminate against women around the world. Activities are planned from March 8 to October 17,

2015 (International Day for the Eradication of Poverty), and to build collectively a much needed just world with alternatives. The International Action has numerous activities and actions to be developed in countries and territories in which the March is present that can be followed through the website of the International Action: www.mmm-2015.info, and facebook: [wmw-mmm-mm2015](https://www.facebook.com/wmw-mmm-mm2015).

In London, a broad discussion and social for women was held on March 8, at the initiative of RCPB(ML), under the title, "Women, Society and Enlightenment". Following this initiative, further discussions will be held in the future highlighting what it means for women to affirm themselves and be at the forefront in the fight for the rights of all.

The problem remains that while women aspire to a world of peace, security and justice for all, they are excluded from control over the decisions that affect their lives. In this context, it is significant that women are leading politically in standing in the May 7 election to take responsibility for the future of society and to hold governments to account.

ELECTION: ALL OUT TO DEFEAT THE AUSTERITY AGENDA ON MAY 7

The developing crisis of the cartel-party system:

Big Data and the “Social Media” Election

There has been increasing reporting and speculation over the role of social media in the coming general election. Recently, the BBC reported that the Conservatives are spending over £100,000 per month on their Facebook campaign. Facebook, in conjunction with the Electoral Commission, posted an advert on February 5 to all British users to encourage them to register to vote. This comes days after an announcement by Twitter that advertisers, including political parties, can now target adverts to its 15 million users in Britain based on their postcode, through the use of geo-location. As the election run-up reached the last 100 days, Labour strategist Douglas Alexander said that social media will prove “priceless”.

This talk of social media election has to be looked at in context of the existing party-dominated system of representative democracy, which in its current form has been characterised as the cartel-party system. A set of big parties dominate the political process and engage in turf wars as to who should constitute the government. No longer the link between the state and civil society, these parties are agents of the state itself. They are pillars of the way the state operates. Along with the established media, they almost entirely set the political agenda and terms of debate around a consensus from which it is very difficult to break. They have the majority of media space and time, and have the finance to put up candidates in every area and election, and to promote these candidates to the extent that little is heard of any alternatives. Their finances and mode of operation allow politics to be taken up as a potentially lucrative career move, so that there is no shortage of individuals seeking to join these parties with a view to a self-serving career in politics. In short, the big parties monopolise the political process and guard the gates to political power. Just like industrial or financial monopolies, the cartel parties collude and compete in equal measure. They have a mutual interest in maintaining the status quo, while very real and vicious competition exists between them for the top spot.

At the most basic level, the use of social media is to influence people, as the latest means to get a message across. Young people particularly now read what is posted and shared by their social media networks of friends and who they follow more than they read the traditional newspapers. In the hope that this can sway things, the big parties are spending a lot on maintaining their social media sites, encouraging liking and sharing of their posts. The big cartel parties, which have become so disconnected from the people, need something to fill that gap. Superficially, they are trying to break down the barriers, trying to make a party seem

like one of your friends on Facebook.

Furthermore, social media, in particular platforms such as Twitter, lend themselves to sound-bite messaging. Rather than slogging through some article or even an election leaflet, the aim is to engage people on a personalised, individual level. All are looking at the Obama campaigns, which provide the current model of the digital election. It is reported that the Conservative and Labour parties recently hired Jim Messina and David Axelrod respectively, who were both central to the Obama campaigns. The Holy Grail is for a campaign to become a phenomenon, where posts and hashtags trend and go viral.

A number of things relate to this. One is the idea that politics is something about your personal values. Back in 2011, Ed Miliband talked about Labour being the “natural home for progressives”; similarly the Tories were struggling to ditch their image of being the “nasty party”. In general, it is the idea of value-based politics, with the choice between parties somehow being about what values reward you or speak to you emotionally. Rather than an issue of strategy and tactics, or of class interests, or of rational analysis, or of manifestos and policy objectives, voting, as with the rest of life, becomes intuitive.

The main issue in the current election is the need to defeat austerity, and of course this is a very emotive issue itself. Either as part of this, or to divert from it, we see emotive mobilisation behind issues such as benefit cuts, immigration, the NHS, the bedroom tax, and so on.

At another level, the digital election is about targeted campaigning. This is analogous to a business selling a product and trying to capture its target market, and swaying their uncertain potential buyers. Similarly, parties are especially interested in targeting marginal seats, where floating voters hold the balance.

The present innovation is the increasing use of big data, collected in various ways and tied together. Alongside the traditional methods of canvassing, parties are sending out surveys in an attempt to build up statistical pictures of people’s voting intentions. The hope is to correlate intention to address, lifestyle, and other characteristics. The whole point of social media as a business is the gathering and linking of lots and lots of data about people: our musical tastes, who are our friends, our groups, where we live, went to school, etc., allow all kinds of correlations and psychological profiles to be built out of what we might buy – and of interest to political parties, what might sway a certain person to vote a certain way. Is this a person to focus on?

This allows targeted advertising of a political party running up

to an election to the particular individuals in the particular constituencies thought likely to make a difference. Parties can tailor message to types of people or even individuals, if this will give them an edge over their rivals. We see then a development of the party-political system increasingly as a kind of business model, a marketing, product-selling model. The parties are appealing to emotional and other aspects, whatever might work, simply to get a vote. Politics as such isn't even part of that picture; it is all kinds of motivating factors, representing a step further in the role of electorate purely as voting cattle. Elections are becoming through these means much more socially-engineered with outright manipulation of the electorate.

Big data is big business. Twitter's announcement of postcode-based advertising at exactly this time shows how big business is becoming an integral part of this. The biggest parties are spending vast amounts and making business deals to buy this data. Even the third and fourth-sized parties are spending large sums.

This developing role of big business in the electoral process will only develop further as social media and big data becomes increasingly monopolised by the biggest players such as Facebook and Google. Furthermore, the cartel parties play their role as fully-integrated parts of the state itself. This points, then, in the direction of the electoral process developing into a set of arrangements involving a tight relation between the state, parties and the big data companies.

The massive election expenditure is relevant in the regard. The 2012 Obama campaign spent \$6 billion, according to reports. British parties spent £31 million in 2010, an amount that does not include individual candidate spending. It is reported that the Conservatives alone have a £79 million campaign fund for the present election. Further, the big parties have invested in big data software: Labour is using Nation Builder and Contact Creator, the Conservatives are renovating an in-house system, and the Liberal Democrats are users of the Voter Activation Network, which was used in the Obama campaign.

The digital election is a reflection, firstly, of increased competition between the cartel parties, in the situation where there is less and less to choose from. There is increasing disenchantment, and disaffection with representative democracy, with people not even registering to vote, increasing numbers being undecided and politics seen as having to do with individual lifestyles. Secondly, the need to turn to technology reflects how the big parties no longer have a mass base and instead have dwindling memberships. They can instead achieve their canvassing and data collection via social media. They can influence with small dedicated teams with big computers rather than armies of people knocking door to door. In short, they are becoming increasingly well-oiled electoral machines.

The use of social media and big data is not just a reflection of



increased competition, but also the collusion of the cartel parties to stay in power. The cartel-party system is mired in crisis. It is not a clear cut thing that their dominance will remain. Elsewhere in Europe, such as in Greece, where austerity has been imposed most harshly and all of the existing social arrangements are been torn up to favour the monopolies, the old cartels have completely collapsed due to popular resistance and discontent and what will replace them has not yet been resolved.

In Britain, the coming and past elections have marked something of a turning-point with rise of small to medium-sized parties. With the cartel-party system in its heyday, the role of elections became one of staging electoral coups d'état to resolve who would be the champion of interests the monopolies, the classic example being the Blair victory in 1997. With the crisis of the cartel system, we are moving into an age where such coups are harder to pull off. The outcomes of elections are harder to predict and it is being widely speculated that coalition governments may become the norm. All of this makes for a less stable political situation. In these conditions, how do the ruling circles continue to dominate? How do the features of the cartel system that keep people out of power, its established pro-austerity and pro-war consensus, continue to exist? This is the problem the establishment is faced with. They are developing the means to continue to dominate politics in the interests of the monopolies in the face of developing opposition, while concentrating power in their own hands and politicising private interests.

Of course, people and their movements themselves use social media. The decisive thing, however, is that people have their own independent outlook and politics and use whatever means to organise effectively and develop their consciousness, and in this context to think strategically and tactically about elections. Furthermore, people need to mobilise around the demand to select the candidates for election, that there should be no election without selection. People should not hold any illusions about this social media election and actually see it for what it is and what it reveals about the decay of the cartel party system and what it is pointing towards. There is a need for democratic renewal!

[Sources: Daily Political View, The Grapevine, The Guardian, The Huffington Post, The Independent, International Business Times, Nesta, Tech City News, The Telegraph]

WORKERS' FORUM

Marches and Rallies in Sunderland and Newcastle: Build the Workers' Opposition to Defeat the Coalition Government and Hold the New Government to Account

On Saturday, February 7, marches and rallies took place in Sunderland and Gateshead against the ongoing wrecking by the Coalition government of fire-fighting services and other public services in the northern region.

In the morning, several hundred marched from Sunderland Central Fire Station into the centre of Sunderland for a rally to oppose the closure of the fire station as well as the closure of two other fire stations in Gosforth Newcastle and Wallsend North Tyne-side with the losses to firefighters' jobs. Contingents from Sunderland's two Unison branches, UCATT, Sunderland People's Assembly, The Green Party and other supportive members of the public featured on the march which was organised jointly by FBU Tyne and Wear, Sunderland Trades Council and the Northern TUC. The rally was chaired by FBU North East representative Andy Noble and featured speeches from Northern TUC secretary Beth Farhat, Sunderland Central MP Julie Elliott, Sunderland Trade's Council representative Dave Allan and Sunderland City Council leader Paul Watson.

Since the Sunderland demonstration, the Tyne and Wear Fire and Rescue Authority has withdrawn the closures of all these fire stations. However, 131 jobs will still be going and six fire-fighting appliances will be taken away by 2016-17.

In the afternoon of the demonstrations, several hundred people from Gateshead gathered in West Street and marched to the Gateshead Civic Centre for a rally to oppose the devastating cuts to council services, which are happening across the region and are caused by the ongoing and massive reduction in the council "grant" from central government.

In ongoing cuts, Gateshead Council, having lost 36% of its central government funding, is to close five libraries, libraries which provide the focus for many elderly people and parents with young children who use the services regularly. It also plans to close some leisure centres and reduce the hours of others. It is proposing to totally dismantle the irreplaceable home support service for older people in Gateshead which helps them maintain their independence and safety.

The rally also opposed the closure of acute mental health beds and further in-patient beds at the Tramwell unit in Gateshead which the Northumbria Tyne and Wear Mental Health Trust is closing, with patients and relatives in the future being forced to travel long distances for in-patient treatment.

At the rally in Sunderland it was pointed out by Julie Elliott MP that the closure of the modern fire station in the centre of a city like Sunderland would be unprecedented and would bring great dangers to the people of Sunderland when fire engines would

have to come so far and across a bridge. Andy Dark, Assistant General Secretary of the Fire Brigades Union, said that the union was fighting against the closure of the North East fire stations. He said that what we are fighting is the devastation of the fire service. He said that there were 39 fire stations threatened with closure and that figure is going to double. He said that since the Coalition came to power in 2010, 5,000 firefighters' jobs and 145 fire engines had gone. He said the people pay more now in taxes yet these vital services are being cut. He explained that this endangers the lives of ordinary people with minimum effect for the rich. He said that not only are fewer fire engines able to turn up to fires but there were less firefighters on those fire engines. He said that people's lives get ruined by fire and people's homes are burned to a state that they cannot be lived in and businesses are ruined so they can no longer function and with loss of jobs.

At the rally in Gateshead, Tony Dowling, North East Peoples' Assembly, said that libraries are being closed and leisure facilities dismantled, with the handing over to the free market of the care and welfare of our old folks and our senior citizens and our vulnerable friends and neighbours with health issues, or to no market at all. He asked, "Where is the Olympic legacy that Cameron promised us? Where is the regeneration and inspiration you promised our young people when you cut funds leading to the closure of our magnificent facilities at Dunston leisure centre that attract young boys and girls and families from our region to do gymnastics?" He asked in reference to library closures, "Where is the concern about standards of literacy? Why are you cutting our funds?" Finishing with a quote from Dickens on the day which marked the 202nd year of his birth, Tony Dowling, emphasising that young and old stand together to say no more cuts, said, "There is a wisdom in the head, and there is a wisdom in the heart. Do the wise thing and the kind thing too, and make the best of us not the worst."

Clare Williams, Chair of the Public Service Alliance, concluded the rally by saying that "when we come together as people have done on events like today, you see that we can make a difference, and I think you have to also recognise that these type of events are the start of something not the one off event." She concluded, "Keep getting involved in activity. Come to the Gateshead PSA and make sure we get a government that will represent us as opposed to the rich!"

These marches and rallies constituted a significant step in that many ordinary workers and people turned out in these towns to fight back against the Coalition government. In Gateshead many ordinary people were organised to speak about the devastating ef-

fects on their lives of these loss of services.

These actions that were carried out in the North East show that people have long ago rejected the fraudulent “austerity” cuts by the Coalition government and their implementation by local authorities. The fight is for the rights of all to be defended.

As part of its work the Northern Region RCPB(ML) took part in organising for these actions and distributing around 100 copies of the publication of North East Workers and Politics at the demonstrations giving the call that these are “Our Communities, Our Public Services – The Rights of All Must Be Defended!” Quite a few people said they were going to go away and read the paper, taking a serious approach as it is realised how serious the consequences

would be if the Coalition parties were re-elected because the task of holding the new government to account would intensify.

The Workers’ Opposition must address the weaknesses in the movement that cause divisions and build unity in action. The issue is not that of voting for the Labour Party “or suffering the consequences” as some speakers said. It is to set our own agenda and not hand the initiative to any force tied to the interests of the big business monopolies. In the election this means backing genuine anti-austerity candidates. Workers in their workplaces and communities can turn this election into a battleground to work out what serves their interests and build their Workers’ Opposition to defeat the Coalition government and hold the new government to account.

The Right to Speak Out!

Meeting Discusses Organising Defence of Safe NHS and Public Services

On February 12, a public meeting The Right to Speak Out! In Defence of Safe NHS and Public Services and Those Who Work in Them! took place at the British Medical Association’s (BMA) headquarters in London. The meeting was organised by the Reinstatement Charlotte Monroe Campaign and hosted by the BMA. Charlotte Monroe was dismissed by Barts Health Trust in 2013 after raising her concerns over the hospital in her capacity as a union rep. The purpose of the meeting was to deepen the discussion over the implications of her case and defend the rights of NHS and other public sector workers and oppose the climate of diktat which is preventing trade unionists and other public sector workers from raising concerns about present conditions in, and the future of, the NHS and other public services.

Charlotte Monroe highlighted two major concerns: first, the silencing of concerned individuals, and secondly that of trade union representatives being disciplined for their legitimate trade union roles and activities. She pointed out the present climate of diktat in the NHS and other public service is incompatible with care.

Dr Kim Holt, founder of “Patients First”, an organisation of health staff who have suffered reprisals for raising concerns and working to protect whistleblowers, pointed out that the victimisation of whistleblowers and those who speak out is a “sore in the NHS” and damaging to it.

Tracey Boylin, former HR director dismissed for standing up for clinicians’ right to speak out against management diktat, told the meeting how she was dismissed from her job after 20 years’ service.

Julie Davies, an NUT rep, pointed out that the attacks on the right to speak out also affected other workforces including teachers.

Nick Clark, a founder of “Freedom to Speak Up Review” set up by Sir Robert Francis, explained how the Review had done a survey of 20,000 state sector employees and interviewed 300 people who had been dismissed for whistleblowing.

Polly Toynbee, Guardian columnist, she said she was “sceptical” about Jeremy Hunt’s “support” for the recommendations of the Francis Report. Holding the government responsible, she pointed out that “bullying starts from the top” and runs down to senior management and then down to the workforce who bear the brunt. Polly Toynbee pointed out that the situation within the NHS in the aftermath of Lansley’s Health and Social Care Act was impossible with three-quarters of all Trusts who had previously been well run now falling into debt. Polly Toynbee was therefore making the important point that the question of bullying and the rights of whistleblowers cannot be separated from the overall situation of the NHS following the Health and Social Care Act and the aimed destruction of the NHS by this government.

The main speakers were followed by a lively discussion from the floor with many health workers, doctors and patients participating. Several people pointed out that the Francis Report was “missing the point” in that the people implementing the Report, from the Secretary of State and senior managers, are the perpetrators of all the problems of the NHS.

The significance of the meeting was that it raised the crucial question that the issue of whistleblowers and bullying cannot be separated from the government’s wrecking agenda of austerity cuts and privatisation. It highlighted the fact that health workers are not only fighting against their despicable work conditions but increasingly taking a stand in defence of the health service and, most importantly, to safeguard the future of the health service and change its present direction.

FOR A MODERN SOVEREIGN SCOTLAND

Hague Announces Plans for “English Votes for English Laws”

The referendum on Scottish independence held last September opened up a space over the right to decide and the question of where sovereignty lies. Even though the result was against independence, the close result in the face of a concerted campaign of disinformation and fear-mongering by the entire establishment nationally and internationally, and the nature that the debate took, represented the determination of the Scottish people to take their future into their own hands and an affirmation that the people of Scotland are sovereign.

There was therefore no possibility of the Westminster system returning to business as usual. On the contrary, the governing parties have sought to occupy the space that has opened up in the interests of the ruling elite, as well as their own narrow party interests. Recently, on February 3, Leader of the House of Commons William Hague announced Conservative plans to prevent MPs representing Scottish constituencies from voting on measures devolved to the Scottish Parliament, as well as giving a veto power to MPs representing English constituencies over laws that affect only England. These plans are the latest development in what has been called “English votes for English laws” or EVEL.

In this context, former Prime Minister Gordon Brown requested a parliamentary adjournment debate on the subject of Scottish Representation in the Union on February 4, where he gave a speech highly critical of this manoeuvre.

“My argument tonight,” he said, “is that with the announcement of English votes for English laws, which means nothing other than restricting the right of Scottish Members to vote in

this House, the Government are deliberately driving a wedge between Scotland and England and, in so doing, they have asked the wrong question, and they are now getting the wrong answer.”

It was Brown, it will be remembered, who stepped in at the last moment during the lead-up to the referendum as the saviour of the floundering official No campaign, “Better Together”. He certainly retains the perspective of preserving the United Kingdom and the essence of what it stands for. Nevertheless, he comes at the issue with a somewhat different angle to Cameron and Hague. His demolition of their scheme is based on a position that: “If the Union is to survive, it will have to be built on the interdependence of our four nations, and it will have to guarantee equality of status within the United Kingdom.”

He said: “The Conservative party has got this [its proposals] wrong, because it presumes, as Members now on the Government Benches have always said, that the fundamental anomaly in the British constitution is that Scottish MPs can vote on English-only laws, whereas English MPs cannot vote on Scottish-only laws. In retaliation for what they see as Scots pursuing a Scottish interest, they wish to pursue and enshrine an English interest above a common UK interest that could bind us together.”

But, he continued, the “central anomaly, and the real asymmetry from which all else follows, is the basic, and indeed unchangeable, imbalance in the size of the four nations. England represents 84% of the UK population, Scotland represents 8%, Wales represents 5% and Northern Ireland represents 3%. England sends 533 Members to this House, compared with 59 from

Scotland, 40 from Wales and 18 from Northern Ireland – 117 in total against 533. It is obvious that when we start from such a profound imbalance and asymmetry – such a huge inequality in population and voting shares – fairness of outcome cannot easily be secured by a blanket uniformity that treats the minorities exactly the same as the majority. It follows that the rules needed to respect and reassure the minorities, who might always be outvoted, have to be different from those needed to uphold the majority.”

Brown identifies the calls for what might at face value seem like equality as actually a cynical manipulation, particularly by the Conservative party, for self-serving ends. They would mean the domination by England by virtue of its majority.

He asked: “Can you imagine Scotland, or possibly Wales and Northern Ireland, being enthusiastic about sending MPs to this place indefinitely if they have to withdraw when



the real vote on the Budget – the consent vote, or the veto motion – is being taken on this central economic legislation once a year: income tax rates in the Budget voted on by a consent motion that excludes Scottish and, in time, Welsh and Northern Ireland MPs who also want devolution of taxation? Can we sustain truly positive support for one United Kingdom Parliament for long when it becomes clear that the Government of the day owe their existence to an English majority and ride roughshod over other representation?”

Brown’s argument takes the existence of these nations, with distinct interests and their need for real equality in practice, as its starting-point. This reflects a shift that has been brought about by the Scottish nation asserting its right to sovereignty. The old way of thinking, that the Union can be taken for granted and the national question within Britain ignored, cannot continue. Both Hague’s announcement and the opposing stand taken by Brown

are reflective of the contradictions that exist over the issue.

From the perspective of the working class in Britain, the question of unity is connected with issue of who decides and where political power lies. As Workers’ Weekly said at the time of the referendum, a vote for independence was a vote for the alternative, and to take a stand for Scotland’s independence was a just stand, “a stand to right the historical injustice of the subjugation of Scotland by the English ruling elite over centuries. Once this injustice is overturned, not only does it open the path to ending inequality and class privilege in Scotland, but it will strengthen the fighting unity of the working class in England and Scotland. The working class will also be in a position to advocate a voluntary union of modern sovereign states which will be an advance when sovereign peoples are in a position to block the power of the state arrangements to deprive the working class and people of decision-making power.”

NO TO IMPERIALIST WAR!

Churchill and the Commemoration of the End of the Second World War

On January 30 commemorative events were organised throughout the country to mark the 50th anniversary of the death of Winston Churchill, who is most often lauded as Britain’s prime minister during the period of the Second World War. There was extensive media coverage of these commemorative events that included services in Westminster Abbey and Parliament, while the Royal Mint issued a new £20 coin. Several leading politicians made speeches on the occasion, including David Cameron, who remarked that what was important about Churchill was that he “knew Britain was not just a place on the map but a force in the world”. Cameron made it clear that he thought that Churchill’s “courage and resolve” was also required now and that in this century too what he referred to as “freedom and democracy” would “win out over barbarism and tyranny in the end”.

The commemorative events were undoubtedly designed to extol the times when Britain “was not just a place on the map but a force in the world”, since many associate Churchill’s death with the death of imperial British, which today the Westminster consensus is determined to resurrect in a new form. But what is of particular note is that although there is official concern to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the death of the wartime prime minister, there seems to be so little concern for marking the 70th anniversary of the end of the Second World War in Europe which falls on May 8, the date of the unconditional surrender by the Nazi regime in Germany. This is all in rather stark contrast to the government’s approach to commemorating the centenary First World War, with events planned until 2018.

The differences between the two world wars are significant.



Yalta Summit, Churchill, Roosevelt and Stalin

The 1914-1918 war was a predatory imperialist war, waged to re-divide the world between Britain and the other big powers. It was a war fought over colonies, resources and spheres of influence and opposed by the most enlightened individuals and organisations. Following that war the big powers carried out their re-division, created all the conditions for a further global conflict and also for many of the problems which exist in the world today, especially in Palestine and what is referred to as the “Middle East”. The most significant consequence of the First World War were the revolutionary events that occurred in several countries, most significantly in Tsarist Russia, where the working people empowered themselves and for the first time in history, led by

Lenin and the Bolshevik Party, created a new political and economic system in which it was the working class, not the monarchists, imperialists and exploiting classes, who wielded state power.

The Red Flag is raised over the Reichstag The Second World War, which was occasioned by the nurturing of fascism by Britain and its allies, with the hope that it would destroy the new Soviet Union, necessarily assumed the character of an anti-fascist war in which the peoples of many countries, led by those of the Soviet Union, fought not just to rid the world of fascism but for a new world in which war, colonialism, racism and the exploitation of the many by the few would be consigned to history. It was a war in which Churchill, who in 1919 had been the main advocate of Britain's attempts to "strangle the Bolshevik baby in its cradle", was compelled to find common cause with the Soviet Union and all those countries that eventually referred to themselves as the United Nations, that is those who united in action to rid the world of fascism and to create new international machinery to maintain peace. When the United Nations Organisation was created at the termination of the war it enshrined in its Charter the aspirations of many to build a world in which the rights of men and women of all nations were recognised as equal, where freedom and social progress were promoted and machinery was put in place to "save succeeding generations from the scourge of war". As is well known, the unity of the war-time allies did not last long and only a few months after the surrender of Nazi Germany Churchill was to make reference to an "iron curtain" and Britain, alongside the US and others, adopted a hostile approach to the Soviet Union which soon culminated in the so-called Cold War.

It is clear that from that time onwards there have been at-

tempts to rewrite the history of the Second World War, to create confusion about its causes and to obscure the important lessons that humanity must draw from such a global conflict, which led to the loss of over 50 million lives, and its aftermath. The Second World War was a tragedy but one in which the peoples of the world fought to prevent an even greater tragedy. In the course of the war and directly following it the conditions were created for the liberation of many nations in Africa and Asia and for the working people to advance their cause for progress and social emancipation. The few years after the victory over Nazi fascism were a time of great momentum, profound changes and the creation of the socialist camp.

It should also not be forgotten that less than two months after VE (Victory in Europe) Day, the working class and people of Britain, with their aspirations for a new society, one that was built on opposition to all that imperialism, fascism and Nazism stood for, threw Churchill out of power in the July 1945 general election.

Today the problem is not just that representatives of the Polish and Ukrainian governments are being economical with the truth about the nature, causes and events of the Second World War. Such disinformation and the falsification of history is also a characteristic of official pronouncements in Britain. What is more, there appears to be official attempts to prevent the widespread discussion of the lessons of the Second World War on the occasion of the 70th anniversary of its termination in Europe.

Far from defending "freedom and democracy", as David Cameron alleges, the present government has followed its predecessors on a warmongering and interventionist path. It is the task of all peace loving people to learn the lessons of history and create the conditions for an anti-war government.

Britain Must End All Intervention in Ukraine

For the British government and its NATO allies the problem in Ukraine is being posed as allegedly the intervention of Russia, which is accused of annexing Crimea, of providing military support for its "proxies" and solely responsible for the instability and bloodshed that has been intensifying. On the basis of this falsification of the situation, British Foreign Secretary Philip Hammond concluded that "it is vital that all those countries who have a stake in the rules-based international system remain clear and united against Russian aggression".

In attempting to pose the issue as one of external aggression on Ukraine by Russia, David Cameron speaking at the EU summit in Brussels said, "If this is a genuine ceasefire, then of course that would be welcome. But what matters most of all is actually actions on the ground rather than just words on a piece of paper. I think we should be very clear that Putin needs to know that unless his behaviour changes, the sanctions we have in place won't

be altered."

Thus although the British government claims that its aim is a peaceful settlement in Ukraine it becomes clear that it is intent on pursuing a hostile stand against Russia. It is for this reason that Hammond emphasised that Britain's strategy is to make sure that the EU countries continue to ally with the US and maintain robust economic sanctions against Russia. The British government even boasts that it is the main architect of EU sanctions against Russia.

The result is that despite the latest Minsk agreements, which purportedly ushered in a ceasefire in Ukraine on February 15, fighting has still continued in the country. Britain and the other big powers must be condemned for creating all the conditions for the continuation of this on-going civil war which has led to the loss of so many lives.

Already it is reported that since last Spring over 5,000 lives

have been lost, while over 1.5 million people have been displaced from their homes. The latest Minsk agreement comes after previous attempts to agree a permanent truce last September were unsuccessful. It calls for both sides, the government of Ukraine and those rebelling against it, to withdraw heavy weapons, for the withdrawal of all foreign troops and for the establishing of a demilitarised zone. There will also be new political arrangements for the areas in eastern Ukraine currently controlled by those in rebellion against the central government, granting them some measure of autonomy and the right to establish economic relations with Russia.

The fact is that Ukraine remains a country that the British government and the big powers of the EU and NATO wish to incorporate within their orbit. As Hammond mentioned in his recent address to the House of Commons, they wish to place it firmly within the EU and under the direction of the IMF, so as to “reform” its economy and wrest it away from the influence of Russia. The British government has already contributed £10m for these purposes, while the EU and the IMF aim to put in place \$15bn worth of finance to fully incorporate Ukraine into their fold. The EU and the US are working hand in hand also for the takeover of Ukrainian agriculture. The Ukraine has 32 million hectares of arable land, the equivalent of one-third of the entire arable land in the EU. It is the world’s third largest exporter of corn and the fifth largest exporter of wheat. With the full co-operation of the present government, more than 1.6 million hectares have already been signed over to foreign companies.

This economic intervention for the exploitation of Ukraine’s people and resources is accompanied with the political intervention that culminated in the ousting of the former president and the promotion of openly fascist organisations and elements that have links to, or are part of the Ukrainian government and state apparatus. However, since that too was not sufficient for the purposes of the British government and its allies, and has been

From left: Russian President Vladimir Putin, German Chancellor Angela Merkel, French President Francois Hollande and Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko pose for a group photo at Independence Palace in Minsk



Protest at US embassy against “lethal aid” for Ukraine

resisted by many Ukrainians and opposed by Russia, it has been backed up with open military intervention and the threat of further NATO intervention in the future. As the Foreign Secretary explained, the British government is providing “technical” support to the Ukrainian armed forces. At the same time it will play a leading role in establishing six NATO bases in Estonia, Lithuania, Latvia, Poland, Bulgaria and Rumania, which are aimed to threaten Russia. In addition NATO will open a new military “training” centre in Georgia, in what is said to be the largest strengthening of NATO forces in Eastern Europe since the demise of the Soviet Union. The US government, for its part, has announced that it is considering openly arming the Ukrainian government, while at last year’s NATO summit in Wales various warmongering plans were established to threaten Russia, including the Very High Readiness Joint Task Force, which Britain will lead in 2017 and to which the government has pledged 1,000 troops and four RAF Typhoon jets. Thousands of British troops will also participate in warmongering NATO “exercises” in Eastern Europe this year.

It therefore seems certain that despite the recent agreement in Minsk that Ukraine will continue to be a point of contention between the big powers and that within the country there will continue to be resistance to a government that is widely viewed as a proxy of NATO and a front for fascist organisations and ideology. It seems that the governments of Britain and its NATO allies have forgotten all the lessons of the Second World War. Far from opposing aggression and war as a means to resolve conflicts so that no more lives are lost, Anglo-US war aims are leading to chaos, reaction and armed conflict.

What is required for a lasting peace is the ending of all foreign intervention in the area and an end to hostile actions by the leading members of NATO such as the British government. The dangerous situation in Ukraine and other parts of the world necessitates that all democratic and peace-loving people step up their struggles to establish an anti-war government in Britain, one that immediately withdraws from the warmongering NATO, ceases all intervention abroad and ends the deployment of British troops on foreign soil.

No to the European Union of the Monopolies!

Two recent developments have shown the dangerous nature of the EU of the monopolies. A leaked draft of what the European Union wants excluded from a new trade deal with the United States has been obtained by the BBC. And European Commission President Jean Claude Juncker has called for the creation of an EU Army, or unified EU military force. They show that the concentration of power in the EU is not some benevolent internationalism, but is part of the agenda of imperialist neo-liberal globalisation and that the contradictions between the EU bloc and the US are fraught with danger for the working class and people.

The document seen by the BBC describes itself as the EU's "initial offer" in negotiations over the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP). The 103-page document is headed "trade in services and investment: schedule of specific commitments and reservations" and was produced before the most recent round of negotiations in Brussels were held at the beginning of February.

On health, the document states: "The EU reserves the right to adopt or maintain any measure with regard to the provision of all health services which receive public funding or State support in any form". The wording is the same as that used in a similar free trade agreement between the EU and Canada (CETA).

This leaked document has confirmed expert legal advice that NHS services in Scotland and the rest of Britain do fall within the scope of the TTIP. This means that US investors in NHS services that are privatised now or in the future will be able to use TTIP to sue the government if it tries to bring them back into public hands.

As regards the EU military force, it is absurdly being justified as protection from Russia, but it can more accurately be seen as the military expression of the EU and Germany coming into loggerheads with the US and NATO over Ukraine.

Previously, the EU military force had been seriously considered during the build-up to the illegal Anglo-US invasion of Iraq in 2003 when Germany, France, Belgium, and Luxembourg met to discuss it as an alternative to US-dominated NATO. The idea

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has been resurrected again under similar circumstances. In 2003, the friction was over the US-led invasion of Iraq. In 2015, it is because of the mounting friction between Germany and the US over the crisis in Ukraine, according to political analysis given in RT. An EU Army would also increase German influence in relationship to the US and NATO.

The analysis goes on to say that Franco-German differences with the US began to emerge after it was announced that the Pentagon was going to send arms into Ukraine. The Russian Foreign Ministry responded by announcing that if the Pentagon poured weapons into Ukraine, Washington would not only seriously escalate the conflict, but it would be a serious signal from the US that will change the dynamics of the conflict inside Ukraine.

AGAINST THE VIOLATION OF SOVEREIGNTY

Condemn the Latest US Sanctions against Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela

The Line of March condemns the hostile statements made by US President Barack Obama against Venezuela. On March 9, Obama used emergency executive powers to label Venezuela as "an extraordinary threat to US national security". The US has also tightened unjust and illegal sanctions

against the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela.

Obama's statement is as hypocritical as it is hysterical. Every day, all over the world, the US acts as judge, jury and executioner to declare who poses a danger to US national interests and engage in selective assassinations, kidnappings, torture and inva-



February 27, 2013, Venezuelans mark 24th anniversary of the "Caracazo," mass rebellion, referred to as "the day the people awoke" – the beginning of the Bolivarian revolution. As many as 3,000 people were massacred during the rebellion.



process as well as police killings of black youth with impunity and many other crimes it commits against humanity. But it accuses the Venezuelan government of "human rights abuses against anti-government protesters". Besides which, Venezuela has invaded nobody and poses no danger to the United States.

In fact it is the Venezuelan government, faced with repeated attacks against its sovereignty, which has consistently upheld the rule of law. All those arrested for criminal offences linked to violent destabilisation efforts will have fair trials.

History has shown that since the election of President Hugo Chávez by an overwhelming majority in 1998, Venezuela has been under continuous illegal, hostile and increasingly aggressive activities of the so-called opposition backed by US imperialism.

Despite bogus US government claims, Chávez became a target of US aggression. Though a US-supported coup d'état briefly overthrew Chávez in 2002, his subsequent rescue by millions of Venezuelans and loyal armed forces, and his return to power, only increased US hostility towards the oil-rich nation. After Chávez's death in 2013 from cancer, his democratically-elected successor, Nicolás Maduro, has borne the brunt of these attacks,

in which Britain itself has been involved.

The Venezuelan people have firmly faced the most vicious form of foreign

interference. Time and again they have defended the Bolivarian Revolution and thwarted every attempt of the US and its agents to reverse the great achievements of the people since 1998.

The latest desperate actions of President Obama will again fail to block the people from defending and developing their Bolivarian nation-building project which is based on putting the people's well-being and dignity in the first place. The destabilisation efforts are intended to hurt the people so that they turn against their President and revolutionary process. They will face the difficulties and the reactionaries will again be defeated.

The day after the imposition of Obama's sanctions President Nicolás Maduro announced, "Venezuela is preparing to draft an anti-imperialist law to prepare for all scenarios."

The illegal sanctions which violate the sovereignty and right of the Venezuelan people to chart their own path must be immediately withdrawn. The working class and people must make every effort to ensure that the historic achievements of the Venezuelan people are defended in Britain.

Obama Stop Sanctions Now!

Victory to the Bolivarian Revolution of the Venezuelan People!

DPRK Foreign Minister Ri Su Yong Addresses the United Nations Human Rights Council

Ri Su Yong, Foreign Minister of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK), made a speech at the 28th session of the United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC) on March 3. In his speech, the DPRK Foreign Minister refuted the fraudulent and ill-intentioned allegations of so-called "human rights violations" in the DPRK.

Ri Su Yong emphasised that the concept of "human rights" has become extremely politicised, and those countries hostile to the DPRK are not in fact interested in the reality of the exercise of human rights in the DPRK. He said, "At present, the biggest hurdle for the international co-operation in the field of human rights is the abuse of human rights issue for political purposes. The most typical examples of such abuses are found in using human rights issues to bring down the social and political systems of certain countries."

The Foreign Minister said of the way that US imperialism utilises the "human rights issue": "It is only an extension of the US hostile policy towards the DPRK pursued since the dawn of the Cold War by which they turned the Korean peninsula into a theatre of confrontation between socialism and capitalism in

Asia. To this end, they poured an astronomical amount of money into south Korea, while, at the same time, seeking to bring down the social system of the DPRK by all evil methods including isolation, stifling, blockade, suffocation, threat, blackmail and pressure."

Ri Su Yong emphasised the fraud and double standards of the way that the arena of the United Nations is abused to target those states which stand up against the bullying of the big powers. He pointed out, "Recently, atrocious acts of torture systematically conducted by the US government agency have been revealed shocking the whole world. However this issue has not been submitted on the table of the UN."

The DPRK's Foreign Minister continued, "We believe that the interference in other country's internal affairs, use of and threats by armed forces and economic sanctions and blockade against them constitute wanton violations of human rights of the peoples of the countries."

In conclusion, Ri Su Yong emphasised that the DPRK will firmly safeguard its national sovereignty in order to protect the human rights of its people from infringement by hostile forces.



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