

# **Revolutionary Unity conference**

## **April 26**

### **Bulletin No 1**

**Anticapitalist Initiative**  
**International Socialist Network**  
**RS21**  
**Socialist Resistance**  
**Workers Power**

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*Following a meeting of the conference organising committee on Monday April 14<sup>th</sup> three important things have changed.*

*Firstly RS 21 were at the meeting and it was agreed that they will now come fully into the process as a participating organisation. This is a very welcome development.*

*Secondly there was a change to the agenda. The item on 'introducing the organisations' has been dropped and a session on feminism added - which will now be the second item on the agenda. Each organisation is urged to submit a written text profiling their organisation.*

*Thirdly that there will be a second conference bulletin with a copy deadline of Tuesday April 22nd and circulated the next day. This will carry the profiles from each organisation, contributions for the feminism discussion, texts submitted by RS21 on any agenda item and further contributions to the discussions.*

## Why is the British working class in retreat when so many people are angry?

### ISN network

The most pressing question facing socialists today is this one. We saw hundreds of thousands of people taking strike action in November 2011 when the public sector unions called action; the students in 2010 caught the world's attention in their militant stance over tuition fees; Occupy seemed to capture the hearts and minds of millions of people when they formulated the 99% versus 1% metaphor for the class divide that resonated with an angry mood against the banks and the rich.

And yet... there has been little or no follow up to these fights in terms of grass roots or rank and file organisation. The union leaders cut off the strikes; the students returned to campus and the British Occupy movement failed to develop as an organised force against British capitalism or the state that administers it.

There are several thoughts about this on the left. There is the notion of viability: that workers are increasingly cowed by arguments from the capitalist class, and the trade unions that mediate between workers and bosses; that workers must accept job losses, pay cuts and underemployment or face the closure/relocation of the workplace. This fear has meant that neoliberal economics has ridden roughshod over working class instincts to fight, intensified during this latest severe economic crisis. Rank and file organisation has atrophied steadily since the massive defeats for workers in the 1980s. It is now the revolutionary left's role to find effective means to counter these arguments in the workplaces and start to rebuild working class organisation.

In terms of movements, there is the fact that the ruling class offensive against protest has severely impacted on the confidence of the youngest and most spirited: those who we would expect to see taking a stand right now. Punitive sentencing, pre-demonstration arrests and intimidation by the police in the form of harassment and surveillance all mean that, for many, the risk of having their lives ruined or job chances curtailed are not risks worth taking, especially in this harsh economic climate.

On the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Miners' Strike, how do we reorganise the working class today?

The working class has undergone three decades of neoliberal assault, where victories have been significantly outweighed by punishing defeats, drastically reducing its militancy and size of the trade union movement. This much we know. As people enter long term unemployment, retire, drift demoralised out of activity or into new job sectors without traditions of collective organisation, we no longer have the networks and experience of the 1970s and 80s to draw on. The nature of our economy, and thus the working class itself, has changed out of all recognition: gone are the mines, the steelworks and the shipyards. The economy is now heavily retail- and service-based with workers atomised and feeling precarious in all but a minority of sectors. In this environment is it really enough to focus on the trade union leaders and their bureaucracies to organise workers who have little contact with them and even less in common? To what extent should we stand for elections into national positions? Should we, instead, focus our militant instincts, knowledge and experience on organising within our own workplaces and communities, and enabling others to do the same? It seems increasingly evident that the most important successes we have seen over the past few years are those that involve self-organisation and a grassroots, bottom-up approach: the Sparks' victory in 2012, the IWGB's #3Cosas struggle, the Quebec students, the fall of ATOS and the Chicago teachers. Does the habit of granting primacy to workplace organisation fit now that less than half of workers have a stable workplace and when many of the terms and conditions in workplaces are set by the state? Or is the workplace just one vital arena amongst others?

These are very difficult questions that cannot be resolved in any single meeting or debate. The revolutionary left needs to share experiences and ideas in order to generalise them in working towards effective revolutionary strategies. To do this we need a critical mass of activists in our workplaces, unions and campaigns that are organising and communicating with each other, rather than trawling for points of difference. In order to be effective we need to nurture and grow a network of socialists inside and outside of reformist structures like Left Unity, who can begin to establish what needs to be done and how to achieve it.

## Left Unity and the unions

### Socialist Resistance

If Left Unity (LU) is to develop into a serious alternative to New Labour it has to win influence in the unions. This is probably common ground in this discussion, where there might be less agreement, however, is what this involves in practice and how it might be achieved.

LU should, of course, orient towards the trade union rank-and-file, particularly the more militant sections of it, and the rank-and-file activists. It also needs, however, to build a strong relationship with the trade union left including those who hold elected positions at workplace, regional, and national level. These two aspects should be a part of the same approach. In fact LU needs to win significant numbers of the trade union left, both at rank and file level and those holding positions, into membership if it is to become a force in the unions.

A policy aimed at exposing the left union leaders or 'making them fight' or seeing the left as the main problem in the unions would take us nowhere. LU's overall approach should be to stand with them against the rightwing—who are the main obstacle to the development of a fight back and a regeneration of the unions. It should support the left formations in the unions where its members in those unions decide to do so, and help build new ones where they don't exist.

LU should also urge its members to stand for elected positions where they have the base amongst the membership to do so. It's hard to see how it is possible to tackle the crisis of working class representation without being prepared to stand for such positions at all levels. This would also prepare the ground for trade union affiliations, which must be a longer-term objective.

There is no doubt that the right wing leaders and the TUC have played a major role both in getting us where we are and keeping us where we are. Brendan Barber and Dave Prentis (in particular) managed to defuse the great N30 strike in 2011 just as it was reaching its greatest potential. The way the union leaders have now rolled over to the Collins Review in relations to the trade union link is a direct reflection of that.

Any idea, however, that it is just the union leaders who are holding back a wave of trade union struggle that is about to break out is to depart from reality. Leadership is extremely important but it is far from the only factor involved. We are still in a deeply defensive period shaped by the defeat of the miners in the 1980s and the imposition of the Tory anti-union laws as upheld by Blair and New Labour. Strike figures remain stubbornly at an all time low. There has been a major shift in the balance of forces over the last 20 years in particular towards the employers and the political elites.

As a result of this the employers' offensive against the unions also continues in full force. Wage freeze, wage cuts, and zero hour contracts are the order of the day along with many other forms of precarious employment—even working for zero wages. There are increasing attacks on facility time and on the check-off system, in order to further destabilise the unions. (Sections of the shop stewards movement opposed the introduction of the check-off in the 1970s when the union leaders and the employers were very keen on it on the basis that it would weaken the link with the membership and that it would make the unions vulnerable to its withdrawal by the employers when it suited them.)

Under these conditions there is no point in pretending that there is a simplistic answer to the regeneration of the unions, or that every strike call will result in mass action. Of course we should criticise the union leaders, right or left, if they sell out a strike or refuse to act when a real opportunity presents itself. But ritual blaming without any real analysis of the situation—which is prevalent amongst much of the far left—gets us nowhere.

The UCU, for example, has called actions over recent years where it struggled to get its membership out. No doubt the campaign for the strikes could have been better, but that misses the main point.

Repeated calls by sections of the far left for a general strike, or for the TUC to name the day for a general strike, when the current level of struggle is so low, always look more like exposure of the TUC than a considered approach to how such a strike could get off the ground. The call by Workers Power, in this discussion, for an all-out indefinite cross-union national strike against austerity, has the same ring of unreality.

Some of the smaller unions, the RMT (the most important current example of a class struggle union) and the NUT for example, have been calling strike action to their great credit but this has not get changed the overall situation, or developed into a wider fight back.

Grangemouth was a big defeat for a workforce with a militant record but it cannot be understood just by looking at the role of McCluskey or even Miliband, who played a particularly sinister role in the dispute around the Falkirk constituency Labour Party. This is the line of the SWP and the SP.

The employer, Ineos, employed shock tactics that the workforce were not prepared to face down in the circumstances presented, and its unlikely that a stronger line from McCluskey would have changed that. They didn't just threaten closure of the whole site in the event that their ultimatum was rejected. They closed both plants down a week in advance of their deadline and sent the workforce home—imposing what was effectively a lockout. They then announced that the petrochemical plant would remain closed permanently unless their terms were accepted and that the future of the refinery side was also in jeopardy.

In fact the move to accept management's terms came from the Unite convener on the site Mark Lyon and supported unanimously by the shop stewards. It was then accepted unanimously by the workforce at a mass meeting. McCluskey then came in behind it of course. Mark Lyon has since been sacked by Inios and is now pursuing reinstatement in an industrial tribunal.

None of this mean's that everything McCluskey did in this dispute was adequate or defensible, far from it. Nationalisation could have been pushed harder and earlier for example. His declaration afterwards that the outcome was a victory wad bonkers. But the analysis supported by much of the left that the key factor was betrayal by McCluskey misunderstands the situation. A more detailed article on Grangemouth can be found at: <http://socialistresistance.org/5651/grangemouth-a-major-defeat>

Len McCluskey's Achilles heel, of course, is that he refuses to break with Labour—despite the mauling Unite received over Falkirk. And his recent comments that Unite could stop paying money to Labour if it loses the next election has all the hallmarks of putting a bit of pressure on Miliband rather than any serious intention. In any case why only if Labour loses? This implies that he would be perfectly happy with Labour if it won and continued with the cuts. In any case he had said something completely different at the LP special conference where he said: "Lets' make these reforms work. To those elements in the party that try to edge us out—this is our party and where going nowhere".

Despite this important qualification there is no doubt that Unite is playing a better role today than it was under the previous leadership. It gives a lot of help and support to the PA and to those campaigning against the cuts. Its community branches are an important new resource—which was clear at the recent PA conference.

The reality is that rebuilding trade union strength and combatively is not going to be easy. The problem is that the unions have not just been battered in the workplaces. With the rise of New Labour in the 1990s, alongside new realism, the unions have been battered at the ideological level as well. The unions lost the voice that had had in this discourse since the high point of trade union strength in the 1970s and 1980s. New Labour took the whole political situation to the right and handed it over to the Tories who have never let go and have no intention of doing so.

Workers Power's call for a rank and file movement means little in this situation. It was debated for much of the last century (and for over 30 years by WP itself) and was at least a real discussion when trade union membership was 14m with a militant 350,000 strong shop steward's movement that stretched across the big companies and the multi-national, across industries, and across unions.

Today the decline in numbers and influence of this movement has been even greater than the decline in trade union membership itself. Combine committees hardly exist. Cross sector movements are non-existent. Even the reduced workplace structures that exist in the public sector are under heavy attack. Today we have a weakened trade union movement that has been battered by the employers and abandoned by social democracy.

Rebuilding the unions and generating a fight back today has to be based on an assessment of today's realities and not those of the 1970's. It means not only maximising support for struggles when they arise and winning some victories in order to bring confidence back it means it means creating a new political pole of attraction and a new political discourse based on a socialist perspective rather than the logic of the capitalist market.

The current Tory led coalition won the argument on austerity, that deep cuts are necessary in order to 'resolve the crisis' and balance the books, by default soon after they came to office, mainly because neither Labour or the unions offered a credible alternative. Even today most of the population remain convinced of their deeply illogical position.

It is this that defines the role and the importance of a new party to the left of Labour such as Left Unity. A fight back against the cuts, or a longer-term regeneration of the unions needs to have a political dimension and a political perspective if it is to be successful.

This means that building links with the unions, and bringing trade union activists and reps into membership of Left Unity, cannot be an optional extra but must be central to what Left Unity is about and the crucial role it can potentially play.

# Working in the Peoples Assembly (PA)

## Socialist Resistance

### 1. Why SR has built and fully supports the PA

Socialist Resistance saw the need for a genuine united front campaign against austerity when it helped found the Coalition of Resistance which was launched with over 500 at its first conference in November 2010. Since then it has become the People's Assembly which held a 4000 strong day rally in July 2013 and just held a delegate conference on March 15<sup>th</sup> with 660 people registered and around 500 or so actively attending. A dozen national unions are affiliated as well as a number of other political parties and campaigns – from CND, the Campaign against Climate Change to Left Unity, SR, Counterfire and the Morning star (the list is available at the website). It is a truly nationwide movement if you examined the delegate list and the reported activities of local groups. Over 80 local groups are claimed to be active although their activity and implantation vary a good deal. A number of local groups who are not called Peoples Assemblies participate in the national network and are encouraged to do so.

**Clearly this is the only truly broad, representative national anti-austerity network.**

That does not mean that specific anti-austerity campaigns such as Keep our NHS public, the Anti- Bedroom tax or Disability rights networks should not be recognised as representative. However they too are inside the PA. Other claimed national campaigns such as the SWP's Unite the Resistance or the SP's National Shop Stewards Network are not even on the field of play. In practice the SWP in their Party Notes encourages SWP members to build PA events – they were present at the conference and in some local groups. Nevertheless, there is radio silence in the pages of Socialist Worker. The SP just sell their newspaper at PA events. A revolutionary Marxist organisation today should be inside the PA. But let's take up some of the criticisms of our position from comrades participating in this discussion.

### 2. Is it 'top down' or 'held back by the bureaucrats'?

The PA structure has national affiliated organisations such as trade unions and others who have a voice on the steering committee. Unite and the Morning Star provide office space and financial support. However the recent conference set up regular national meetings where local groups can send delegates who balance the weight of the national steering committee. If you are going to have a truly national campaign with the resources to make an impact this seems a reasonable set up and one that has functioned well in other campaigns over the years. You have to put a weighting on the contribution of a big union with millions of members against a local group of activists. Conference correctly voted down a proposal for a far looser 'participatory' network. The ability to organise nationally coordinated action, demonstrations or other events depends to some extent on material resources and full timers.

However some have also objected that the influence of the union leaders in the campaign holds back more radical positions and in particular does not criticise Labour enough. If you look at the vast amount of policy adopted and particularly the Peoples Charter it is clear that they are totally incompatible with Miliband's Labour. PA has always been against all cuts and it has helped organise Labour Assembly against the Cuts. There was some manoeuvring against Ken Loach being a main plenary platform speaker at the 2013 rally but he was still able to be an official speaker in a room with over 400 attending. Obviously today the main fire has to be against the Con-Lib coalition because they are imposing austerity. But the PA hasn't stopped lobbies of local Labour Councils by their local groups. Indeed McCluskey, Serwotka and other PA supporters have criticised Miliband over any austerity-lite policies. It is hard to see Unite's influence in the PA as the key factor holding back either national or local mobilisations. The historic accumulation of defeats in which the trade unions leaderships have had significant responsibility clearly does have an impact on why the one day strike action or action in other sectors have not gone anywhere. However Unite and the NUT are both actively supporting the June demonstration and other actions - they are not an obstacle for mobilisation..

### 3. Is it undemocratic?

It is hard to criticise the running of the recent conference – over 90 motions were put. Amendments were passed against the steering committee on the issue of finances and no opposing voices were silenced. There has been some debate about a top down method of launching local PA groups with the usual formula being a big rally with Owen Jones and other star speakers then leading to local groups being formed. On occasion the local PA group bypassed the existing anti-cuts committees. The rallies have often been big meetings and groups have consistently emerged from them involving quite broad forces.

#### **4. Is the PA Relationship with local pre-existing anti-cuts committees sectarian and bureaucratic?**

Occasionally there have been cases of the PA being artificially counterposed to a local committee but that has not been the norm. Generally, existing campaigns have come in and worked with the PA structure – taking advantage of its national links and resources. Our own representative on the steering committee pushed for equality in delegates between PA groups and existing anti-cuts committees at national conference. Non-PA committees participated in the conference.

#### **5. Some people lump PA into the same bag as Unite the Resistance or NSSN suggesting it is just another ‘front’ organisation, led by Counterfire and therefore is not a break with a certain methodology of left group politics that we have seen with Stop the War too.**

In this vision of the world the left groups have become the foot soldiers or cadres of the left bureaucrats. Obviously you can see that Counterfire does try to take advantage of its record in actually building the PA to push forward some of its members to key positions or as speakers. However if you are the best builders of a coalition and other groups are not involved this can tend to happen. If they really wanted to exclude other forces they would have never organised the conference as they did – do we see this with Unite the Resistance? Does it try to stop the involvement of other groups? That has not been our experience. Obviously there is another discussion to be had about Counterfire’s overall political project and how it is bound up with McCluskie and their refusal to join the Left Unity project. However that does not make PA a Counterfire ‘front’

#### **6. Over-estimation of the anti-austerity struggle and the weakness of the government .**

It was noticeable in the conference that there was occasionally some over-optimism about the present situation. People talked about a ‘weak government’ that the coalition was ‘frit’ and that the anti-austerity movement was on the offensive. We should remember previous movements like the Anti-Poll tax campaigns when we make such assessments. Sam Fairbairn’s speech veered a little in this ‘boosterist’ direction when he talked of the impact of the November 19<sup>th</sup> 2013 actions. Other speakers, such as Rob Griffiths from the CPB and John Rees were much more realistic about where we were at and accepted that the Tories had won some of the arguments about welfare in public opinion.

#### **7. Why PA is important for revolutionaries and Left Unity.**

The PA is mobilising a similar target audience that Left Unity is building from. Activists involved in the People’s Assembly are nearly all both against government austerity and New Labour’s austeritylite ‘alternative’. We have to be working alongside these activists not preaching from the sidelines that Unite has ‘sold out’ on Grangemouth or not yet organised a general strike or that the People’s Charter is not a revolutionary programme. We need to be there when these activists ask themselves whether consistent anti-austerity activity can co-exist with a belief that Labour can be reclaimed from the left. It was noticeable that there is a very limited number of Labour MPs or councillors signed up to the People’s Assembly and even fewer Labour Party branches affiliated. We need to also collaborate with Counterfire – they may be part of a future left recomposition. Sooner or later they have to ask themselves whether the only perspective is building such united fronts and recruiting to Counterfire, turning it into a better SWP, or whether energies also need to be put into developing a broad political alternative to Labour like Left Unity. Both the CPB and Counterfire counterpose the PA to projects like Left Unity – misunderstanding the difference between a political party and a united front campaign. The CPB even talks of the PA as the most important political movement around. The PA will be around after the next elections, the debate on the left may have significantly changed. We need to be in the same room as the activists who identify it as a political movement.



## **FOR A RANK AND FILE MOVEMENT IN THE UNIONS**

### **A Contribution from Workers Power**

#### **Summary:**

- From mass strikes and demonstrations to grassroots actions, the trade union movement has shown it lacks neither determination nor initiative. What it does lack is a leadership with a strategy that is prepared to confront the government and mobilise the most powerful resistance possible.
- The 'left' union officials bear a heavy responsibility for the lack of action despite the fact that on quite a number of issues they are better than right wingers who obstruct any sort of fight back. For this reason we should campaign to elect genuine left-wingers against the right. We should organise to get them to fight, support them if they do. But even these left-wingers often call off strikes or call ineffective protest strikes which demoralise members. Worse on the big strategic cross-union struggles they tend to tail the right wing leaders instead of organising action and appealing to the membership over the heads of the leaders.
- The strategy of creating 'broad lefts' in order to elect 'left' officials has served to demobilise the struggles rather than escalate them. Action is left in their hands with no mechanisms of democratic control over them. Blaming the members for a 'lack of confidence' or militancy is no excuse. The members' loss of confidence in their leaders' ability to fight is unfortunately all too often based on bitter experience. It the role of revolutionaries to explain why the union leaders don't fight, and how the members can take control of the fight back for themselves.
- To stop the retreat we need to organise a movement which sees workplace militants take control of disputes, spread unionisation campaigns and demonstrate that determined action can win. Though these militants may be few in number, and the hour late, the only alternative to fighting and going down to possible defeat is not fighting and accepting certain defeat.
- A rank and file movement should campaign to put disputes under the control of strikers, with votes and strikes committees elected at mass workplace meetings. It should campaign for a radical transformation of the unions – from tools of class collaboration into schools of class struggle, with all officials elected and paid the average wage of those they represent.
- We need to campaign to rebuild the trades councils as genuinely accountable delegate bodies representing all trade union branches. If this is not possible then we must build cross-union committees in every workplace, town and London borough to coordinate the resistance.
- We should fight to recruit workers into the unions, and fight to open up non-union industries to the unions, drawing in the insecure, young, women and migrant workforce into fighting unions which will base their recruitment on their ability to deliver concrete advances in the pay, terms and conditions of workers.
- A genuine rank and file movement must set its aim as dissolving the privileged caste of bureaucrats whose social role is to limit struggle and channel it into the limits set by the ruling class. Hand in hand with this must go the fight to replace the political arm of class collaborationism – Labour – with a genuinely mass working class party. The task of revolutionaries is to do all they can to win this party to the goal of a revolutionary transformation of society by class struggle methods – not with the imagined working class of the future, but the working class of today, the one whose jobs, lives and futures are being destroyed.

Since the Coalition government took power in 2010 there has certainly been no shortage of opposition to the effects of their policies. In various localities militant campaigns have succeeded in successfully defending particular services - at Lewisham Hospital for example. What has been missing is nationally organised and coordinated opposition on the scale, and with the determination, necessary to force Cameron and Osborne to retreat.

The TUC, in particular, has failed the test of leadership. Having delayed any action at all for nearly a year after the Coalition launched its offensive, until the “March for an Alternative”, in March 2011, it then did nothing for 18 months before repeating the exercise with a demonstration with an equally vacuous slogan for “A Future that Works”.

The pattern is essentially the same with the individual unions. Although union leaders like Billy Hayes (CWU) praised the students after their struggle was over and said the unions should learn the lessons of their campaign, it soon became clear that what they really meant was they would make sure there was no such militancy in *their* campaigns – and certainly no question of allowing their members to take control of action in the way students coordinated grassroots struggles after being abandoned by the NUS under Aaron Porter and his successors.

Most importantly, in the public sector, the Coalition's main target, the union leaders adopted a strategy that dissipated and diverted the potential power of millions of workers. Instead of declaring a determined campaign against the whole government offensive, including redundancies, wage cuts and privatisations, they singled out the attack on pension rights as the centrepiece of their campaign. Important as pension rights are, this was the issue that least united all the workers involved. Older workers would not be affected at all while for younger workers the impact was still a rather distant prospect.

So why concentrate on pensions? Because it was the only issue that affected unions across the public sector and could be presented as a “trade dispute” under the anti-union laws. In other words, from the word go, the unions accepted that they could not mobilise any strike action against the heart of the government's offensive; the pay freeze, job losses and privatisation. Once again, all the evidence, in the shape of strikes by 750,000 teachers, lecturers and civil servants in June 2011 and then by 2 million workers right across the public sector in November, confirms the determination was there for a real fight.

Yet, once again, they were led up to the top of the hill, only to be led back down again. In just one afternoon, the supposedly “clever” strategy of avoiding a confrontation with the law by concentrating on pensions was totally shattered. Dave Prentis of Unison, the biggest of the unions involved, agreed to a few paltry concessions from the government and promptly marched his union out of the battle altogether. The ‘left’ union leaders seemed flabbergasted. Crippled by the bureaucracy’s code of honour never to criticise one another they did not know what to do. So they did *nothing*. Our union leaders have no doubt all sung the praises of the Tolpuddle Martyrs, but faced with the threat of anti-union laws they have absolutely no intention of following their example.

The biggest scandal of all is that two years after the Coalition announced its intention to break up the National Health Service, only in September 2013, did the TUC or the principal health unions call a mass national demonstration. Though Prentis and Unison, as the largest health workers’ union, bear the heaviest share of the responsibility, the union leaders to his left have scarcely if at all criticised them and certainly not tried to lead a fight themselves and draw in Unison members from below.

The absolute uselessness of the TUC as the “general staff of the labour movement”, demonstrated with tragic consequences in 1984-5 with the miners has been repeated as farce over the past two years.

At the Brighton TUC in 2012 a resolution was passed pledging the general council to co-ordinate industrial action against government austerity measures “with far-reaching campaigns including the consideration and practicalities of a general strike”.

The three largest unions in the UK – Unite, Unison and the GMB, backed it. Unite’s Len McCluskey said he was proud to have done so and that “doing nothing was not an option.” Indeed he asked those who wanted a general strike to put up their hands at the TUC’s mass rally in Hyde Park on 20 October 2012. A huge forest of hands went up amid thunderous applause. But it turned out that “doing nothing” was an option for our leaders after all. Indeed, for them it was the only option.

Those socialists, including Workers Power, who were not afraid to agitate for a general strike as the only way to stop the austerity offensive in its tracks received a warm response from all but the more right wing union contingents. The problem was a simple one: the rank and file in these unions, the shop floor militants faced with the dense and impenetrable bureaucratic structures of their unions, did not have an organisation linking the rank and file that could bypass or break through this obstacle.

Last year too, Unite, the mightiest union in Britain, ran away from a fight in Grangemouth. Union leaders right and left have tamely allowed the anti-union laws to prevent a class-wide response to a political attack on the entire welfare state.

Once again at the Bournemouth TUC last September the unions pledged to organise “a midweek day of action”, i.e. effectively a one day general strike. Since then not a peep has been heard out of them. Instead the TUC has called yet another weekend demo for October called lamely - “Britain Needs A Pay Rise.”

If “Britain” needs a pay rise why have the unions not put in catch-up claims to fully restore the real value of wages lost since 2008. They could even “coordinate” their ballots and strikes as they have been promising to do for years so that we go into action all together, public and private sector. They could appeal to the unorganized workers in precarious jobs to join in too and provide the organizational resources to help them do so.

But for all their talk of coordinated action the unions have failed miserably to unite our resistance.

The October demonstration comes two whole years since the last one; which in turn was 19 months since the previous one. Of course we must mobilise but we can safely predict that it will end with the usual inflated rhetoric at a rally in Hyde Park... and then nothing. Rather, the union leaders’ sights will be fixed on the general election in 2015.

Changing this leadership is crucial to avoiding another Thatcher-style historic defeat - destroying the post-1945 Welfare state and shattering the power of the unions in their last real stronghold, the public sector.

The overpaid, cowardly and repressive caste of union bureaucrats needs to be replaced by recallable representatives working for their members' average earnings. We need democratic accountability and rank and file control, from our workplace organisations to the union head office itself.

The belief that such major changes are beyond us and that the best we can do is to support left officials or that we can concentrate only on the little things is a counsel of despair and defeat. The actions of rank and file unionists in the private sector - particularly the electricians, indicate that this is possible - but it will take a determined fight and it will necessitate uniting the forces of the left in the unions.

Of course we do need to recognise our weaknesses. Union membership - as is well known - has more than halved since the early 1980s. There has indeed been a dramatic decline in the numbers of shop stewards and workplace representatives since a golden age from the 1960s. Then there were around 175,000 stewards - two-thirds of these in manufacturing. The total number of stewards grew to reach 335,000 by 1984.

The turning point was the historic defeat of the miners. The decline in the number of shop stewards in the next six years was dramatic. By 1990, there were only 178,000. Estimates made in the 2000s vary from 102,000 to 146,000 stewards or union reps – a fall between two thirds to a half. A large part of the private sector - especially the “new” service sector is virtually union-free. According to official figures (2011), only 16.9 per cent were union members as compared with 56.5 per cent in the public sector.

We need to relearn the lessons of shop floor militancy in the twentieth century but apply it to new conditions and problems we face. The initiative of rank and file electricians in leading a victorious struggle against wage slashing new contracts, the large vote won by Jerry Hicks in Unite in 2010 and 2013, show that a new mood of openness to grassroots organising is spreading in response to the attacks of the bosses and the government and the delays and betrayals of the leaders.

We need to assemble the rank and file militants in every union and across the unions with the goal of democratising and transforming the unions and drawing in the unorganised, a new generation of young workers in “precarious” jobs, of immigrant workers, of women workers. We must start by recruiting these workers into the unions and launching unionisation drives to break into new areas: agency workers, temps, cleaners, and interns. From these new layers of trade union members can emerge - new workplace reps and activists, who will start to take up workers' grievances and challenge management diktats.

We need cross-union organising centres in every town, city and London borough. We need to revive the Trades and Trade Union Councils so that they really represent branches and workplace organisations including joint shop

stewards/workplace reps councils. We need to fight for their autonomy - free them from the interference of regional TUCs or Congress House. We need to win the unions to funding resource centres such as existed in the 1980s where strikers can meet and produce printed material, use the internet, where the unemployed can receive help and training and organise themselves.

We need unions in which policy is decided by directly elected delegates of the members concerned, where negotiations are controlled by elected delegates and all officials are subject to election and paid the average wage of those they represent.

We need an end to the bureaucratic mergers, creating ever fewer, more unwieldy and bureaucratic mega unions over the heads of their members concerned. We need a trades union congress where all the delegates are from the workplaces, not fulltime officials and local trades union councils convened on the same basis. We need a plan to reorganise the unions along sensible industrial or sector lines, getting rid of craft divisions - as much in education and health as in industry and transport.

We need strong workplace branches, joint union committees wherever several unions are present, constant recruitment of non-unionists, bringing young militants into branch positions.

In disputes we need:

- Control of strikes by the strikers' representatives, strike committees elected at mass meetings/ballots if and when the members decide they want them.
- industrial action to stop the witch hunting of militants

Any rank and file movement must be radically different from the broad left groups developed by the Communist Party in the 1960s and 70s and copied by the Socialist Party and Socialist Workers Party today. These exist primarily to get left wing officials elected but tend to demobilise the moment these officials strike a deal with management or government – not doing this is the acid test of genuine rank and file independence.

Those opposed to rank and file organisation tell us that it's a vertical division that matters - left and right - not a horizontal one of the base versus the tops. Of course we want left wing leaders elected to fight for militant class struggle policies. But we can't depend on even the best general secretaries – the Arthur Scargills or the Bob Crows - to fundamentally change the relations of power between the officialdom and the rank and file. This can only be done by the most thorough democratisation of every aspect of union life. To do this we have to start by organising the rank and file; electing people who are pledged to radically transform the unions and then keeping control over them.

# Why we should build Left Unity as a whole

## Socialist Resistance

### Our framework

The approach of Socialist Resistance to building a broad party to the left of Labour has been, as we explain in the 'where we come from' document produced for this conference, one of the central political positions of our organisation over a long period of time.

In the current political context in Britain and across Europe, where there is a crisis of working class representation as social democracy has moved to the right and adopted a social liberal approach, there is a need for new broad parties of the left which can begin to provide political leadership in communities and trade unions as well as at the ballot box.

The need is for a new, genuinely broad and pluralist organisation of the left that could embrace both those who had reached revolutionary conclusions and those who had not—i.e. the revolutionary groups and individuals as well as people from the Labour and trade union left and activists from the campaigns. Such an organisation could make a material impact on the course of events at both the electoral and campaigning level.

That is the framework in which we have supported previous attempts to build such a political alternative in Britain and in which we think the approach adopted by Left Unity at its founding conference in November last year was absolutely correct – to adopt a political platform which is clearly socialist but with a broad definition of what socialism is which can reach beyond the ranks of self-defined revolutionaries and involve people coming into political activity for the first time.

### Our balance sheet of previous attempts in Britain

This position is most extensively set out in a chapter written by John Lister and Alan Thornett in 2010 for our book *New Parties of the Left* which appears on line at <http://www.internationalviewpoint.org/spip.php?article3192>

Lister and Thornett argue that: *'..For the last 10 years the basis has existed for a substantial left party in England reflecting the rise of the SSP in Scotland. Not a mass party. But an organisation of fifteen or twenty thousand embracing sections of the trade union left was entirely possible. The failure to establish such a party has been the responsibility both of the endemic sectarianism in the British left (with its inbuilt Stalinist legacy) as well as the enduring pull of Labourism — even as it moved to the right. The grotesque first-past-the-post electoral system for Westminster also compounded the problem.'*

The chapter, written while Socialist Resistance was active in Respect, attempts a balance sheet of the various attempts to build an organisation to the left of Labour since the rise of New Labour and draws out key lessons in its concluding paragraphs:

*The failure to organize the various formations to the left of Labour as political parties, with their own political life, communication systems and culture of debate, to offer a convincing alternative for those who had been part of, or been attracted to the Labour Party.*

*The failure to establish genuine democracy. Time and again this is supplanted by some form of top-down domination by domineering, self-seeking individuals or groups, which offers no real political alternative to the bureaucracy of Social Democracy, and no opportunity for activists to play a leadership role and feel they have a genuine voice.*

The continuing failure to establish the right relationship between the far left organizations which join such parties and the leadership structures of that organisation. An example of this was the decisions being taken in the structures of the SWP rather than the structures of Respect, and the lash-up which allowed the SP with its various partners to rebuff attempts of other left currents and groupings to join No2EU and TUSC.

While it's true that there have been some developments in the political situation which are worth considering, the same points remain as pertinent in Left Unity today.

The anticapitalist movement epitomised by the Occupy/indignados movements, while weaker in Britain than many other places in Western Europe /North America has in general a sharper and deeper critique of capitalism as a system than people whose political radicalisation has been through the traditional Labour movement. This current has a deep

antagonism to hierarchies which need to be taken on board by any organisation that wants to build a serious base amongst young people – although actually most of the horizontalist solutions adopted have their own problems in institutionalising invisible power structures as pointed out by Jo Freeman’s Tyranny of Structurelessness originally written in 1970 (<http://www.jofreeman.com/joreen/tyranny.htm>)

However while this audience is one which Left Unity should engage with through common campaigning and recruitment, it also needs to appeal to the thousands more who have a less developed critique. We want to involve those people defending their local services against cuts, fighting for better conditions at work, former Labour Party members disgusted by the support for the Welfare cap and indeed people who have never been to a political meeting before-

So while it is important for Left Unity to find ways of building more effectively amongst young people and students and more generally amongst those influenced by the ideas of the anticapitalist movement it is not the case that the audience we need to address in general has moved to the left since the chapter was written.

Another issue which has taken greater prominence over the last year or so, triggered particularly in this phase by the crisis of the SWP over the Delta case but with wider causes and ramifications, is the question of the relationship between the struggle for women’s liberation and the struggle for socialism.

On the positive side this has taken place at the same time as a rise in the self-organisation of young women in Britain and internationally. It has also seen and, to some extent, stimulated a rise in new theoretical explorations of the relationship between violence against women and austerity, on questions of social reproduction and some of the hiatuses in traditional Marxism and much more.

Left Unity seemed to accept without too much argument that there should be space within its structures for caucuses of disabled people, LGBT people and Black people (although it hasn’t given enough priority to the latter) as well as women.

But while the founding conference agreed by a significant majority on the need for both 50% quotas for women’s representation as well as a women’s caucus, the discussion was one of the most acrimonious both in the run up to conference and at the conference itself. And recent discussions on email lists and social media suggest that the discussion will continue.

For Left Unity to become a feminist organisation in reality will require an ongoing political and organisational battle. Political questions of particular interest to women will need to be given priority at national and local level and discussions are examined through a feminist lens – as for example the discussion on purple jobs does as part of the economic policy adopted in Manchester. We need to break down barriers to women’s full participation including by organising collective childcare and discussing the possibility of women only events to give women more confidence.

### **Where we are today**

In a modest way given the political space that exists, Left Unity has achieved a lot in the less than a year since it was initially set up.

Left Unity has nearly 2000 members. It has local organisation in more than 75 parts of England Scotland and Wales – of which more than 50 are fully functioning branches while others are just in the process of formation. In less than a year since its formation Left Unity is more developed than Respect was even at its strongest point.

In the last two weeks with Labour’s support for the welfare cap, Loach’s article in the Guardian and increased media attention there has been a significant increase in people wanting to set up new branches as well.

The 50 branches meet on at least a monthly cycle, with a significant proportion meeting fortnightly. A good proportion are visibly involved in local regional and national campaigning – an increasing number have their own banners so that other campaigners see LU as a participant in their activity.

The policy conference in Manchester at the end of March saw policy agreed on a series of central questions – on the Economy, on Health and Housing, on Europe and electoral strategy on migration and racism, against fracking on Scotland and on how we should organise in the trade unions.

Although we are not standing in the forthcoming European elections and it's unlikely that many local branches will even put forward candidates in the local elections this time round, no one within Left Unity has argued at a national level that the new Party should be primarily focused on elections. The strategic framework on electoral strategy agreed at the recent national conference is to build the party in the long term through elections and campaigning.

The conference together with the founding conference back in November saw a whole raft of members across Scotland Wales and England contributing to debates on policy and strategy. And behind those who spoke at the two conferences were many others who were involved in discussions in branches and policy commissions as well as on the website. There are a wide range of people committed to the organisation and playing an important role in creating collective teams at branch, national and commission level.

The national conference also saw the election through a membership ballot of national officers and delegates to a new national council – posts for which any member of the organisation had the right to stand. A second round of nominations and then balloting is currently taking place to fill the currently vacant posts for the National Council and other committees that the new party has created.

None of this is to argue that Left Unity doesn't have any weaknesses. The party needs to make a conscious turn to building itself more amongst black communities and activities. More fundamentally because previous attempts at creating parties to the left of Labour have failed it makes this attempt more fragile. Some of those who have been through previous attempts remain to be convinced that this one will do better. Thousands who think support the Labour Party does not speak for them remain to be won to Left Unity. It means convincing them that Left Unity can provide them with a political home in which their ideas will be taken seriously and treated respectfully including by people who don't necessarily agree with them.

Left Unity needs to work in a united front way in broad campaigns in ways that can begin to win it a reputation for being the best fighters in defence of services etc. while at the same time winning the best activists directly to its banner through providing an answer to the crisis of political representation

### **Our differences**

The debates at the national conference in Manchester clarified some of the differences between comrades and organisations involved in the regroupment discussions in a more concrete way than the discussions between our organisations has done so far.

One area where differences were apparent was on Europe. Socialist Resistance has a long standing opposition to European integration EU style which we believe is an important mechanism through which the European bourgeoisie attacks the gains of the working class.

That doesn't mean that we do not prioritise building solidarity on a continental wide basis or that we would support an organisation such as No to EU – which as we have argued consistently ends up capitulating to racism by defending a British jobs for British workers line.

We don't think in the current political situation that we should campaign for British withdrawal from the EU as a priority but we don't agree with Simon Hardy when he argued that we should support European integration or with the Lambeth resolution when it argues that we should no more take a position on capitalist European integration than we would on the mergers of companies (actually in some situations we think it's appropriate to take a position on the latter – it's a question of concretely analysing a specific situation and assessing what is more or less likely to strengthen workplace and company-wide workers organisation).

But while the question of Europe is for us an important political question – and one where we don't think our position is particularly reflected in what are currently Left Unity's positions – we don't think the differences here are problematic for common work within Left Unity – or indeed within a common revolutionary organisation. Indeed we have comrades within Socialist Resistance who hold positions quite close or even the same as those expressed in the Lambeth resolution.

The amendment on trade unions from Lambeth Left Unity seemed to suggest that there is no difference between trade union leaders who have fought for sustained industrial action in defence of members' terms and conditions such as Crow and the leadership of the RMT and those, such as the national leadership of UNISON, who have consistently

sought to block this. This approach would cut Left Unity off from building constructive relationships with those thousands of activists who do see a difference. This we think is a strategic problem because it focuses on the way Left Unity should work – where and how it seeks to build itself.

Socialist Resistance doesn't caucus within Left Unity or similar organisations. We think that it is more constructive to work alongside other comrades and listen to their arguments about the best next steps to take. We think by doing so we are more likely to win respect for our political ideas than by intervening in a way that suggests we have all the answers.

## **Conclusion**

If we return to what Lister and Thornett set out in the book chapter as the key traps to avoid, how does Left Unity measure up?

The fact that Left Unity is an individual membership organisation and not a federal structure creates the possibility for people who are not members of any other political organisation to find a political home. The fierce commitment of many members of Left Unity to such a model in our view comes from the balance sheet that many have drawn of previous attempts – whether based on firsthand experience or more long distance observation.

On the question of democratic structures and a healthy internal culture Left Unity is generally doing well though there is still an issue about the extent to which political differences can be debated without these degenerating into personalised attacks or accusations of class collaboration. This is particularly an issue in some exchanges on social media and can act as a barrier to involving those without prior political experience in particular.

Of course the landscape on the radical Left has changed since the chapter was written with the crisis in and splits from the SWP which makes it less dominant than it was previously. Never the less the consequences of such previous bad behaviour, of the treatment of the predecessors of Left Unity primarily as fishing pools for far left recruitment remain an issue. Some of the hostility to platforms in the run up to the founding conference is not necessarily healthy but on the other hand the view of some revolutionaries within Left Unity that the organisation should adopt its full political programme is not a helpful one.

Socialist Resistance does not believe that the job of revolutionaries is to get Left Unity to adopt the most left wing policies possible - if in doing so it fails to increase its capacity to achieve any gains through losing members or potential members

We are committed to building Left Unity as a whole and don't see our primary job at present as building a left within it. Of course we have fought for and will continue to fight for the right to organise around platforms within Left Unity because we do not exclude the possibility that this could become important even essential as the organisation develops but we don't think it's the key job today.



## **BUILDING A PARTY FOR CLASS STRUGGLE**

### **A contribution from Workers' Power**

#### **Summary:**

- Labour, like other major reformist parties of the working class in Europe, has not just abandoned the struggle against austerity – it has implemented such that policies in power and still supports them in opposition. This has left resistance largely to the trade unions and the small Trotskyist groups.
- It is clear that the union leaders are unwilling and incapable of leading a class wide resistance which really challenges the logic of austerity. The left groups on the other hand, though launching various “united” campaigns, failed to seriously challenge the disastrous strategies of the union leaders.
- The task of building a new party of the working class whose aim is to replace Labour has been attempted several times in the last ten years. The actions of one or the other of the principle revolutionary organisations have effectively sabotaged these projects – putting their own organisations’ control above the need to develop a credible mass working class party.
- We believe that it is nevertheless necessary and possible to build such a new party, and that revolutionary socialists must play an important role in this process – without hiding their politics or postponing the fight for them till (supposedly) more revolutionary times.
- A party which is genuinely democratic and at the same time capable of leadership is both a necessary precondition for the mass action and will also dispel the myth that the ‘party form’ is inherently authoritarian. This widespread view is the punishment for the opportunism of the undemocratic and sectarian SWP and SP.
- In a period of deep capitalist crisis, there have been plenty of examples of the consequences of the *absence* of a working class party oriented on the strategic seizure of power. In Egypt and Tunisia, workers and youth have been left defenceless in the face of the counter-revolutionary suppression of the Islamist parties. In the USA and Europe the anticapitalist consensus generated by the Occupy and *Indignados* movement has left no organisational expression capable of generalising this sentiment amongst millions of workers.
- For us the question is not ‘do we need a party?’ but ‘what kind of party do we need?’. The measure of a party’s nature is determined by the strategy it adopts for achieving its aims.
- A revolutionary party’s aim is the seizure of power; the creation of a workers’ government based on workers’ councils which expropriate the capitalists, suppress the capitalist state machine, and organise the material basis for a socialist economy which aims at the abolition of economic and social inequality and through that the elimination of the material basis for class society.
- Such a party is necessarily different from a party’s whose aim is to manage capitalism by winning elections, or one whose aim is to suppress capital through the rule of a party bureaucracy (Stalinism). Democratic debate and unity in action on the part of the whole membership is a precondition for the creation of a revolutionary working class leadership.
- Small propaganda groups cannot, by individual recruitment, attain the status of a genuine revolutionary party. But through their debates, which are debates rooted in the living experience of the class struggle we can contribute to the creation of such a party.
- A first step would be to hammer out a common strategy for challenging the reformist leadership of the working class – a strategy which puts the working class and the class struggle at the centre of the fight to stop the ruling class’ austerity offensive.
- The next would be to join with those parts of the labour movement which recognise the need for a new working class party. Drawing the trade union militants, the youth, the unorganised workers would create a powerful pressure for unity.

- If such a party could be established on a democratic basis, without celebrities and cliques, then it would face the question of how to achieve the goal of bringing about a fundamental break with the old society.

Almost since its foundation, revolutionaries in Britain have wrestled with the question of how to break the fighting vanguard of the working class away from Labour and Labourism. Through 'Old', 'New' and now, 'One Nation', the task of forging a party of the working class which rejects subordination to the rule of capital remains a political necessity.

Right across Europe the Great Recession has proved the traditional parties of the labour movement unfit for defending reforms workers made over the last 60 years - often through the electoral victories and actions of these very parties and the trade unions linked to them. But this was when our rulers feared a post-war revolution and when a post-war boom allowed them to make major concessions. Now we live in an era when "reform" means demolishing gains like free health and education services, full employment and other advances made from the 1940s to the 1970s.

Over the past years Labour, Socialist and Social Democratic parties have stood aside from the movements of resistance, leaving this task to the trade unions. Those in government actually carried out the cuts and austerity demanded by the banks and the bond markets. No wonder their active memberships decline remorselessly and trust and respect for politicians and parties has hit rock bottom. In Italy they prefer comedians. Len McCluskey idea of reviving a pro-working class reformism by recruiting a few thousand trade union militants into the Labour Party has rightly aroused little enthusiasm.

The Communist Party of Britain and the Morning Star - though still influential amongst the left union officials - is no longer the dominant force amongst the militants. The far left, mostly of a Trotskyist origin, the Socialist Workers Party (SWP) and the Socialist Party (SP) and many smaller "Trotskyist" groups are the main guardians of socialist ideas at a time when these have been all but banished from the Labour Party. But they have not grown in this crisis as might have been expected. Why? Because they have failed to advance a straightforward and openly socialist alternative to cuts, failed to unite the rank and file for action and been fearful of challenging the union leaders - especially the left talking ones.

They have founded several rival "united fronts" against the cuts. Unite the Resistance (SWP), the Coalition of Resistance (Counterfire and the CPGB), the National Shop Stewards Movement (SP). They have held a whole series of "conferences". But these have been in reality just rallies - graced by assorted left and not-so-left general secretaries and Labour lefts. None of them have adopted a concrete plan of action and taken it back into the workplaces, the unions, and local communities for debate, decision and implementation.

The larger socialist groups - despite their involvement with the Socialist Alliance, Respect, the Scottish Socialist Party, the Campaign for a New Workers Party and TUSC, have failed to make a lasting success out of any of them mainly because of a combination of political opportunism and organisational sectarianism. Whilst they have been willing to uncritically court celebrities amongst the union general secretaries or maverick MPs like George Galloway and trim their policies to what these 'celebrities' find acceptable, they have been equally willing to destroy them rather than lose organisational control.

Yet socialists who are organisationally non-sectarian but persistent in arguing for socialist policies and a programme could build a party - formed from a broad range of trade union militants, former Labour Party members and young people new to politics convinced of the need for a genuine anticapitalist and socialist alternative.

They should start by uniting all the forces of the anticapitalist left, showing by a combination of united militant action and democratic debate and the election and control of leaders, that the fears of libertarians that parties mean bureaucracy, authoritarianism, and the stifling of democracy, are groundless. Only if it pursues such a course will such a party show that it is able to succeed where the new parties or fronts of the first decade of the new century failed.

Lenin remarked that the punishment for the opportunism of the main forces in the labour movement is anarchism and ultra-leftism. The development of the Arab Spring, the Occupy and UK student movements in 2011 saw a revival of the view that all forms of party, all centralisation, all leadership are inherently authoritarian, violating the autonomy of individuals. The old libertarian and anarchist ideas flourished again; that mass assemblies

reaching decisions only by consensus were the instruments for transforming society. Parties were inherently authoritarian and should be excluded or ignored.

The Occupy movement certainly for a few weeks, maybe months, seemed to turn the ideological tables on the apologists for capitalism and inequality – but like previous such movements – it did not lead to the creation of any permanent structures, nor the institutions of direct democracy which were supposed to be prefigurative of a whole new society. Events in Greece in 2012 drew attention back to elections and political parties – not least because a party that appeared to reject austerity altogether - Syriza - seemed on the verge of winning power, precisely because of its rejection of the capitalists' austerity consensus.

In Egypt and Tunisia mass assemblies in the squares and courageous mobilisations of youth against the police and the thugs of the regimes, with the aid of workers' strikes, brought down dictators like Ben Ali and Mubarak. But then conservative Islamist parties swept to power in the first free elections. The young revolutionaries and the workers found themselves sidelined with no organisation with which to struggle for power: in short without a political party they could not realise their demands for democracy and social justice. In Egypt some of them (Tamerod) were so fearful of the Islamists some were prepared to look to an intervention from the military as with el-Sisi's coup in August 2013. The counterrevolutionary consequences can be seen today – the restoration of a Mubarak-style military presidency with an Algerian-style terrorist campaign against it and the forces that made the revolution largely silent and impotent.

These events show that if revolutionary forces do not struggle for power then counterrevolutionary forces will not be so reticent. Illusions in movements without a leadership being sufficient to change the world, or that “empowering” people in temporary mobilisations, within present day society, is more realistic than seizing power, is a dangerous illusion. You cannot “change the world without taking power”- full stop.

### **Party and Programme**

The question remains not *whether* we need a party or not but *what sort of a party* do we need? What should be its main methods of struggle, what should be its key goals, and its form of organization?

The answers begin with the goal of its programme. A programme is a strategy for the working class seizure of power and what to do with it once it is won. The ultimate task of a revolutionary party is to pose the question of the seizure of power to the working class organisations and win them to the task of depriving the capitalists of control over the state, creating in that process an alternative type of state altogether, heading this with a workers' government, resting on workers' councils.

A workers' government cannot leave the old machinery of rule and repression in place – the top civil servants, the generals, the police chiefs, the judges, who will never serve a workers' regime, but will stab it in the back at the first opportunity.

Its aim must be to smash the entire apparatus of repression, propaganda and administration, replacing it with a network councils of workers' delegates, from local to a national level, who will not only legislate but also execute its own decisions - reducing a professional bureaucracy to a minimum and one that is in the process of withering away altogether. By seizing control of the big industries, the banks and the big stores it will be able to plan to achieve greater and greater equality, fewer and fewer hours of necessary labour. In short, the building of socialism.

If these are its goals, then plainly the sort of organisation we need is totally different from one whose purpose is winning elections, forming cabinets and carrying out piecemeal reforms to humanize capitalism or at most gradually “grow into” socialism. Incidentally it is also radically different to the sort of party required to exercise a totalitarian dictatorship over society (old-style Stalinism).

The type of workers' party that we need is one that is active on a daily basis, most of whose members are in the thick of the class struggle in the workplaces and trade unions, in the working class communities, fighting unemployment, homelessness, racism, women's oppression, homophobia and every attack on democratic rights. Its tactics will centre on mass direct action, the economic strike, the political mass strike, the mass demonstration, and the workplace occupation.

Of course it would stand in elections, local and national, but primarily to win support for its anticapitalist programme. Rather than watering down its goals until they fit the anti-egalitarian aspirations of the aspiring middle class it would attack all examples of privilege. Its MPs and councillors would be tribunes of the people, supporting workers on strike, immigrants fighting state racism, youth protesting the attacks on education, health workers defending the NHS against its demolition. Their speeches in parliament will not be directed at the baying benches of our class enemies but directed "out of the window" i.e. to the great mass of working class people; inciting rebellion against the ruling class parties, far and wide.

Given the experience of Social Democracy and Stalinism we need to make sure that such a party does not succumb to bureaucracy, and that means establishing real *democratic* centralism. Apologists for capitalism, reformists and anarchists alike say all centralism leads to bureaucratic and undemocratic ways of organising. This is not true. Democratic centralism - as the Bolsheviks practised it - began with the maximum of debate and discussion within the party in working out the correct strategy and tactics to adopt. But when a decision has been reached, it meant disciplined unity in its implementation. Then, once the battle was over and the results could be assessed, it meant a full and democratic discussion to judge what needed to be corrected, developed or maintained.

Discipline in action, freedom of discussion and democratic decision-making enables a revolutionary party to choose for its leaders at all levels the best organisers, theoreticians, speakers; those with a track record of honesty and loyalty to the party's goals, to the membership and to one another. And if leaders prove inadequate or if better ones emerge, they can be replaced.

Only such a revolutionary leadership will be able to break the hold of the reformists and win the support of the working class, as the Bolsheviks did in 1917. It will do so not by clever tricks or deception but by proving themselves the most consistent fighters for the interests of the working class and all the oppressed and exploited. For without revolutionary leadership, the revolution cannot triumph.

Today in Britain we have nothing approaching such a party though we have several groups which probably amount to a few thousand militants, who lay claim to be building such a party. But in reality organisations of this size cannot transcend the tasks of making socialist propaganda and acting as ginger groups in the trade unions or the Labour Party. The discussions and ideological battles between these groups are not valueless, however. The struggles between supporters of differing programmes' policies and methods of working are the only way the working class can ultimately select the correct path to victory.

Yet such propaganda groups are insufficient to lead working class resistance to the capitalist onslaught in a period of deep crisis like the present - insufficient above all to lead it to power.

So how can we unite the cadres trained by the small revolutionary groups with the hundreds of thousands of trade union militants and the youth activists either already in action or ready for action? How can we speed up the selection of an action? How can we weld these forces into a powerful political force - a revolutionary party?

A first step would be for the propaganda groups, big and small, to agree to hammer out a common policy in the struggle to defeat the Coalition's attack on the post-war gains of the working class - to unite all the rival campaigns and adopt a policy independent of all wings of the union bureaucracy; yet not standing aloof from united action with the leaders whenever they fight.

Part of the way forward was taken by launching the People's Assemblies. Unfortunately after two such gatherings it is now clear that this limited unity was achieved at the price of adapting to and failing to criticise the union leaders. If the price of unity is non-criticism of the General's Secretaries - then it is too high a price to pay. It will prove to be the unity of the graveyard. The task of the rank and file mobilised by such a body will be that of a stage army, summoned to the streets approaching Hyde Park once a year, politely critical of Labour until an election hoves into view. Instead of a fighting programme of action we are offered the People's Charter - a series of aspirations and values with indication as to how they can be won or implemented.

The next step is for the revolutionary groups and the militant forces in the trade unions - not just left leaders - but a broad mass of rank and file activists too, to agree to form a common party. A party with democratic rights for all its members; the right to maintain or form groupings, tendencies and publish newspapers but above all the pooling of their resources so that the party has a clear common identity and can recruit tens of thousands of militants who never belonged to any propaganda groups or "party" before.

Such a membership would be a powerful force for unity. Such a party would have to open up a democratic debate on the grand strategy; how the workers' movement can win power i.e. a debate on programme.

Last but not least it needs to strive to set this work in an international context – to create not just a national party and programme but an international one. This means adopting the goal of a new – a Fifth – International.

In Workers Power we believe that while it may be necessary for revolutionaries to join reformist organisations, the creation of reformist or semi-revolutionary (centrist) organisations should not be substituted for the building of a party with a revolutionary strategy. If there are real forces within the working class trying to break from Labour and build a new party of the working class then it is our role to argue loyally and honestly for the revolutionary strategy that we believe the working class should adopt to break from Labourism and open up the seizure of power and take the task of the revolutionary transformation of society into their own hands.

### **Are “Broad Parties” the answer?**

This brings us to the question of "broad parties" which include both revolutionaries and reformists – a strategy that the Fourth International (FI) has advocated since 1995 and which has been part of its practice long before that (e.g. the Partido dos Trabalhadores (PT) of Brazil). To this we can add the rather different 2010 World Congress call for (broad) anticapitalist parties which are based as the name suggests on a rupture-break with capitalism but which are not "revolutionary parties" as the FI defines them. Alan Thornett and Socialist Resistance plainly prefer the former and indeed have a scenario which makes this an objective necessity. To shorten somewhat a quote from Alan's contribution to the discussion

"...the rightward course of Social democracy had opened up a space to its left which was there to be filled - either by leftward moving ex-CP fragments, or by new broad parties initiated by other sections of the left or by a combination of the two.(...) .This new space reflected a growing crisis of working class representation which could not be filled by the revolutionary organisations alone . ... because the space which had opened up was not a revolutionary space. It was, and is, a left of labour/left social democratic/ radical left/ anti-capitalist space, which could only be effectively filled by a broad organisation which could embrace such a range of forces in a democratic framework."

The logical conclusion from this scenario is that such parties - if they are to include a "broad" spectrum of non-revolutionaries from both Stalinist and Social-Democratic backgrounds without them abandoning their previous ideas, and without us attempting to persuade them to do so, - must of necessity be limited to what they will accept. In short such parties must have a reformist programme and a reformist-type structure and practice - because that is the gap we have to fill. If the revolutionaries hide their light under a bushel (in theoretical journals, books and abstract propaganda generally) then of course it is unlikely these elements will succeed in breaking through to revolutionary politics on their own.

Our objection to this, in brief, is that it is a stage-ist schema: first a (left) reformist party, then perhaps an anticapitalist party that is not fully revolutionary (a centrist party) then finally, when the prospect of revolution arrives, a fully revolutionary party. This assumes that history does not play any unkind trick on us and present us with a "space" necessitating type three whilst we still embroiled building type one.

It also entails revolutionaries defending reformist programmes against those “ultra lefts” who, failing to realise there is just no "space" for it, naively continue to argue for a revolutionary programme. It also leads to revolutionaries adopting the task of defending the actual reformist leaders and bureaucrats, endorsing their right to lead. In sum it means ceasing to *act* as a revolutionary even if as SR comrades suggest you maintain a revolutionary tendency within such broad parties.

Why? Because such a tendency will not actually fighting for leadership or to win the party to a revolutionary programme - *not yet!* This requires as Trotsky wrote, keeping two or three classes of programmes, like the pre-war railway carriages with third class for the reformist masses; second class for the (centrist) vanguard and first class for the revolutionary élite.

This does not at all mean that Workers Power believes that the only road to a revolutionary party is the molecular growth of a small fighting propaganda group – or for that matter revolutionary unity between several of them. On the contrary we think this is a very unlikely development. It ignores the fact that crises within reformist and centrist organisations and parties will occur repeatedly and that these crises present opportunities for

revolutionaries to join forces with militants from these organisations and develop to a revolutionary organisation that really deserves the name of a party. We believe the theory and the practice of the founders of Marxism and Lenin and Trotsky provide us with many examples for fusing a revolutionary programme with the vanguard of the working class.

This includes initiating or participating with trade union leaders in founding labour parties or workers' parties where there is no existing mass party of the working class; entry into existing reformist parties and winning them or a substantial part of them to forming a revolutionary party; and uniting sizable revolutionary and centrist forces into a revolutionary party. In all these examples the classical Marxists stressed the need not only for participation without issuing ultimatums or demanding preconditions for doing so but, at the same time, resolutely struggling to win them to revolutionary politics.

All these methods avoided two dangers – presenting a pre-prepared revolutionary programme in a take-it-or-leave-it manner, or deliberately advancing a programme embodying a non-revolutionary perspective and defending it for an entire stage, in the belief that “the historic process” or the spontaneous development of revolutionary consciousness, or rising “confidence” will transform it into a revolutionary perspective at some later date.

We believe the method adopted by the classical Marxists as opposed to the method adopted after the Second World War as the “orthodoxy” of the various fragments or descendants of the Fourth International avoids these contradictions. They allow the revolutionaries both to “disdain to conceal their aims” but nevertheless avoid standing aside from serious moves to the left by significant sections of the working class and its militants.

Might this mean revolutionaries ending up in a left reformist or centrist party? Given the tiny forces of revolutionaries – and the even tinier number who dare to argue for the adoption of their politics – very likely it will. But we do not have to advocate forming reformist or centrist organisations, nor do we have to take any responsibility for the limitations such forces place on their own new organisations – indeed we have to warn against the consequences of such limitations. Above all we should not mimic these trends, in the hope that this will provide us with a sympathetic audience. A reformist audience will remain reformist until it is confronted with a revolutionary alternative.

## Thinking about policy in Left Unity

Kris Stewart for ISN

Back in October, in a bulletin before the ISN politics conference, Tim N of Bristol wrote:

“Left Unity has clearly become one of the most important projects which the IS Network is involved in. In pretty much every area where we have active members Left Unity has been one of the main focusses of their activity.” At first consideration the reasons for this are obvious. We split from the Socialist Workers Party just as Left Unity was being set up, and in many ways it was a natural home for us. For some time many of us had become increasingly concerned with what we considered to be dogmatism and sectarianism in the SWP. Left Unity promised an antidote to both these problems, attempting to build a radical left wing organisation which was open to all socialists, irrespective of their particular tradition. However, I believe that this is, in some ways the root of our mistake in how we have approached Left Unity. We have made no serious, collective attempt to theorise our involvement in this project. This is a serious mistake. One just has to look at the graveyard of failed electoral and unity projects on the left- the Socialist Labour Party, the Socialist Alliance, Respect, and the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (the latter may not have been officially declared dead, but the last rites are being read); to realise that such projects are far from easy, and organisations with a lot more ideological and organisational coherence have been seriously damaged as a result of their involvement.

The problems which have arisen from our failure to properly theorise and analyse our approach to left unity should be obvious to everyone. While the majority of our activists are engaged in Left Unity, there is little to no communication between them. There have been no meetings to discuss the project, no coordinating group has been formed, and therefore there has been absolutely no strategy. As a result, we have seen no serious debate about any of the current discussions which are on-going within Left Unity, and are now pursuing alternative, often counter-posing strategies. While this may be necessary in some circumstances- if extensive political discussion has occurred and there is a failure to reach a consensus- it is not something to be celebrated. We should strive for unity in action at every opportunity, and at the very least attempt to coordinate our activity. I would argue, therefore, that we need to work collectively to theorise what sort of organisation Left Unity is, and what we would like it to become. We need to base this on an analysis of recent attempts to build similar projects, and root it in theory. We must attempt to reach a common analysis on how to approach Left Unity as an organisation, in order to best intervene in it and build it.”

Since then, Left Unity has moved on a ways and so has the Network – and so, of course, has the world. We have worked more in Left Unity, we have discussed our work together more, and we are, I think, more likely to agree than we were before (although that is partly because some people have left the Network).

In any case, I'd argue that the basics of what Tim N said are still correct:

- Left Unity is a big part of the Network's activity
- We haven't theorised it fully
- We should strive for a consensus where possible

### Left Unity – what is it?

The basics - Left Unity is a new party of just over 2,000 subs-paying members, with a number of functioning branches around the country. There's a (hugely over-engineered) constitution, setting us up as a party which seeks to introduce “radical and fundamental changes” including a democratically planned economy and the principle of from each according to their ability, to each according to their need.

We have an elected (largely by default) leadership and have recently adopted some policies – reasonably described as “a raft of solid left-wing policy”.

As for the bigger stuff – well I think it's not quite clear yet “what it is”, in terms of finding a neat box to put it in. But tendencies have emerged and it's worth looking at them:

## **Who is Left Unity?**

There are some individuals who have been leading the project to a greater or lesser extent pretty much since it started. They don't seem, to me, to have a homogeneous set of politics, at least not formally. But they do seem to share a general approach to Left Unity – they want it to be clearly to the left of Labour while clearly not revolutionary, they place great importance on being media-friendly, and they are committed to liberation politics' having a high profile. This group clearly commands the confidence of a large section (quite likely a majority, and a growing one) of Left Unity's membership and provides most (all, really, except for Ken Loach) of the party's public profile.

There are a number of people who call themselves revolutionaries who are members of Left Unity. Some have no other alignment, not having confidence in any of the expressly revolutionary groups which currently exist – and who could blame them? Some are members of Socialist Resistance, who have theorised the importance of what they call broad parties over a long period and see Left Unity as the right way to build such a broad party in Britain, to some extent because they believe that building sizeable revolutionary organisations is not something that can be done in the current period. Some members (though probably more recent ex-members) of the IS Network take a similar approach. Members of Workers Power take a different approach in that they argued for Left Unity to adopt a class struggle programme focussing on the methods of struggle (rank and file in the unions, general strike, etc.) and less on strategic policy, arguing that we should leave the debate over the strategy to achieve socialism for a future date when Left Unity is more established.

There are also a fair few Left Unity members who have previously been members of various revolutionary organisations but now do not consider themselves revolutionaries. Some of these people are very wary of revolutionary groups' being involved in Left Unity and at times and in places this has caused problems.

The Independent Socialist Network is another grouping within Left Unity, which also operates as part of the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition. They formed the bedrock of the Socialist Platform, arguing that Left Unity needed a more explicit socialist programme and to be clearer on what socialism meant.

When the membership of Left Unity was in the hundreds, the above formal and informal groupings were a majority and many of the discussions and debates were between and among them. Indeed, as far as active membership was concerned, there may have been a majority of revolutionaries in Left Unity in the early stages. This is now no longer the case and as membership increases it becomes less and less so. So whatever your position on what Left Unity should have been when it was set up, it is set up.

It is also worth noting that the recent survey of Trade Unionists in Left Unity revealed that the largest grouping is in Unite (probably with a large chunk from Unite community), then Unison then the NUT. With over a hundred members in both Unison and Unite and 60 members in the NUT, Left Unity could play quite an important role in the left of those unions in the near future.

## **What is Left Unity for?**

Whilst there is a lot of agreement in Left Unity, there are also some different ideas about what the party is for, which can be seen embodied in the different policy documents for conference. Is it;

- A “proper” Labour party, with a spirit of '45 but really meaning it. A party for government.
- A political campaigning organisation, taking part in and eventually leading struggles, at first against the austerity onslaught and later in offensive struggles to improve the position of working-class people. A party which stands in elections as part of those campaigns.
- A party for the overthrow of capitalism, whether by parliamentary or extra parliamentary means.

There are other ways of thinking about Left Unity, but those three describe a lot of the discussions which I've heard among members. Some people have different views taken from all three different perspectives. Generally all agree that Left Unity should at some point be standing in elections to raise left wing politics in the mainstream, indeed many of those without a background in political parties, or coming over from Labour, expect us to stand in elections in order to win power – at whatever level. To be councillors, even to be MPs.



Those who have theorised broad parties in depth over a long period have an understanding of what they expect and what they want from electoral work. Similarly those who reject the broad party approach have a clear, but different, understanding. However, the Network has not examined these questions and we do not as yet have answers to the major questions posed around Left Unity.

What working agreement we have among the membership has not yet come about through planned discussion and agreement, though we did take some steps in that direction with Simon H's document to the Sheffield members meeting.

Some discussion points for the network and for all revolutionaries working in Left Unity

What is the perspective over Left Unity? Is it a medium to long term project? In other words even if people don't "get their way" yet in the votes will they leave or stay in and seek to change minds over time?

We have some members in the leading bodies - is that because they are the best individuals or because they have built a genuine base or to fill a gap because no-one else was standing? How are they accountable to the network?

- what politics do we take to LU and why? Do we press our revolutionary politics? Or do we put forward militant anticapitalist politics? Do we expect to win LU to our politics? What are our red lines?

- Will network members stand for public elections as Left Unity candidates, in which case what is the balance between our revolutionary views on the state and Left Unity's current position?

- what attitude should we take to LU taking office; at a local council level; as part of any coalition, formal or informal; or at national level? Although a million miles off, the questions around "a workers' government" informs our practice now.

Finally we need a full and honest accounting of the mistakes of the Socialist Alliance and Respect. Whilst everyone is happy to criticise the collapse of the Socialist Alliance because we can all blame the SWP who are currently no ones friend, the fact that a number of people in Left Unity were also important figures in or prominent supporters of Respect at the time means that the critical evaluation of the failure to build the last "broad left party" goes undone. For instance quite a few of the 'foot soldiers' for building Respect are now in the ISN and rs21, how do we account for that political past? Was it all just George Galloway's fault or was Respect a flawed project for more fundamental reasons than one persons egotism?

# Ukraine and Imperialism

## International Socialist Network

There has obviously been much debate about the crisis in Ukraine. The toppling of the pro-Russian Yanukovich government by a pro-European Union, largely nationalist protest movement and its replacement by a right wing Ukrainian nationalist government was followed by a military intervention by the Russian state, which led to the annexation (or separation depending upon your take on events) of Crimea and pro-Russian separatist groups, suspected of being directly supported by Moscow, seizing government buildings in Eastern parts of Ukraine. This has raised a number of questions regarding how the left should respond, both to the right wing government in Kiev, and the actions of Moscow; which raise issues regarding the revolutionary socialist analysis of imperialism.

Some argue that our primary concern should be the seizure of power by right wing nationalists in Kiev, which many argue are backed by the European Union and US imperialism, in an attempt to further break into Russia's sphere of influence, as it has been doing since the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989. There are some truths to this narrative. The Maidan movement quickly became dominated by right wing organisations, including fascist groups, which played a key role in the street fighting which led to the seizure of power. It is also true that after the fall of the Soviet Union, when the United States became by far the most powerful state in the world, Western imperialism, often through the European Union or NATO, began to encroach upon former Soviet spheres of influence. Eleven countries which were formally part of the Eastern Bloc are now EU member states. The West also increased its influence by backing movements which seized power in Yugoslavia, Ukraine, Georgia and Kyrgyzstan. Much of the politics in these countries since 1991 have been dominated by a push and pull between the West and Russia over control of such states. This has often led both sides to manipulate political, religious and ethnic divisions in these countries in order to maintain, or attempt to establish, control. However, it is incorrect to argue that the main villain in the crisis is US imperialism attempting to encroach upon Russia's turf. Firstly, this makes a rather problematic assumption that Russia in some way has a right to dominate Ukraine and other countries, and treat any attempt to encroach upon that as an act of aggression. Secondly, it utterly downplays the despicable role Russian imperialism has had in the region, and continues to have.

## Russian Imperialism in Ukraine

Ukraine was arguably Russia's oldest colony, to various degrees subject to the Russian empire since the early eighteenth century. Under the tsars there was a policy of Russification of Ukraine, as there was elsewhere in the empire. The use of the Ukrainian language in print and public was suppressed, Russian nationals were appointed to all leading administrative positions, and the eastern Ukraine was forcibly settled by Russian nationals. Throughout the nineteenth century a Ukrainian nationalist movement began to emerge. As urbanisation and industrialisation, driven by the tsars, occurred, this movement became dominated by a cultural trend towards a romantic version of nationalism often led by the middle class intelligentsia. With the 1917 Russian Revolution, Ukrainian nationalism emerged as a force, and there were several attempts to establish a Ukrainian nation. The Civil War, however, devastated the Ukraine. 1.5 million people were left dead, and there was a famine in the South in 1921. A national cultural revival was supported by the Soviet government following the Civil War, but these policies were reversed by the Stalinists in the 1930s. The programme of collectivisation of agriculture used to fuel the Soviet Union's industrialisation drive in the 1930s led to a Great Famine in Ukraine where 10 million people died. In the Great Purges of 1929-34 and 1936-38 systematic state terror was used against Ukrainian culture. "Nationalist deviationists" were purged from the Ukrainian Communist Party, artists and intellectuals were imprisoned. Political repression at this time killed a further seven hundred thousand people. The Ukrainian language and culture was once again repressed- the Stalinists returned to the "Russification" policies of the tsars.

These were the events which led up to the 1941 invasion of the Soviet Union by Nazi Germany. Although the majority of people in Ukraine either fought against the Nazis, or did not fight at all, a significant number supported the Nazi invasion. The Nazi ideology, with its anti-Communist and anti-Slav elements resonated with many Ukrainian nationalists. The brutal repression of the Soviet state drove many Ukrainians into the arms of the Nazis, and Ukrainian nationalism since has been influenced by fascism. Ukraine, particularly the West, was largely agrarian; industrialisation enforced by Russia and the Soviet Union meant much of the middle class and intellectuals were influenced by romantic utopian ideas about conservative rural societies and this became integral to Ukrainian nationalism- the Nazi's "blood and soil" nonsense resonated with this.

After the Second World War, Soviet repression continued. Twenty percent of the Soviet Union's "special deportees" in the early 1950s were Ukrainian. Tartars from Crimea were deported to Central Asia in their hundreds of thousands,

ethnic Germans were also deported. The Soviet Russification of Ukraine continued. Right wing Ukrainian nationalism remained the most dominant resistance ideology right up until the liberation movements of 1989-91. Despite becoming independent with the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991, it remained part of the Commonwealth of Independent States, and dominated both economically and politically by Russia. Attempts by Ukrainian nationalists to break from this domination, and resistance to this from elements of the ruling class which support Moscow, have become the dominant themes of politics in post-Soviet Ukraine. The current crisis is the latest phase in this process.

### **The Ukrainian Government and Fascism**

It has been repeated often by many people on the left that the Ukrainian government put into power is either fascist, or it contains fascists. The government is definitely right wing, and includes three ministers from the far right populist party, Svoboda, which has a number of rabidly anti-Semitic leaders and racist policies. However, it would be inaccurate to label them as fascists. They are not a dictatorial party which aims to found the state on racial grounds. Undoubtedly, like many right wing populist organisations, they may number some fascists and fascist sympathisers in their membership, but this in itself does not make a party a fascist one. The government as a whole is a mixed bag of right wing nationalists, conservatives, and right neoliberals. The Right Sector, which was formed in the course of the Maidan movement, could, and should, be called a fascist organisation. It is constituted largely of neo-Nazi groups and individuals and was the core of the street fighting units in the Maidan movement. It continues to organise violent racist street gangs. The Right Sector, however, has no members in the government, and its relationship with the government is at best complex. On 25 March one of its leaders was shot dead by police.

This is not to underestimate the role of fascism in the Maidan movement. It did not start as an overtly right wing movement, and included many progressive elements, such as anarchist groups. However, the movement was quickly hegemonised by the organised right, and these progressive elements were drive out. But there is an important distinction between right-wing nationalist and conservative capitalist governments, and a fascist one. It is this that needs to be made clear. A fascist government would mean the complete shutting down of all democratic freedoms in Ukraine, and the establishment of a police dictatorship. It is perfectly conceivable for the current government to become such a state, or the social forces upon which it rests to replace it with one. But this has not happened yet. This has important implications for our analysis of resistance to the Kiev government. If it is correctly designated as fascist then the role of socialists is to organise alongside those who wish to overthrow it, and this may include compromise with some unsavoury elements in the Russian separatist movement in order to do so. The overthrow of the fascist government would be the absolute priority. If this designation is incorrect then socialists' relationship towards such a group would be different. While they should absolutely fight for any right wing government's overthrow, any act of resistance to the state would not become by virtue of its opposition to the government an objectively anti-fascist act. Furthermore, the role of neo-Nazism is not limited to the Ukrainian nationalist movement- there are fascist groups in the Russian separatist movement too, such as the openly neo-Nazi Russian National Unity group, which has been involved in actions in Donetsk and elsewhere.

### **Lenin on Imperialism**

Many on the left have argued that a refusal to criticise Russia is based upon a theory and practice informed by the Leninist tradition, rooted in Lenin and the Bolsheviks' response to the First World War. When the war broke out in 1914 the vast majority of the social democratic movement in Europe, most notably the German SPD, backed their respective states, in most cases arguing that it was a defensive war against the aggression of others. Lenin argued that Marxists should take a "defeatist", rather than "defensist" position, call for the defeat of their own states, and oppose any calls for victory. The argument went that "the real enemy is at home". The workers of Russia were oppressed by their factory owners and the Tsarist state, just as the German workers were oppressed by their own capitalists and the Kaiser. By supporting their own states, the social democrats were not only propping up their own oppressors, but defending their own bourgeoisie's right to oppress the people of other states. The war on either side was not one of defence, but an imperialist war fought between rival predatory states over the right to subjugate colonial people.

This position was absolutely correct. However, when applied abstractly to Ukraine, it ceases to have much relevance. The First World War was an all-out conflict between rival imperialist camps. While Western imperialism has no doubt been encouraging Ukrainian nationalists in the hope of facilitating a turn towards the European Union and away from Moscow, the main aggressor, both historically and currently, is Russia. As has been argued above, the troubling nature of the Ukrainian nationalist movement has its roots in historic oppression by the Russian and Soviet states, and the Maidan movement is simply the latest attempt to break Ukraine from Russian domination. There is no current military threat from the West, either towards Ukraine, or Russia; however, the events in Crimea clearly showed the direct military threat Russia poses to Ukrainian self-determination. To argue when Russian troops are annexing territories, and massing troops on the Ukrainian border, that we should not criticise this and instead insist that "the real enemy is at

home” is essentially to remain silent whenever any state which happens to be in some kind of rivalry with Western imperialism commits any act of subjugation against another country. This approach was not at all what Lenin argued for. The slogan “the real enemy is at home” was raised to argue with workers that their enemy was not workers of another country, but the bourgeoisie, it was not meant as an apologia for the imperialist states of other countries.

The spirit of Lenin has also been channelled in order to justify, or apologise for, the annexation of Crimea. Crimea is, like other parts of Eastern Ukraine, ethnically and linguistically majority Russian. It is also the home of the Russian Black Sea Fleet. After the Maidan movement seized power in Kiev, Russian troops seized government buildings and military bases. A referendum was then called by the Crimean parliament on secession from Ukraine and reunification with Russia, which was returned with a ninety seven percent vote in favour. It has been argued that socialists should support this decision, on the basis of the right of nations to self-determination, as argued for by Lenin. The Tsarist Empire dominated a huge number of national minorities in Europe and Asia. As has been referred to above, the Tsarist state was extremely repressive to these national groups through the system of Russification. There was a debate among Marxists as to whether to support national struggles for liberation. Some argued that by supporting national liberation movements Marxists would be supporting backward and reactionary ideas of nationalism, which would reinforce divisions created by class society. The role of Marxists was to oppose all forms of nationalism and argue for internationalism. Furthermore, many of the leaderships of these movements tended to be from the bourgeoisie and middle classes of the national minorities, and many of them held reactionary politics. Marxists should be arguing that working class should be fighting as much against them as against the Russian autocracy. Lenin, however, argued that the right of nations to self-determination was a basic democratic right. While Marxists should be fighting for the leadership of the working class in national liberation struggles, the victory of these movements was a key part of the fight against Tsarism and capitalism. One cannot argue for the self-emancipation of the working class and yet refuse to recognise working class people’s in other nations’ right to be liberated from imperialism.

It is simply absurd to argue that what occurred in Crimea was an exercise in self-determination for the Crimean people. That any democrat can argue with a straight face that a ninety seven percent vote carried out under military occupation does not have some question marks over its legitimacy is quite worrying. What occurred in Crimea was annexation, not liberation. While all Marxists absolutely should argue for the right of Crimean people to self-determination, a pre-requisite of that must be an immediate withdrawal of the occupying Russian forces. It is a strange kind of anti-imperialist who argues that sending in the tanks is the solution to the national question. Furthermore, if we are going to argue for the right of nations to self-determination, we should apply this principle equally to Ukraine as a whole. Russian imperialism continues to attempt to dominate Ukraine politically and economically, and has just annexed one of its regions. This same tactic is being threatened in other parts of Eastern Ukraine. A major concern for all socialists and internationalists at this point should be the fracturing of Ukraine along ethnic lines. All forms of capitalist imperialism have purposely exploited ethnic divisions in order to maintain or establish control, and this is exactly what is occurring in Ukraine, as a deliberate policy from Moscow. The ethnic divisions created and imposed by Russian and Soviet oppression are now being exploited to fracture Ukraine and impose Russian dominance. It was colonisation by Russia and the Russification programme which created both Greater Russian Chauvinists, who considered themselves a privileged caste under Russification, and right wing Ukrainian nationalists, who looked to Western imperialism, and even sometimes fascism for liberation. We have seen from Yugoslavia to Rwanda the dangers of such divisions, which were encouraged and manipulated by imperial powers, lead to ethnic civil war. Such an outcome would be a disaster for the working class of any ethnicity. The first step for the self-determination of all Ukrainian people has to be the immediate withdrawal of Russian troops and an end to its interventions in the country’s politics.

### **The Anti-Imperialist Movement**

The International Socialists raised the slogan of “Neither Washington Nor Moscow” during the Cold War. This was based upon the analysis of the Soviet Union as a state capitalist society, in which the exploiting class was the bureaucracy. It rejected the designation of the USSR as being a workers’ state in view of the fact that the working class, as a result of the Stalinist counterrevolution, no longer controlled the means of production. This is not the place to go into the virtues of this theory, and many involved in the unity process do not agree with it, including some members of the IS Network. However, this theory established a policy for the International Socialists where they did not reserve our criticisms for native imperialism alone, and would oppose imperialism from both sides of the Cold War, including the one which claimed to be socialist. For example, when there was a workers’ revolution in Hungary 1956, which was crushed by Russian tanks, they did not argue that “the main enemy is at home” and point to the real and imagined benefits Western imperialism would gain from a successful Hungarian revolution and a weakened Eastern Bloc. It was

argued first and foremost, that support for the workers of Hungary against Soviet imperialism was the number one priority for internationalists. The same was true for Czechoslovakia in 1968.

However, with the collapse of the Soviet Union there was a shift of emphasis, not just for International Socialists, but for all the anti-Stalinist left. Where previously there had been two competing world powers, it was generally agreed that there was now only one. In a “unipolar” world, the focus of anti-imperialism was naturally the now unchallenged US imperialism, which was increasing its power through extending its control into formerly Russian spheres of influence, and was now largely unrivalled when subjugating the Third World, where previously it had to compete with Moscow. The anti-imperialist movement in response to US hegemony reached its height with the opposition to the launch of the “War on Terror” and the attacks on Afghanistan and Iraq. Not only was the main aggressor obviously the United States, the countries it was invading were clearly not rival imperial powers. Attempts to claim that these wars were either wars of defence or liberation were quite rightly written off as propaganda. The unipolar imperialism meant that a consensus both with regards to resistance to imperialism at home, and national liberation could be formed within the anti-imperialist movement, which had previously been much more difficult when there was a competing world power. In Britain, the most obvious example of this consensus was the Stop the War Coalition which achieved massive mobilisations over the Iraq invasion. Some of the core organisers of this were from Trotskyist, International Socialist and Stalinist traditions. Some involved, particularly from the latter tradition, held to the idea that anti-imperialists should never criticise states which are fighting against US imperialism (mostly because during the Cold War these states were either supported by the Soviet Union or their victory would weaken the US in favour of the USSR). Many of these were also sympathetic to the Ba’ath regime. While International Socialists and other Trotskyists were critical of the regime, and equally so of the politics of those who supported them; such divisions were much easier to overcome when the main threat was Western imperialism. The real enemy *was* at home.

The anti-imperialist consensus has largely broken down, for a number of interconnected reasons. The combination of becoming bogged down in Afghanistan and Iraq, and the economic crisis severely weakened American imperialism. While it remains without a doubt the global hegemon, its relative power compared to other states such as Russia and China is weaker than it was before. One could in fact argue that the recent setbacks for the West when it has attempted to encroach upon the Russian sphere of influence- such as Georgia, Kyrgyzstan and possibly now Ukraine- were the result of Russia being able to assert itself now that the US has been weakened. This realignment has unbalanced the consensus that was established around anti-imperialism. Many in the anti-imperialist movement consider states such as China and Russia to be anti-imperialist themselves, and refuse to criticise them. This made little difference when the US was invading Iraq. However, when Putin’s Russia began sending tanks into other countries, such a position became problematic to say the least. Furthermore, the Arab Spring also broke through the consensus. While mass movements against US allies like Ben Ali and Mubarak were supported by all, when the regimes of Gaddafi and Al Assad came under threat, the divisions grew even greater. Both had been supported as anti-imperialist regimes by Stalinists, and some Trotskyists, and Syria remained a key Russian ally. Russia had troops stationed in Syria, and supplied Al Assad with weapons to put down the revolution. At this point, the Stop the War Coalition argument that “the real enemy is at home” slogan was appropriate ceased to be a principled anti-imperialist position, and became nothing more than apologism for Putin’s Russia and the regimes he supports. This is not internationalism, as the real enemy for the people of Syria was not the US, but Al Assad and the Russian state backing him. The same is true for the Ukrainian people now.

The role of internationalists is not to side with one imperialism over another. While we must primarily criticise our own state’s imperialism, and certainly refuse to be pulled by any attempts to paint it as progressive or benign; when a rival imperial power, such as Russia, is engaged in the oppression of another country as internationalists we should argue for solidarity with those it is oppressing. However, the resurgence of Russia may weaken Western imperialism; it is not the role of anti-imperialists to root for rival imperialisms. Socialist Resistance, Workers Power, the Anti-Capitalist Initiative, the IS Network and RS21 have managed to work well together on the question of Syria. We all built a conference on the Syrian Revolution, and the former four released a joint statement in its support. We may not be able to reach a similar consensus over Ukraine, but we should be looking where possible to build joint work on international and anti-imperialist issues. The Stop the War Coalition has become politically bankrupt, and while we are not in a position to build a new campaign, we should be attempting to make the argument for a new radical anti-imperialist left which builds practical and political solidarity for international resistance movements.

## Ukraine – the Russians are the aggressors

### Socialist Resistance

The Russian annexation of Crimea has sharply divided opinion on the British left. On the one side [No2EU is saying](#): “The European Commission will officially hand over €1.1 billion this week to far right coup leaders in Kiev that removed the elected government with street violence.

US secretary of state John Kerry also said on a visit to Kiev this week that Washington will add \$1 billion into the pot to shore up fascist rule.”

A less shrill echo of this view is offered by the Stop The War Coalition which prominently features an article by Eamonn McCann in which he sets out their stall. “In the game of Great Power politics, if we have to pick a side over Crimea, let it be Russia.” [Counterfire](#) have republished the same article along with one by [Chris Nineham](#) which argues that the strategic issue is that “Nato and EU expansion in the last two decades has dismantled Russia’s traditional buffer zone.” From this he also concludes that we have to back Russia.

We can speculate that some around No2EU see Putin’s Russia as being, in some distorted way, the heir to socialist bulwark that the Soviet Union once was in their eyes. For people from the SWP tradition this isn’t the case and their rationale is that as socialists in the European Union and (EU) their main responsibility is to oppose NATO and the EU.

It is true that NATO has been moving Eastwards for many years. It is also true that Putin does not like it, and that we oppose it. The idea, however, that this is what drives Putin’s policy towards Ukraine today misses the point. His policy today is motivated by two principal factors: opposition to the popular (Maidan) movement that brought down Yanukovich, which he saw as a potential threat to his own regime in Russia, and his wider expansionist project in the frame work of Great Russian chauvinism.

Self evidently if the EU or NATO were to start making claims on Russian territory we would oppose that. It is also obvious that the land seizures so far have all been initiated by Russia, which stage managed a flagrantly ridiculous referendum and used the result to seize Crimea. Russia was the aggressor. It violated Ukraine’s national sovereignty.

The movement that brought down the Yanukovich regime was deeply contradictory. It could hardly have been otherwise in a society run by gangster capitalists who atomised mass consciousness and ran political parties as means of sharing the spoils between competing groups of oligarchs. An issue of serious concern has been the presence of the far right both in the mass movement and the newly formed government. We’ll set aside for a moment the widespread presence of the far right in Putin’s Russia. Ukraine has a specific history which has left a legacy of a deep antipathy to everything tainted by the Soviet Union. The famine Stalin inflicted on Ukraine in 1932-3 (which was covered up by many socialists at the time) is estimated to have killed 7.5 million people. Many Ukrainians interpret it as a deliberate act of genocide by the Moscow regime. It is inevitable that a national trauma on that scale will affect the way people view history. It goes some way to explaining why anti-Soviet rhetoric has such an appeal and the far right has successfully exploited the memory of that Stalinist crime.

### Revolutionary content

However, socialist participants in the events, such as [Ilya Boudraïtksis](#) of “Vpered” (“Forward”), Russian section of the Fourth International saw the mass movement as containing the germs of a revolutionary process:

“...each element of which breathes an authentic revolutionary consciousness, painted in some strange, unusual colour – a kaleidoscope of propaganda from every possible ultra-right-wing party and sect, with countless “Celtic” symbols and runes on the walls. The incredibly sickening dissonance between the revolutionary content of the process and its reactionary form represents circumstances demanding not squeamish ethical evaluations, but action aimed at changing such an ugly equation.”

This ideological confusion is the fruit of a society in which independent working class consciousness was suppressed for decades by a bureaucracy which claimed to rule in the name of that class. The thieving oligarchy, which apologists like George Galloway refer to as the overthrown government, viewed the state as a treasury to be plundered. As a result mass consciousness has been evolving rapidly from a primordial swamp of old prejudices, half remembered ideas and glimpses of the outside world.

For many Ukrainians all that is good about the outside world is represented by the European Union. From their point of view, and that’s what matters here, joining the EU means that they might have a chance to get a job in England, Germany or Belgium. In a country in which virtually every transaction between a citizen and the state means paying a bribe, the EU can seem like a corruption free paradise. Singing a song which mocks the government doesn’t get you

thrown in jail. The Sex Pistols weren't sent to a labour camp outside Birmingham for singing God Save the Queen. Contrast that with Putin's treatment of Pussy Riot. Who wouldn't choose to live in a society like Denmark when the option on offer is living in a client of Putin's Russia?

### Analogies

Putin's strategy is to gouge out chunks of Ukrainian territory. He started with Crimea. That is roughly analogous to the north of Ireland. The British state has used the presence of a Protestant population which is opposed to a united Ireland to claim sovereignty over Irish territory. Another analogy is the Israeli state. There, a settler population displaced the original inhabitants and denied them the right to a Palestinian state. Stalin's tactics in Crimea were not too different from those of the Israeli state's founders. He deported almost 200 000 Crimean Tatars and filled the gap with ethnic Russians. Putin is planning to use the presence of Russian speakers in other parts of Ukrainian territory to annex them. This has even worried Belarussian President Alexander Lukashenko. According to [The Moscow Times](#) he criticised Russia's annexation of Ukraine's Crimea as setting a "bad precedent." Even Putin's friends in the region are twitchy now.

Putin's [speech](#) formalising the annexation was an appeal to every reactionary aspect of backward Russian chauvinism, from religion to empire building:

"This is the location of ancient Khersones, where Prince Vladimir was baptised. His spiritual feat of adopting Orthodoxy predetermined the overall basis of the culture, civilisation and human values that unite the peoples of Russia, Ukraine and Belarus. The graves of Russian soldiers whose bravery brought Crimea into the Russian empire are also in Crimea."

He went on to make barely concealed threats, claiming Kiev as a Russian city and reserving the right to intervene in Ukraine if a suitable pretext arose:

"Kiev is the mother of Russian cities. Ancient Rus is our common source and we cannot live without each other.

Let me say one other thing too. Millions of Russians and Russian-speaking people live in Ukraine and will continue to do so. Russia will always defend their interests using political, diplomatic and legal means. But it should be above all in Ukraine's own interest to ensure that these people's rights and interests are fully protected. This is the guarantee of Ukraine's state stability and territorial integrity."

Putin's way of dealing with the national questions which have resurfaced since the break up of the Soviet Union is to try to turn the clock back to a Tsarist concept of the Russian sphere of influence. All the states on its borders are expected to defer to Moscow's wishes, up to and including being part of its economic sphere of influence and having governments that are based on the Moscow model.

To prove that Moscow is serious it has started raising the stakes by gradually increasing its military presence in Transnistria, an unrecognised state which borders Moldova and Ukraine. Both the Moldovan and Ukrainian governments have interpreted this as a preliminary step a campaign of disruption which will be used to justify armed Russian intervention against both states.

Current polls say that the chief Russian kleptocrat is enjoying a burst of popularity as a consequence of his aggression against Ukraine. The same thing happened when he invaded Chechnya and flattened Grozny, turning the country into what the murdered Russian journalist Anna Politkovskaya called "a small corner of hell". Putin and his cronies must have been terrified when they saw the people take to the streets against Yanukovich. If it could happen in Kiev it could happen in Moscow or Saint Petersburg. His aggression on Ukraine served the double purpose of intimidating the mass movement there and showing any Russians inclined to imitate it what they might expect. It was a real source of optimism that 50 000 people took to the streets of Moscow to protest against their own state's aggression, an event that went unremarked by the British Stop the War Coalition.

Saying that we are against the Russian seizure of Ukrainian territory does not for one moment imply that we defend the new government in Kiev. Like the old one, it is largely comprised of robber oligarchs and now includes a significant far right presence. That does not make it a fascist government. We are on the side of the Russian anti-war protestors and the multi-ethnic thousands who took to the streets of Ukraine's cities demanding an end to corruption, the plundering of state assets and cops who were indistinguishable from criminals. A defeat for Russian imperialism in Ukraine is both a victory for that mass movement and the Russian working class. Socialists in imperialist countries should see their primary responsibility as establishing links and building support for those groups in Ukrainian and Russian society which are opposing the oligarchs and organising a real movement against them. That is rather different from helping Putin hold on to power by annexing his own imperialist "buffer zone"

## **Ukraine: neither Berlin nor Moscow, but workers' internationalism**

15 January 2014 **Workers Power**

Over the last month, thousands of people have occupied Independence Square in the Ukrainian capital Kiev. Their protests were initially provoked by President Viktor Yanukovych's decision to suspend negotiations for Ukraine's eventual entry into the European Union.

It had transpired during these negotiations that the EU was demanding neoliberal "reforms" similar to the austerity it has imposed on Greece or the horrific "shock therapy" that Boris Yeltsin imposed on Russia in 1992.

The effects, in terms of mass unemployment, inflation and the slashing of social services would have fallen most heavily on the Russian-speaking eastern Ukraine, where much of the former Soviet Union's heavy industry was located. This is the heartland of Yanukovych and his wing of the capitalist class, drawn from former bureaucrats who grew rich from privatisation. They could not survive against "free" competition from the West.

The rival wing of the ruling class, based in the Ukrainian-speaking west and centre of the country, want to liquidate much of this industry that they call a rustbelt. Instead, they hope to act as the local agents for what they hope will be a massive inflow of German capital seeking cheap Ukrainian labour.

Yanukovych would also like to draw in Western capital; in fact, he had already gone a long way to agreeing the EU's terms and even now has not ruled out a deal. But he wants to sweeten the bitter EU pill and at the same time avoid a break with Russia's strongman, President Vladimir Putin.

A complete turn to the West, however, would quite simply destroy Yanukovych's economic and electoral base. It could also see Russia resort to devastating acts of economic retaliation. Ukraine is massively in debt to Russia for its oil and gas supplies; Putin could literally turn the country's lights off. But the West can exert some quite painful pressure of its own; Ukraine has \$17 billion in loans due to be repaid this year.

Ukraine's internal dispute thereby overlaps with the growing imperialist rivalry. Both Chinese and Russian officials have protested at US and EU interference in Ukraine. These two new imperialist powers have been pulled closer by Washington's "Pivot to Asia" and by Germany's economic "Drang nach Osten" or "Drive to the East" for markets and labour.

Putin has undoubtedly exerted pressure on Yanukovych behind the scenes to escape the EU's embrace, and has offered bridging loans. But, at an economic level, Russia cannot match Germany and its EU partners. Sections of the US ruling class are also sticking their oar in, getting back at Putin for their humiliation over Syria.

The protest camp in Independence Square has been visited by that old Republican warhorse Senator John McCain, who addressed a rally alongside MEP Elmar Brok of Germany's ruling Christian Democratic Union.

He met with Arseniy Yatsenyuk of the opposition Batkivshchyna (Fatherland) party, heavyweight champion and Presidential hopeful Vitali Klitschko, and Oleh Tyahnybok of the openly fascist Svoboda (Freedom) movement, whose members smashed to pieces the statue of Lenin in Independence Square.

Tyahnybok makes brazenly anti-Semitic statements, claiming Ukraine must be liberated from the "Muscovite Jewish Mafia" and the country's 400,000 Jews expelled. Yet McCain and the EU emissaries sat down to dinner with him!

This outside sponsorship of Ukraine's rival camps, by Moscow, Berlin and Washington, threatens its independence and its unity. Under these outside pressures, the country could split along its linguistic and historic lines. Only the working class can hold the country together, avoid inter-ethnic conflict and establish a meaningful independence.

Neither the pro-Western parties nor the pro-Moscow eastern oligarchs can offer a real future. The attitude of ordinary people to the Moscow and EU manipulators should be a plague on both their houses!

What is urgently needed is the independence and unity of the working class across both language groups, a militant defence of jobs and social services, and a determined reaching out to the workers of Western and Eastern Europe alike.

Brussels and Moscow hands off the Ukraine!

For a Ukrainian workers' republic!

For a Socialist United States of Europe!



## **Kyiv: regime rules under fascist whip**

11 March 2014 **Workers Power**

Power comes from the barrel of a gun. The counterrevolutionary regime composed of thieves, fascists and hypocrites in Kyiv has secured the temporary loyalty of the fascist militias by conceding key levers of state power to Svoboda ("Freedom") and Pravy Sektor (the "Right Sector").

For the first time since the Second World War, fascists have come to power through an insurrectionary movement. The posts now occupied by unreconstructed fascists were claimed as their reward for their vanguard role in the armed overthrow of the government of President Viktor Yanukovich.

The armed and well-organised fascists operating under the umbrella of the Right Sector acted as the shock troops of the Euromaidan "revolution". It was these forces that rejected the EU-sponsored "peace" deal.

Instead they summoned reinforcements from their police allies in Lviv, surrounded the parliament in Kyiv and ensured the appointment of a government that locked out the liberals in favour of a stitch up between ultra-nationalists and open fascists.

This was the result of the USA's successful efforts to frustrate the plans of German imperialism and its Ukrainian client Vitali Klitschko, whose Ukrainian Democratic Alliance for Reform received nothing in the anti-democratic distribution of spoils. The US imperialists would rather have "their" people in power – even if that means getting into bed with the fascists of Svoboda.

The fascist ministers include Andriy Parubiy, commander of the Maidan self-defence forces and a founding member of Svoboda. He was appointed Secretary of the National Security and Defence Council, which presides over the defence ministry and the armed forces.

His deputy secretary is Dmytro Yarosh, leader of the Right Sector coalition and a former mercenary who fought alongside the Chechen resistance.

Key posts have been granted to Svoboda members Oleksandr Sych (deputy prime minister), Ihor Tenyukh (defence), Serhiy Kvit (education), Oleh Makhnitsky (Prosecutor General), Ihor Shvaika (agriculture) and Andriy Mokhnyk (ecology).

Right Sector commandant Stepan Kubiv is the new chairman of the National Bank of Ukraine. Dmytro Bulatov and Tetiana Chornovol, both linked to the anti-Semitic and ultra-nationalist paramilitary organisation Ukrainian National Assembly – Ukrainian National Self Defence have been rewarded with the Youth and Sports ministry and the government's new "anti-corruption committee" respectively.

The social crisis in Ukraine has allowed the two wings of Ukrainian fascism – the street fighters and the politicians – to capture key levers of state power.

The government has committed to elections by 25 May. The fascists, however, have not wasted a single day in driving through as much of their agenda as possible.

In their first hours in office they released dozens of their imprisoned comrades and tabled motions to terminate the official status of Russian and other minority languages, to rescind Crimean autonomy and to outlaw the Communist Party of Ukraine (KPU). With these actions they must bear a heavy responsibility for provoking a wave of pro-Russian chauvinism in the East and particularly in the Crimea.

The presence of so many fascists in the self-appointed "transitional government" is no accident. The growing desperation of millions impoverished by the economic crisis, the leading role played by the fascists during the Maidan protests and the manoeuvring between the rival EU and US imperialists has catapulted them into a position where their demands for a share of state power could not be ignored.

Their further advance, either within the state machine or by a further surge in the elections, casts the shadow of social catastrophe over the country. Already it has created the prospect of civil war.

Maidan's fascist vanguard

From the outset, the Euromaidan movement mobilised support on the basis of a reactionary appeal to chauvinist and nationalist ideas among the Ukrainian-speaking population concentrated in the west of the country.

With the Neo-Nazi “14/88” and White Power icons emblazoned on their shields, flying the red and black flag of Stepan Bandera’s Nazi-collaborationist Ukrainian Insurgent Army, the fascists emerged as the most powerful force within the Euromaidan movement.

While it was possible to mobilise generalised opposition to the deeply unpopular Yanukovich regime, the influence of the far right and its identification with nationalist icons like Stepan Bandera immediately alienated much of the Russian-speaking East of the country.

It should not be forgotten that far more Ukrainians fought in the Soviet Army and partisan formations than in Bandera’s pro-Nazi auxiliaries, and that however gross and repulsive were Stalinism’s crimes in Ukraine (the famine, the purges, the NKVD’s slaughter of nationalist prisoners in 1941 and the mass deportation of Tatars), those of the Nazi occupiers will never be erased from their consciousness.

The discipline of the fascists and the absence of an equally disciplined left allowed the fascists to drive organised progressive activists out of the Maidan demonstrations, attacking feminists, trade unionists and anarchists and ensuring their physical and political hegemony over the movement in the west and centre of the country.

The fascist militias of Svoboda (whose leader Oleh Tyahnybok was one of the three main speakers of the Euromaidan movement) and the Right Sector formed the vanguard of the uprising. Also prominent were Spilna Sprava (“Common Cause”) and the so-called Afghantsy (Afghan veterans).

The fascists consolidated their position within Euromaidan. They used their combative armed gangs, first to defend the square, and then to go onto the offensive, seizing government buildings to use as bases for further advances, then seizing police stations and barracks, and then attacking Communist Party and trade union offices. In short, they used their position to arm themselves and to prepare their supporters for the seizure of power.

They soon conquered a place in the top echelons of the protest leadership. Tyahnybok shared the platform in Independence Square alongside opposition leaders Vitali Klitschko and Arseniy Yatsenyuk. He received the embrace of US Senator and Republican Presidential candidate John McCain.

Imperialists play with fire

The EU-brokered peace deal collapsed when the fascists and the mutinous police refused to accept a government of national salvation, seeing their own militias as a living embodiment of salvation from Russian imperialism.

The EU’s attempt to bring about this compromise was intended to stymie the USA and achieve an outcome favourable to German imperialism. It had of course an element of sound political calculation: to keep Ukraine together as a state requires a regime that does not completely exclude or alienate the 30 to 40 per cent of the country’s population who are Russian speakers.

But the deal, which included disarmament of both the police and the militias, came too late, after the shootings of protesters. Opposition leaders were booed off when they appeared on the stage to announce it. The militias refused to hand over their weapons; instead they bussed in reinforcements Lviv, which had already declared independence from the Kyiv government.

The deal, which aimed to undermine the influence of the organised far right in the transition by promoting Klitschko as an alternative “clean pair of hands”, collapsed because the fascist influence, backed up by guns distributed or seized from police depots, had grown too big. Their supporters were demanding Yanukovich’s head, in some cases literally, not his or his party’s cooperation in putting together a coalition that would carry out the EU Association Agreement.

Svoboda and its “respectable” nationalist partners found that their interests coincided while they were mobilising to oust Yanukovich, but when it came to an armed struggle for power the latter discovered that they faced a monster with ambitions of its own.

Even if they wanted to, the US-backed Ukrainian nationalists will have difficulty stopping their fascist junior partners from settling accounts with leftists, Jews and working class people opposed to their agenda.

However, far from being powerless in the economic sphere, the USA’s agenda will be to drive through measures that will allow Western companies to come in, strip the country of its assets and complete a counter-revolution that will destroy the last vestiges of the jobs and services that the working class built with its own hands in the pre- and post-war years.

Thus we can see that the fascists in Ukraine are being courted and cultivated by competing capitalist oligarchs and by competing blocs of Western imperialists (the Franco-German and the Anglo-American blocs).

The EU, who tolerated the fascists' presence for as long as they were a useful tool with which to threaten Yanukovich, wanted Klitschko in the driving seat or at least as a strong check on Yulia Tymoshenko's *Batkivshchyna* ("Fatherland"). But they were outmanoeuvred by the USA, which was prepared to tolerate a fascist presence in government in order to sideline the EU.

US Assistant Secretary of State Victoria Nuland's now infamous intercepted telephone call revealed the extent of the USA's role in determining the composition of the transitional government. She insisted that "Yats" (Yatsenyuk) not Klitschko should be prime minister, and conceded that Svoboda could have several ministries as long as Tyahnybok did not receive a major post. Her comment "fuck the EU" left little doubt about the USA's attitude toward its erstwhile allies in Berlin.

With the EU sidelined, the USA faces a new problem. While it recognises that the fascists will be a useful and necessary tool in order to fulfil the functions of class repression left vacant by the collapse of the police during the coming "readjustments", the fascists' methods risk destabilising the government and provoking working class resistance.

Some argue that this is not possible because the Right Sector is marginal and because Svoboda are not "real" fascists. Let us examine these specious claims more closely.

Svoboda: suits today, boots tomorrow?

The crisis in Ukraine has catapulted Svoboda from obscurity to international notoriety. By the time Yanukovich fled, its blue flags bearing the three-fingered Tryzub (trident) flew from occupied town halls and government building from Lviv to Kyiv.

With 15,000 members and 37 MPs, Svoboda is the largest far-right organisation in Ukraine. It shares a European Parliament affiliation with Hungary's Jobbik, the British National Party, France's Front National (FN) and several other European fascist parties.

It was founded in 1991 as the Social-National Party of Ukraine (SNPU). Its name and Wolfsangel (wolf-hook) logo were adopted to express its identification with Hitler's Nazis. In its early years it struggled to differentiate itself from the morass of fascist sects that spawned in western Ukraine following the collapse of the Soviet Union.

In 1999 the SNPU founded Patriots of Ukraine, a paramilitary group responsible for attacks on leftists and trade unionists.

Patriots of Ukraine was disbanded in 2004, when the party elected "reformer" Oleh Tyahnybok as its leader. At its party congress that year, the SNPU embarked on the process of reforming its public image, heeding the advice of FN leader Jean-Marie Le Pen who had led his own organisation from obscurity to third party status.

Its first step was to change its name and to replace the swastika-like Wolfsangel with the three-fingered Tryzub, a symbol associated with Ukrainian nationalism. Furthermore, it declared plans to form a single rightist political party jointly with the Congress of Ukrainian Nationalists and the Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists (OUN). This transformed it into a sizeable organisation on the streets, even if electoral success would continue to elude them for several years.

To publicise its re-orientation, it announced its support for mainstream anti-Russian politician Viktor Yushchenko's presidential candidature.

Through a combination of purges and an emphasis on "social" questions, Tyahnybok succeeded in shaking off the party's overt identification with neo-Nazism. Nevertheless the words and actions of Svoboda leaders since expose this shift as the cynical opportunism it is.

Speaking that year at a memorial to Stepan Bandera, he called for Ukrainians to fight the "Muscovite-Jewish mafia" that he claimed controlled the country. He praised Bandera's organisation, the original OUN, for having fought the Russians, Germans, Jews and "other scum who wanted to take away our Ukrainian state." Bandera's OUN had been responsible for the extermination of tens of thousands of ethnic Poles and Jews during the Second World War.

A year later Tyahnybok signed an open letter denouncing the "criminal activities" of "organised Jewry" who he claimed wanted to commit "genocide" against the Ukrainian people.

These speeches were publicised heavily in the state media, exposure that did nothing to hinder Tyahnybok's rise to national prominence in the years to come.

Tyahnybok has never renounced these views, indeed saying recently that he had not repented and could quite happily repeat what he had said. Re-elected as leader of the party several times, and a member of the Verkhovna Rada, the

Ukrainian parliament, Tyahnybok clearly represents the fascist core of the party, whose antisemitism and ideas of racial superiority are merely given a façade of supposedly more respectable Banderism.

Svoboda's political breakthrough in the 2009 regional elections in Ternopil oblast, where it came first place with 35 per cent, capitalising on the common ruin of the Yulia Tymoshenko's bloc and Yushchenko's Our Ukraine, former allies who had fallen out.

In the 2010 regional elections, Svoboda took seats in seven more regional councils and won control of three. In the 2012 general election it won 37 seats in the Rada and 10 per cent of the vote. While in the rural western regions it took nearly 40 per cent of the vote, in the industrialised east it polled under 5 per cent and in some regions just 1 per cent.

That year Svoboda joined the Dictatorship Resistance Committee, a front created to protest against Tymoshenko's criminal conviction, and pledged to work with the United Opposition coalition composed of Tymoshenko's Fatherland and Arseniy Yatsenyuk "Front for Change" if the opposition won the election. This was the genesis of the "triple alliance" that toppled Yanukovich by force in 2014.

Svoboda exploited popular disillusion with the rule of Tymoshenko and Yushchenko. It took part in numerous protests promoting populist slogans on social issues and opposing "unpatriotic" (that is, pro-EU) policies, deflecting attention away from the reactionary, pro-fascist politics of its members and leaders, politics that are an insurmountable barrier to its growth in the eastern and southern parts of the country.

Under Yushchenko's presidency, Svoboda benefitted from Yushchenko's rehabilitation of Nazi collaborator Stepan Bandera and his promotion of Ukrainian nationalism. However a key part of Svoboda's popularity undoubtedly stems from the fact that it is seen as being untainted by association with the oligarchs whose competition has brought the country to the brink of economic ruin.

Just as Hitler did not shout about his funding by industrialists Thyssen and Krupp, Svoboda makes much of its claim that it rejects all funding from the oligarchs, insisting that it is primarily small and medium sized businesses owners that finance it.

After Yanukovich's Party of Regions won the 2010 presidential elections, Svoboda began to receive heavy publicity in Yanukovich-controlled television stations. This was a calculated move designed to establish Svoboda as the party of opposition, allowing Yanukovich to denounce his opponents as nationalists, Banderites and fascists. These terms are a political death sentence in the Russian-speaking regions, where there remains a strong collective cultural identification with the Soviet Army and partisans' struggle against the Nazis.

Given Svoboda's annual processions by torchlight commemorating the anniversary of Bandera's death, such accusations cannot be dismissed.

While Svoboda denies that it is racist, deploying the common fascist defence that it is not "against" anyone but simply "pro-Ukrainian", it continues to restrict membership to ethnic Ukrainians.

An idea of its leaders' attitudes to ethnic minorities is given by Svoboda deputy leader Ihor Miroshnychenko's comment that actress Mila Kunis is not Ukrainian, but "a Jewess" ("zhydivka").

Leaving aside the Svoboda member who founded a "Josef Goebbels Political Research Centre", objections that Svoboda's policy documents and official manifesto don't contain outright racism are purely academic. Many, if not all of its leading cadres are conscious racists, open antisemites and ethnic Ukrainian chauvinists. The scum floats to the top.

Still, it is true that vicious racism and a publicly expressed desire to ban abortion even in the case of rape do not alone a fascist party make. But anyone who is deceived by this whitewash will be in for a nasty surprise.

Inasmuch as every particular fascist party has to develop its own ideology by combining whatever nationally dominant reactionary trends suit their purpose, Svoboda's ideology is drawn from the 'Two Revolutions' doctrine, developed by former OUN leader Yaroslav Stetsko.

The essence of this doctrine is that "the revolution will not end with the establishment of the Ukrainian state, but will go on to establish equal opportunities for all people to create and share material and spiritual values and in this respect the national revolution is also a social one".

In other words, once the political revolution overthrows the ruling political regime, a "social" revolution will proceed. This social demagoguery, borrowing from the working class movement its language while giving it a non-class racial meaning, is typical of fascism.

An examination of Svoboda's political programme reveals the ideology underpinning this national and social revolution: state control over banking and major industry, nationalisation of farmland under hereditary ownership, promotion of the family and church, restrictions on the social and economic rights of women, subordination of national minorities to "Ukrainian culture" and so on. This is nothing less than a political programme intended to bind the exploited classes to their exploiters through the imposition of a common "national community".

None so blind

There are some on the left who point to the gradual moderation of the party's extremism to win votes as evidence of a shift away from its neo-Nazi roots. There is no doubt that Svoboda's leaders have made a political calculation to follow the road of some western European fascist parties (the FN in France and the Alleanza Nazionale in Italy). These had generally come to the conclusion that the classical fascist strategy, of opening the struggle for power through winning physical control of the streets, was counter-productive in their countries' circumstances, abandoning this in favour of a strategy of capturing key state and ideological positions by electoral means.

However, the conditions that gave rise to the most successful of these "fascist front" projects, Jean-Marie Le Pen's FN, are not the conditions prevailing in Ukraine, where fascists have already secured physical control of the streets, and where the question of power is squarely on the agenda.

In Ukraine, the social conditions exist for the nourishment of a viable domestic fascist street movement. That this is true is evidenced by the leading role of fascists in the Maidan movement. It is simply wrong to argue that this "cannot be fascism" because fascism develops only in response to a revolutionary threat from the working class. Trotsky's writing on fascism in Germany and Italy make it clear that it is the failure of working class movement parties and unions to present a viable solution to a deep social crisis that turns the desperate petit bourgeois masses, the students, the unemployed and so on towards a fascist "revolution".

The fact that a working class alternative, the expropriation of capital and the overthrow of the capitalist state, is not immediately on the agenda will not stop a section of the capitalist class from turning towards fascism, should they deem it necessary.

The EU-facing west Ukrainian capitalists may come to realise, if they have not already done so, that formal democracy is unsuitable for bringing about the practical conditions needed to force through a further and even more destructive phase of neoliberalism. This, in turn, is needed if they are to achieve their aspirations of moving Ukraine firmly into EU and US imperialism's orbit as a cheap labour semi-colony, from its current position of floating between Russian and Western imperialism.

Fascism can be useful to the capitalist class long before it has to face a revolutionary working class. Factions of the capitalist class back fascist formations hoping to gain a privileged position for themselves, while sacrificing their competitors and perhaps hoping to exert some greater regional or national influence.

In the revolutionary situation opened by the movement against and the overthrow of Yanukovich we have seen the crystallisation and effectiveness of a functional division of labour in the fascist movement.

Svoboda concentrates on the penetration of the state machine, especially the police and army. Adopting the minimum necessary veneer of bourgeois-democratic respectability, it outsources the mobilisation of a fighting street movement to the Right Sector and other groups, who in turn are stigmatised by their constant conflict with the police and the "rule of law".

Undoubtedly this creates a constant internal and external tension. The more a fascist front party has to exist in "normal" conditions of bourgeois state-imposed social peace, the more it is driven to moderate its more extremist ideas and thus undermine its own activist base, while still being unable to distance itself entirely from them and so to attract the social base of the reactionary but more respectably "constitutional" nationalist parties.

Likewise a fascist front party comes into conflict with the street based militants who attack it for its concessions, for not being sufficiently "patriotic" or for being unwilling to use physical force to defend its ideals, and so on.

The Ukrainian fascists' particular success is that Svoboda provided a large part of the political credibility for the unpopular Fatherland, while the Right Sector won their credibility by their organised defence of the Maidan movement. In other words, Fatherland is only in power thanks to the fascists.

The fascists presented their cheque for their services rendered – and got their positions in government.

In many ways the presence of so many fascists in government is not ideal for Tymoshenko or the USA, which is preparing to bankroll her regime. It creates an inbuilt instability in the form of a conflict between Svoboda's need to

respond to its mass base in the impoverished petit bourgeoisie, and the big capitalists' desire to extend their monopolies, by making the urban and rural poor bear the brunt of any IMF restructuring or debt payments.

Nevertheless, the big oligarchs have no particular loyalty to Fatherland or to Tymoshenko. This much is evidenced by the fact that many previously supported Yanukovich. Should they find the policy of Fatherland to their dislike, they may bankroll and encourage Svoboda to mobilise its petty bourgeois base, apparently against this or that wing of the capitalist class or international finance capital, but in reality securing the pre-eminence of whichever oligarch happens to have been the fascists' most consistent backer.

The character of the transitional government is absolutely undemocratic. It was a carve up between the oligarchic factions, and the decision to allow Svoboda control over the state's repressive apparatus would have been taken only with the consent of a considerable section of the capitalist class. This means at the very least that a significant section of the Ukrainian capitalists are putting in place the means to wage civil war, over and above what the "regular" state apparatus is capable of. That is why the fascists have been allowed to purge the police.

The reason is simple

When the measures of economic reckoning really take hold, whether through an IMF and US-sponsored restructuring, or as "collateral damage" in an inter-imperialist trade war, it will become necessary to crush working class resistance, and the ruling class is readying and arming itself for this grim task.

The experience of Svoboda, as an anti-establishment party that can deploy a façade of legitimacy while outsourcing street fighting to peripheral groups specialising in physical confrontation, will be keenly observed by the capitalists across Europe, but especially in Greece and Hungary.

Workers' self defence

The new government, headed by oligarchs from Tymoshenko's Fatherland, with the support of a various oligarchs appointed as regional governors, will now seek to consolidate its power. It can expect to receive the political and financial support of the US imperialists who engineered its victory.

The fascists will be the shock troops of any offensive launched by the new government against the working class, especially in any takeover of the eastern region where Russian speakers are a majority. Whether or not Tymoshenko and the leaders of Fatherland openly support them, the fascists are now strong enough to mobilise independently, and take the initiative if they feel the new government shows weakness or indecision.

The fight to destroy the fascist threat is an urgent one, but the working class must not wait for the nationalists and the fascist gangs to take the offensive. Now, while both sides are regrouping and preparing their next moves is the time for the working class to rouse itself. Nor should workers in the Crimea await salvation from Putin, let alone cede the field to Russian chauvinists and even fascist militias, who are no better on their side than the Right Sector are on the ethnic Ukrainian chauvinist side.

The working class, which has largely remained on the sidelines since the outbreak of the Maidan protests in December must act, and act decisively. It is the only social force with the power and an interest in checking the virulent growth of inter-communal hatred.

Where attempts to organise generalised strike action in support of either side of the struggle have failed, the working class must now act to paralyse this illegitimate government, and impose its own agenda.

Otherwise, and as we have seen, Crimea's demand for independence, understandable given the threats issued by the reactionary Kyiv government, could only be guaranteed by its military annexation to Russian imperialism.

Now is the time for the working class to mobilise the most powerful weapon in its arsenal, the general strike, which will paralyse the bosses' profit machine and open up the question of power once again.

This would ensure that the choice this time will not be between this or that faction of the oligarchic ruling class, but between capital and labour, between those who produce all of society's material and cultural wealth, and those who plunder it for their own gain.

What is to be done?

It is plain that the new regime presents extreme dangers to the working class as a whole – both Ukrainian and Russian speakers, as well as the various minorities. Its non-fascist component will set out to implement roughly the same sort of neoliberal reforms that the EU and IMF have ruined the lives of Greek workers with. But it will also prove a just as bitter a foe of the democratic and libertarian elements who supported the early phases of the Maidan demonstrations.

As the government's fascist components try to fuse with and extend their control over the repressive and security forces of the state, they will strike at the students and the workers regardless of what language they speak or where they live.

If the fascists receive a big boost to their electoral fortunes in May, with more members in the Rada and hence more ministers, then a real "fascisation" of the state could occur. It will only be stopped to the extent that it is resisted in the workplaces, on the streets and in the universities. Stopping it will neither be a peaceful process nor a "legal" one, since these illegitimate forces have in part already made their "national revolution."

Effective resistance to the new regime must be rooted where the working class is potentially most powerful and organised: in production, transport and commerce. Here workers have the potential to bring the source of the oligarchs' wealth, their labour, grinding to a halt. Forming workers' committees in the factories and neighbourhoods can provide the foundation for local and citywide councils of action, which could also draw in delegates from the unemployed, the youth, students and pensioners.

Workers' councils should be linked up as much as possible between East and West, making common cause for the defence of a united Ukraine, and against the intervention of all the imperialist powers: not just the EU, which undoubtedly has the upper hand at present, but also Russia.

If they are made up of delegates directly accountable to mass assemblies of their electors, if they are recallable whenever necessary, if they organise collective self-defence that does not rely on Russian or Ukrainian police or troops, then they can empower working class resistance and marginalise the far right and the fascists in both major language communities.

Working class self-organisation based in the sphere of production, expressed in the collective political decisions of workers' councils, will put the workers' main economic and social demands onto the agenda, and indeed raise the question of who should run the country, and in whose interests. The formation of such democratic assemblies and workers' councils is the only way in which the workers themselves can win the power to act independently in their own interests, and to debate and adopt a coherent and strategy of resistance.

In a country where the government is highly unstable, with equilibrium between its bourgeois neoliberal and its fascist components unlikely for long, with territorial dual power between the east and the south on one side and the centre and the west on the other, workers must fight to create their own forms of governance and self-defence.

They should not accept the power of the remaining regional oligarchs in the east that have not yet gone over to the Kyiv regime any more than of those in the west who have rallied to it. The workers must acquire the weapons to defend themselves. They must do what the fascists have done, and open up the armouries of the police stations and barracks. They must win over sections of the regional state forces and fight alongside them if they help them defend their communities. The working class in the industrial heartlands should agitate for the army to hand over their weapons to the people, and should elect workers' councils in workplaces and neighbourhoods. Soldiers' committees should be organised in the army to win rank and file soldiers to the cause of working class power.

It can be seen in the Ukraine that there is not necessarily strong antagonism between those in the Ukrainian army and the Russian soldiers and sailors. Revolutionaries should encourage the opposed armed forces to fraternise with one another, to resist all provocations and orders to take action against one another. Indeed the soldiers and sailors should be urged to form their own councils of delegates and elect as their officers and commanders people who will not give the order to shoot on each other or on civilians, whether these orders come from Moscow or Kyiv.

Soldiers' assemblies could become an obstacle to fascist provocations or to Russian imperialist intervention, especially if they set as one of their key tasks the defence of minorities: Tatars and Greeks in Crimea, Romanians and Hungarians in the west, Russians in the centre and west, and Jews. Any attempt to create a monolingual and mono-ethnic Ukraine will only produce a terrible disaster along the lines of the wars in Croatia, Bosnia and Kosovo in the 1990s.

It is possible that Russian "volunteers" from the far right, or even Putin's special forces, may start to arrive in significant numbers. Of course, it is permissible for revolutionary volunteers to go to the aid of their brothers and sisters in Ukraine, but to do so under the flags of Great Russian chauvinism, let alone fascism, will not aid but will in fact harm their cause irreparably. It will make it more difficult to achieve class unity, and therefore to win over Ukrainian workers from the west of the country.

The workers of Poland, the other EU countries and Russia should support a struggle to maintain an independent and united Ukraine without privileges for any ethnicity. That struggle should start with a fight to disarm and destroy the fascist organisations. Its slogan must be a united socialist Ukraine as part of a socialist united states of Europe.

The people's only security lies in a struggle for a Ukraine in which the economic and military resources of the whole country are under the control and at the service of the working class. It lies in a struggle for a society that serves the material, social and cultural needs of those who work, and that fights tooth and claw against the reactionary imperialist powers East and West. These powers will, if threatened from below, drop their conflict and collaborate to crush any independent workers' actions.

This means that the defence of workers' action in Ukraine must come primarily from workers in Russia, Germany and the rest of Europe, who have absolutely no interest in seeing either of the competing imperialist camps exploiting the Ukrainian workers as cheap labour or looting their country's natural resources.

Against the politics of despair, the answer and inspiration is the genuinely democratic and internationalist spirit of the Bosnian protests. "Down with nationalism!" is the slogan on the streets there, as they fight for all nationalities in their country against austerity and inequality. Unity of the workers and poor of all nationalities against national hatreds, austerity, and capital: that's where the hope for Ukraine lies.

- No recognition of the illegitimate government, imposed by a fascist-led coup and supported by a violently purged Rada. No to the neoliberal policies of privatisation and closures imposed by the EU. End corruption by expropriating all the oligarchs.
- Down with the fascist gangs that are infesting the state apparatus: for workers' self defence. Protect all national, ethnic and linguistic minorities. No to Great Russian chauvinist or fascist "volunteers" entering Ukraine.
- No to a Russian invasion or occupation of any part of Ukraine. No to any NATO sanctions, intervention or ultimatums. Imperialists – west or east – keep your hands off Ukraine!
- For the right of any part of the Ukraine, and Crimea in particular, to democratic self-determination, exercised free of any occupying forces whether from Kyiv or Moscow.
- For workers' councils in the factories, soldiers' councils in the barracks, and farmers' councils in the countryside, all with democratically controlled militias pledged to protect all ethnicities.
- For a workers' and farmers' government to create the basis for a united and independent socialist Ukraine as part of a socialist united states of Europe
- For a movement of international solidarity with resistance to fascism, and to all imperialist pressure and intervention, whether from the EU or from Russia.
- For a new revolutionary party of the Ukrainian working class, to take its inspiration from the original Bolsheviks, unfalsified by Stalinism.

## **Between imperialisms: Ukraine, Crimea and the Tatar Question**

4 April 2014 **Workers Power**

On 16 March, the population of Crimea voted overwhelmingly for federation with Russia. The results of the referendum were immediately rejected by all the major western imperialist powers, which have now barred Russia from G8 meetings and applied sanctions to figures in Russian President Vladimir Putin's entourage.

In response to manoeuvres by Russian troops, Nato has severed its relations with Russia, increased its air forces in the Baltic, and a US warship has passed through the Bosphorus into the Black Sea. Nato has escalated its military encirclement of Russia by announcing war games with Azerbaijan and Armenia.

The belligerent tone of the Obama administration contrasts sharply with its silence over the bloody repression of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt. That crackdown has seen thousands killed in the wake of the US-backed military coup led by general Abdul Fattah al-Sisi.

Imperial rivals

The crisis in Ukraine and the Crimean referendum vote to secede were not instigated by Russian imperialism. Its military manoeuvres and annexation of the Crimea are a response to the putsch in Kyiv, sponsored and funded by the USA to the tune of \$5bn, which installed a pro-Nato, West Ukrainian chauvinist regime, backed by openly fascist elements.

Confronted with an attempt by a hostile imperialist bloc to extend its military perimeter and to draw Ukraine into the orbit of the EU and USA, Russia acted to defend its own interests; interests which are antagonistic to those of the EU-USA.



It is not the job of socialists to join in the blame game manufactured by the capitalist media. We should explain the crisis in Ukraine as the consequence of inter-imperialist rivalry, sharpened by the economic crisis. The Russian annexation of Crimea is a response to the policy of the US and the European Union to seize the national resources of Ukraine, exploit the “cheap labour” of its workers and to use the country strategically to outflank Russia.

In short, the western imperialists want Ukraine as their exclusive semi-colony and ultimately military base. They have accomplished this by brazenly encouraging the overthrow of Ukraine's elected President, Viktor Yanukovich, the purging of his supporters from parliament and the installation of a prime minister, Arseniy Yatsenyuk, handpicked by the US envoy, Victoria Nuland. This government has made it clear it will sign a treaty with the European Union that will subject the country to the kind of reform programme whose effects have already been seen in Greece. The putsch itself was spearheaded by an armed fascist militia whose backbone was the neo-Nazi Right Sector. It has installed several ministers from the political front of the fascists, Svoboda.

The EU and United States' adventure in Ukraine marks a dramatic tearing up of the non-aggression pact struck with Gorbachev and Yeltsin in the early 1990s. Very much of the nature of an agreement among thieves, this compromise saw both great power blocs agree to guarantee Ukraine's borders and not to try to draw the country into hostile military alliances. Needless to say, while imperialist investment in Ukraine was concentrated respectively in the East and West, both Russia and the EU-USA bloc tried to promote their own allies and draw Ukraine closer into their orbit.

That Ukraine's status as a buffer zone could not last indefinitely was shown by the 2004 “Orange revolution”, the USA's first attempt to decisively alter the balance of influence in favour of the west. Although it was without doubt a phony revolution, it nevertheless did have a major element of a mass movement with sincere democratic aspirations by its participants, characteristics that the Maidan movement almost completely lacked.

The huge political and material support provided to the Maidan leaders was the price western imperialism paid to replace a corrupt, pro-Russian but constitutionally elected, president, with neoliberal nationalists ready to subordinate Ukraine to the demands of the IMF, the European Union and the White House.

No such support was provided to the movement in Bosnia-Herzegovina, a movement which is fighting a regime every bit as corrupt, venal and in league with a foreign imperialist power as that of Viktor Yanukovich. The difference? Bosnia-Herzegovina was long ago subordinated as a semi-colony of the EU and USA through the Dayton Agreement in the mid-1990s.

The scale of US military manoeuvres and the reinstatement of a Cold War-style isolation of Russia are designed to protect the gains the western imperialists have made in this coup. Their intervention represented far more of an “interference in the affairs of a sovereign state” in international law than did the referendum in the Crimea, and they lacked, and lack, the slightest democratic mandate for their actions.

#### Russia and Crimea

Russia, as an imperialist power, mobilised to defend its strategic interests in the Crimea and to send the message that it would not tolerate destabilisation on its border. That Putin will do this by threatening military invasion, promoting racist Great Russian chauvinism and boosting all sorts of reactionary and corrupt local proxies does not alter the fact that he is responding to a hostile expansion by western imperialism.

Revolutionary socialists are under no illusions about Putin's professed democratic or humanitarian concern for the Russian speakers in Ukraine and Crimea. His real interests are those of Russia as a great power and himself as a despotic leader able to crush the civil rights of Russians and continue the cruel and genocidal occupation of Chechnya. But the perpetrators of Western interventions in Iraq, Afghanistan, the Balkans, who themselves supported Putin's bloodbath in Grozny, cannot adopt the moral high ground. All of them are repulsive war criminals.

Nevertheless, we reject both the knee jerk anti-imperialism which says that the actions of imperialist states cannot also coincide temporarily with the interests of the working class and the Third Campism which relates only to an imaginary working class rather than the class and the conditions which prevail.

The surrounding of Ukrainian military bases in Crimea and the sealing of the border with Ukraine did prevent pro-Kyiv forces from behaving as they have done in the West and East, banning demonstrations and violently attacking anti-regime forces. It enabled the referendum to take place.

The referendum itself was demanded by Crimeans in response to the new regime in Kyiv, which threatened to “punish secessionists”. Other towns in the East and South of Ukraine have also demanded autonomy as a measure of self-defence against the new regime, which has appointed pro-regime oligarchs as governors to enforce its writ.

No one has seriously claimed that the referendum did not reflect the desire of a substantial majority of the people of Crimea to join the Russian Federation, at least whilst the present neoliberal-fascist coalition rules in Kyiv. Not only did

135 international observers, including some hostile to the referendum, find no instances of fraud or intimidation, but neither did the western journalists.

Those “revolutionaries”, taken in by Ukrainian nationalism, who denounced the referendum as just a Russian imperialist plot, or a vote by “Russian settlers” who have no right to live in the Crimea and no right to decide the future of the peninsula, lack not only an understanding of history but also the basic principles of working class internationalism.

While the referendum was far from meeting democratic standards (a very short campaign, no access to media for its opponents etc.), the pro-Kyiv forces declared in advance that any vote which challenged the unity of the Ukraine would be invalid. In short, the opponents of the referendum denied the democratic right of the Crimean population to determine their own future. As such, their claim to represent democracy is plainly a fraud.

While revolutionaries should condemn the mobilisation of Russian troops, as well as instances of pro-Kyiv activists being detained and even “disappeared” by Russian security forces, as actions purely designed to defend the strategic interests of Russian imperialism, it is clear that the overwhelming majority of Crimeans, including many ethnic Ukrainians and Tatars too, voted for federation with Russia.

The high turnout and overwhelming vote plainly represents a vote by the population against being subjected to the nationalist-fascist coalition in Kyiv. This is not only, and not mainly, the result of “Kremlin propaganda”, but a reflection of the undeniable fact that the Kyiv government was installed by a putsch, led by fascists and nationalists, who are extreme Russophobes.

For evidence of this, one does not need to turn to the fascists of the Right Sector, but to the bourgeois leader, Yulia Tymoshenko, lionised in the western media as a martyr persecuted by pro-Russian forces in Ukraine, who said in an intercepted phone call: "One has to take up arms and go wipe out these damn 'katsaps' [a derogatory term for Russians] together with their leader."

The Crimean secession was not the result of a Russian “invasion”, as many claim, but started with the rejection of the illegitimate, fascist-backed government in Kyiv by the mass of ordinary people in the East and, especially, in Crimea. This government, installed with the full material and political backing of western imperialism, was a provocation which in its first actions posed and continues to pose a serious threat to the Russian and Russophone population.

Seeing that the western imperialists would impose no serious limits on the terror mobilised to secure the new regime, the Russophone population, lacking significant working class organisation or self defence capacity, naturally looked to Russia to defend them.

#### The Tatar Question

The integration of the Crimea into the Russian Federation raises the question of the democratic rights of the Tatar minority, some 12 per cent of the peninsula’s population or 243,000 people. It was pro-Kyiv Tatar demonstrations under the fascist slogan ‘Glory to Ukraine’ that unleashed developments on the streets that led to the independence movement.

The Tatars’ preference for Ukrainian “protection” is very understandable, given the genocidal treatment they experienced under Stalin in 1944; the deportation of 238,000 to Central Asia in which as many as 100,000 (48 per cent) died. 150,000 descendants of the 1944 deportation still remain in Uzbekistan. Socialists should stand for the right of all those who wish to return to do so.

On March 18, the Crimean government announced it would require Tatars to abandon land they occupied without legal documents of ownership. The USSR, and post-independence Ukraine, both failed to return land that the Tatars had inhabited before deportation. As a consequence, Crimean Tatars squatted vacant land.

Expulsion from this land would clearly be a tyrannical, racist and oppressive act that should be condemned internationally. On March 29, the Crimean Tatar parliament, the Kurultai, voted for "ethnic and territorial autonomy" by "political and legal" means. However, there was disagreement about whether to seek this autonomy within the Russian Federation or within the Ukrainian state.

How feasible territorial separation would be, given the minority character of Tatars in all districts of the Crimea, is open to debate but, clearly, the fullest right to self-government, use of their language and culture and equality of all other political and social rights is not only democratically justified for them, but is in the interest of Russian and Ukrainian speaking citizens, too. All progressive forces in Crimea, Ukraine and Russia should defend the rights of the Crimean Tatars against all and any form of racism or oppression, wherever it comes from.

#### Internationalism

Ukrainian revolutionaries should resist all moves to set Ukrainian and Russian speaking citizens at one another’s

throats. Working class international solidarity is the only solid foundation for this. Unity can be preserved or restored by opposing all attempts to impose a single ethnic or linguistic “national identity” as the basis of citizenship and all its associated rights. This means rejecting both Great Russian and (West) Ukrainian nationalism.

Socialists should stand resolutely against any dismemberment of Ukraine as a state unless secession is the democratically expressed will of the majority of the population in a given area. It is the right wing nationalists and, even more, the fascists, who will, if they are not checked and defeated, pull Ukraine apart and make it a semi-colony of the West. Many western Ukrainians who have the illusion that life within the EU will be much better than what they experience now, will soon be disillusioned by the savage austerity the Maidan government and its masters in Berlin and Washington are planning for them.

Meanwhile, the Russophone populations of the East and South have every right to resist the imposition of the illegitimate decrees and imposed governors or mayors from Kyiv over their regions and to seek and install de facto autonomy. For this, they will have to build, or extend, self-defence militias and to create democratically elected councils, rooted in the factories and communities.

They should also reject the elections planned for May 25 and counterpose to them the call for elections to a pan-Ukrainian sovereign Constituent Assembly. Elections to this should be under the democratic control of workers and community organisations and defence guards and with the media taken out of the hands of the oligarchs or the state and open to all points of view, apart from those fomenting racism and ethnic hatred.

The elected representatives should be answerable to, and if need be, replaceable by, mass assemblies of their electors. One burning question will be the austerity and privatisation programme being foisted on Ukraine by the EU. Socialists should argue for the re-socialisation of the factories, land and businesses plundered by the oligarchs and the creation of a democratically planned economy. They should also seek links with working class and socialist organisations in Europe and Russia to oppose military escalation and the economic attacks being prepared by IMF bureaucrats. They should call for a Socialist United States of Europe and a socialist federation of central Asian states currently subordinated to Russia.

## **On the crisis situation in Eastern and Southern Ukraine**

8 April 2014 **Workers Power**

1. The crisis in eastern and southern Ukraine, which saw takeovers of city administration buildings, declarations of independent “people’s republics” and in response the despatch of “anti-terrorist” forces by the Kyiv regime, holds enormous dangers for working class and progressive antifascist forces in Ukraine.
2. It comes as the neoliberals who dominate the Kyiv government of Arseniy Yatsenyuk announce they have signed the agreement for a savage austerity programme, the usual “medicine” the European Union and the International Monetary Fund dictate, in return for a “bailout” of Ukraine’s international creditors.
3. It comes, too, against the background of the consolidation of the repressive apparatus of the Maidan regime by means of the integration of various fascist forces into a National Guard. This will undoubtedly seek to extend the repression already reigning in Kyiv and western Ukraine against the left and all those who oppose the ultra-nationalists, to the east and the south as well.
4. The apprehension felt in the major working class cities of eastern Ukraine is fully justified. People there, many of them Russian speakers, have good reason to fear a government made up of virulent Russophobes (see Yulia Tymoshenko's recent leaked phone call) as well as the havoc the neoliberals like Yatsenyuk will wreak on the industries of the east.
5. Ukrainian workers are right not to recognise this government or to accept the validity of its elections on 25 May. Above all, they are right to resist the “order” that the National Guard and the thugs of the Right Sector are seeking to impose.
6. However, the declarations of independent republics in Donetsk and Kharkov, and the calls for referendums on independence or autonomy under Russian protection, constituted a serious mistake or an adventure. Kyiv has immediately taken the opportunity to mobilise its forces of repression and, in Kharkov at least, to arrest those who took over the administration buildings.
7. Moreover, it seems that the numbers involved in the takeovers were quite small and, therefore, probably unable to resist the repression they are sure to face. A successful insurrection would require the participation of a mass movement of the working class, mass strikes and a workers’ militia that could confront the state forces. All this was plainly missing.

8. Nonetheless, in cities like Kharkov, Donetsk, Luhansk and Odessa, it is entirely justified for popular organisations to refuse to recognise the Kyiv regime and to resist the military and fascist forces sent to take control. It is also justified for them to assert their local/regional autonomy and, given the repression of left parties, impunity for fascist coercion etc, to boycott the election planned for May 25 until there is democracy in every part of Ukraine.

9. In present conditions, this can only be established by forming local workers' and people's defence squads in every town, city and village and the building of councils of locally elected and recallable delegates to take over local and city governments. These bodies alone would be able to ensure the protection and rights of all Ukrainians, whatever their ethnic or linguistic background.

10. Above all, they could ensure free elections to an All Ukraine Constituent Assembly, guarded against any fascist coercion and free of the bribery and corruption of the millionaire oligarchs. Free, too, from domination either by EU-US imperialism or its Russian rival.

11. Any attack by the new National Guard and the Right Sector fascists in Kharkov, Donetsk, Odessa etc, must be repulsed and resistance to them supported internationally. At the same time, any attempted takeover, overt or covert, by Great Russian nationalist groups, must also be resisted. Any direct intervention by Russia could trigger a bloody civil war and inter-ethnic conflict in Ukraine, which would be a disaster for all its people

12. The task of revolutionaries at the moment is not to launch minority insurrections which, without the masses, can only end in defeat and disaster. We believe the support for the proclamation of a "people's republic" in Kharkov by the comrades of Borotba was a mistake, despite the class and socialist demands under which it was made.

13. The main task today is to address the working class in the factories and mines, agitating for the rank and file memberships of the trade unions (despite their bureaucratic leaderships' ties to the oligarchs) to take action against the austerity programme, against the fascist-riddled National Guard and to reject the authority of the counterrevolutionaries in Kyiv.

14. Appeals to Vladimir Putin to intervene, calls for secession and to join the Russian Federation, can only alienate and divide the working class of the country even more deeply, whereas the task is to unify it against the neoliberals and the fascists. Only thus can Ukraine's unity and freedom from imperialism, east and west, be established

Free all those arrested by the forces of the pro-Kyiv regime

Down with its EU-IMF austerity programme

Down with the fascist gangs; for workers' self defence

Down with the illegitimate Yatsenyuk government

All Nato planes and warships out of the region

No to any Russian intervention in Ukraine

For a sovereign Constituent Assembly

For a workers' and farmers' government and expropriation of the oligarchs

For a United Workers' Ukraine as part of a Socialist United States of Europe.

## THE CRISIS OF THE LEFT AND ITS CAUSES

### A contribution from Workers Power

#### Summary:

- The discussions around revolutionary regroupment take place in a period where the forces contending for leadership of the working class resistance have demonstrably failed.
- This crisis of leadership exists in situation marked by both negative and positive contexts: the crisis and decline of the SWP and competition between far-left groups to monopolise the movement through false 'united fronts' as well as the creation of Left Unity, and the significant if non-committal rumblings of discontent with Labour from the leaders of the three big unions.
- Labour's accommodation to neoliberalism, and the failure of the reformist union leaders to lead a fightback have created a crisis of the reformist left. In this situation revolutionaries need to address the failures of the revolutionary left so we can intervene into the political flux and realignment and advocate most effectively a revolutionary solution to the crisis.
- To do this revolutionaries need to decide what differences cannot be contained in an effective fighting organisation, and which ones can. Schemas and shortcuts can play no useful role in this process.
- The role played by the large revolutionary groups has been a central, if by no means decisive factor in the disorganisation of the resistance to austerity. Small groups which pretend to be 'the' party develop a false relationship to the real mass organisations and struggles of the working class.
- The setbacks and defeats of the British working class since 2008 are not primarily due to the actions of the relatively tiny numbers of organised revolutionaries – though many have played a nefarious role – but down to the *absence* of a sizeable revolutionary organisation, armed with a consistent revolutionary strategy, one which does not seek shortcuts to success, but instead aims for the conscious organisation of millions of workers *against* the misleadership of the reformist Labour and union leaders, and which rejects electoralism and reformism as a strategy or even a temporary stage.
- We are in a period of sustained capitalist crisis, marked by episodes of heightened class struggle in southern Europe, and genuine revolutions in the Middle East. We do not believe that in such a period the task of building a revolutionary party is utopian.
- This does not mean presenting the revolutionary party as an ultimatum. On the contrary it means openly counterposing a revolutionary strategy to the failed strategies of the reformist and Stalinist left, and fighting to win the confidence and leadership of the working class in common struggle.

The starting point for discussions on revolutionary unity in Britain today is the crisis of the British far left, primarily of course the crisis of its largest single component the Socialist Workers Party. This crisis, including the formation of the International Socialist Network (ISN) and RS21, is the most obvious reason for believing there could be a real perspective of regrouping and uniting substantial revolutionary forces at this moment in time.

Another major positive context is also provided by the formation of Left Unity, starting from the thousands who responded to Ken Loach's Appeal and the approaching two thousand people who have joined. This has united in democratic debate over policy and strategy individuals new to party-political activity, ex-Labour Party members, former members of revolutionary groups as well as a few of the smaller revolutionary organisations.

To this background of political flux we can add the calls by the late Bob Crow of the RMT and other union leaders for a new labour movement party. Indeed, the rumblings of discontent with Labour from the three biggest affiliated unions – mainly from Unite, but on occasions from Unison and the GMB too - show a potential for change on a qualitative scale. The "organic link" between Labour and the unions has never been under such strain - however any decisive break is unlikely to materialise until after the 2015 election.

The potential for major realignment on the reformist left of the labour movement makes it an urgent task for revolutionaries to unite the maximum forces in order to influence this broader milieu - both inside Left Unity and more generally - and eventually win it to fully revolutionary politics. We need to decide honestly and frankly what differences between ourselves are serious and cannot be accommodated in a reasonably disciplined and effective single organisation and what are secondary issues that could and should exist in a single organisation.

These problems and opportunities are not just a British phenomenon. In France it is expressed in the rise of the left reformist/post-Stalinist Front de Gauche, led by Jean-Luc Mélenchon and in Greece with the electoral breakthrough of Syriza – which now claims 40,000 members and is a contender for governmental power. However the split and decline in numbers of the Nouveau Parti Anticapitaliste (NPA) and the crisis of the far left Antarsya, indicate the dangers as well as the opportunities of revolutionary forces being damaged by these developments rather than strengthened.

Then there is Italy - a painful reminder of the dangers inherent in any such process. Contrast the flourishing situation of Rifondazione Comunista ten years ago with the appalling splintering and disorientation of the Italian left after the second "experiment" with supporting Prodi.

In Greece the attempts of Syriza's leadership around Alexis Tsipras at the 2013 congress to pressure the far left groups within the party to dissolve, while he pursues increasingly right wing policies, abandoning many of the radical demands which brought Syriza to the bring of power in 2012, testify that the Syriza model may not be the permanent solution that many advocate for Left Unity. Schemas and watertight stages are in themselves a great danger.

For us all this testifies to the centrality of what Trotsky called *a crisis of leadership*. It is a crisis which the would-be revolutionaries are part of too - however much they try to be part of the solution. Workers Power can hardly claim to have been untouched by this "crisis of the left", as the presence of our former comrades in the Anti-Capitalist Initiative testifies.

For us this crisis is not just a matter of the preparation of an alternative leadership-in-waiting. It is a crisis of strategy for the workers' movement - in short, a crisis of what programme an alternative leadership and organisation must be built on.

As far as its short-term causes go this leadership crisis relates to:

(a) the continued and seemingly irreversible assimilation of Labourism and Social Democracy into neoliberal economics and politics,

(b) a failure of the strategy pursued by the leaders of the mass trade unions in the resistance to austerity,

(c) the failure the far left groups to present an effective alternative strategy or tactics to those of the union leaders – above all to create a united movement on the scale of the anti-poll tax and anti-war movements. A direct result of this is their failure to grow substantially during the most serious crisis of capitalism since the Second World War. Historically this is in painful contrast to the growth of revolutionary groups in the 1970s and 1980s.

(d) to this must be added the growth of post-Stalinist and left social democratic parties like Syriza in Greece, the Front de Gauche in France and others.

However, important as these conjunctural failures are in stimulating crisis on the far left, they cannot be the only ones since well before the onset of the crisis we witnessed the break up of the initially very promising Socialist Alliance (1999-2003), followed by spectacular car crashes for the Scottish Socialist Party (2006) and Respect (2007). These failures are in our view the result of a mixture of opportunism (throwing overboard essential Marxist principles, above all the struggle for a revolutionary programme, cultish boosting of figures like Tommy Sheridan and George Galloway), combined with sectarianism in the form of splits, walkouts and expulsions to ensure one or another tendency's domination of their own "front organisation".

### **How real sectarianism has blighted the fight back**

Workers Power has always criticised the idea that as soon as a group reaches a few hundred or a few thousand members, like the SWP or Militant in their primes, it can proclaim itself *the* revolutionary party which can just invite the working class to join its ranks en masse. Such mini-mass parties have a poor record in the history of British Trotskyism.

An organisation with such an exaggerated view of itself will inevitably develop a false relationship to mass struggles and mass organisations of the working class. If such a "party" cannot - because of its small size or weak implantation in the most militant sectors - play any real leadership role in significant struggles, then all too often it is driven to establish imitation mass "united front" formations to maintain the illusion of this influence. This also tends to developing a non-aggression pact with the left and not-so-left union leaders they want on their platforms to boost their claims to have hit the big time.

For this reason, over the past three years or so the rivalry between these parties and their offshoots has been projected into the movement of resistance against austerity. The three original "united fronts" (Unite the Resistance, National Shop Stewards Network, Coalition of Resistance (since subsumed into the People's Assembly)) are primarily recruiting grounds for their controllers.

The illusion of a genuine workers' united front is maintained by annual conferences (rallies) at which one or two left union general secretaries and left MPs speak, but at which nothing in the slightest bit controversial (especially to the celebrities who grace the platform) is discussed and nothing of significance decided.

If the People's Assembly/local assemblies becomes a real united front this will be a great step forward and we should all do our utmost to see that this happens.

Today, as the Labour Party leadership, with only the most feeble opposition from within its ranks, moves ever further to the right, embracing neoliberalism, dumping Keynesianism, reducing even further if not quite breaking their links to the unions, and just as a huge new crisis period has made plain that the issue of transcending capitalism itself is posed in a way it has not been for decades, the need for a powerful revolutionary organisation is itself posed with equal urgency.

That is why - as well as seeking to draw as many militants as possible from the various campaigns into Left Unity, we need to seek regroupment of the revolutionary forces, which by their non-sectarian activity on all the fronts of the class struggle are capable of laying the foundation of new, mass, revolutionary parties.

We have to critically evaluate the new organisational forms being thrown up by the struggle - such as Occupy or the *Tres Cosas* campaign - and develop new tactics or new combinations of old tactics in the best traditions of combining principles and flexibility which determined the political practice of the classical Marxists. With this approach we can reach out to wider layers than ever before. Establishing an honest and loyal relationship between older communist cadres and larger numbers of activists new to politics is central to developing new, organisations founded on an revolutionary socialist basis, orientated to extra-parliamentary struggle: organisations which are transitional towards the creation of a real revolutionary party.

This is the central task if we are to fuse our slogans and ideas in the minds and actions of thousands of new layers of militants. We do not believe that the present world situation – the deepest and most prolonged period of capitalist crisis and stagnation since WW2 – characterised by growing inter-imperialist rivalries and pre- or actual revolutionary situations in southern Europe and the Middle East is unfavourable to the building of revolutionary parties. Indeed, since revolutionary parties are vital to turning the potential for revolution into actual revolutionary victories any other perspectives would be sheer defeatism; accepting the fate of being a part of the problem will not help us become a part of its solution.

We do not believe – as comrade Alan Thornett of Socialist Resistance has recently argued - that the space available for political life and party building is a left reformist one. Firstly, there is one fundamental reason for not acting on this basis. Such left reformist parties invariably abort and sabotage (even if unconsciously) promising revolutionary or even just heightened class struggle situations. If anyone doubts this then we believe the record of Rifondazione Comunista in the early 2000s and the direction Syriza is now taking in Greece is clear enough evidence.

Does this mean standing aside from, or outside of, such parties when they really represent a major part of the vanguard of the workers, youth and the oppressed? No - that would indeed be sectarianism. But neither does it mean being just a loyal left wing, restricting our criticism of the left reformist leadership to secondary issues. It means fighting for a revolutionary leadership on a revolutionary programme.

## Portsmouth Socialist Network

### ISN

Since its formation in January Portsmouth Socialist Network (PSN) has been meeting on a fortnightly basis and doing our best to help build the left in the city. Organising meetings have generally varied between 8 and 14 attendees. We are mainly ex-SWP members; some had left after special conference, others in December 2013. We have members of ISN and rs21, and a comrade who had been in the IS in the 70s. We have also been collaborating with Hampshire Feminist Collective and Portsmouth Antifascists (AFN) which has led to members of those groups coming to our meetings.

We were clear from that start that we can achieve very little working separately or in competition with each other. There was also a general recognition that our previous activity in the SWP was mainly self-generated propaganda activity that did little to build class consciousness or the fighting potential of the working class. We have decided that the best thing that we dozen or so activists can do is throw ourselves into struggles that arise in a non-sectarian way showing real solidarity by offering our time and resources to any campaigns or actions that defend the working class, public services and oppressed communities. We also want to help initiate campaigns and try to make them democratic and accountable to all who wish to be involved.

#### Positives:

We have been very active in building an activist anti-fascist network by working with our anarchist comrades and other anti-fascists activists. Its early days but we have managed to co-ordinate to oppose racist activity several times. For years, despite complaints, the UAF branch in Portsmouth has been run as an extension of the SWP branch with no democratic structures. They will remain important for call outs and press related stuff but most non-swp who are regular activists have voted with their feet and attend AFN meetings and/or are active on the fb group.

We had an excellent public rally and joint meeting with Hampshire Feminist Collective for International Women's Day. Around 40 attended the rally, 25 came to the meeting that immediately followed including women that have been central to the Unite Community branch in the town. An rs21 comrade from London was kind enough to come down and speak alongside local activists in an open debate around women's oppression, cuts, intersectionality and safe spaces. On the basis of this we have won real credit from a number of leading activists in the locality.

We have produced one issue of a free bulletin sheet in which we have tackled the issue of benefit cuts. Although it is a publication of PSN we tried to keep the focus on providing useful information to claimants and promoting working class and left wing activism in general.

#### Problems:

We have very weak roots in the organised working class. We are generally aged from our early twenties to mid-thirties, so although a number of us are active union members we neither have the experience or confidence to be real workplace militants.

Although a number of us wish to be involved in Left Unity in more than a subs-paying capacity we have not managed to do that yet. A comrade contacted each person in the area who had signed the Ken Loach appeal and asked them if they wanted to be involved in regular meetings and activism, the response outside those we were already working with was poor. We will need to make some serious decisions of how to try to build Left Unity as the organisation progresses, it should be said that the not all of our own comrades are particularly enthused by the project.

Some of us feel while we are doing relatively well at the moment that not being formally connected to a national organisation could be a problem in the medium term, although given the size of all organisations other than the two larger bureaucratic centralist sects this is unlikely to be remedied by just joining one.

It is our view that common discussions around perspectives and strategic orientation that come with being in a national organisation or network would immeasurably help us in trying to build a democratic Marxist working class current in Portsmouth. A national organisations help with providing resources such as flyer templates and literature would also be useful. However, the basis of any national organisation has to be a culture of real collaboration and debate, of experimentation and theoretical openness and, above all, a branch-led emphasis to activity



## Unity statement

### ISN

We are coming to the high water mark of a thirty year assault against our class, and the left is unable to organise any serious resistance to it, let alone mount a non-defensive intervention into the political situation. So far, the drive of the ruling class to push our situation back beyond the post war settlement has been, almost uniformly, successful.

As revolutionaries, we understand that we need a mass revolutionary party of the working class, with its own organization, strategy and tactics, if we are to impact upon the balance of class forces. The results of the lack of such an organization are clear all around us. A series of interrelated problems confront us. First, we see the explicit form of our ideas almost absent in the everyday life of our class. Organisations that would have once helped form the fabric of working class life have either completely dissolved, or are in a steep period of decline. Even the amalgamation of some of the biggest trade unions in this country has not led to any great increase in union membership numbers. Social realities that would have at one stage helped cohere the basics of a class consciousness and political education for our class (the Labour and Communist Parties, Labour Youth Groups, Mechanics Institutes and so on) have almost completely collapsed, and entirely lost their mass character. As a result, the organized workers movement, whether "orthodox", International Socialist influenced, anarchist or Left Labourite seems to be in a perpetual cycle of shrinkage and decay.

Furthermore, the small forces of the revolutionary left seem trapped in a perpetual cycle of sectarianism and self defeating competition. This is a situation that has taken years to develop, and the ISN is committed to a long term process of overcoming it.

Because the revolutionary left is in such a small and divided state, we are unable to put into practice effective and independent working class politics. Some of our best and most advanced militants end up carrying out work that decades ago would have been carried out by shop stewards or straight up trade unionists. We end up in tiny groups tailing whichever section of the union or labourist bureaucracy we are closest to, rather than setting our own agenda. At the same time, we can see the sparks of different kinds of action in movements, on varying scales around the world, whether the Chicago teacher' strike, the development of the antifascist network or Syriza.

We find ourselves in the position of being able to take initial steps towards addressing this situation. The general political crisis, having found its way into the left, is beginning to bring into even sharper relief the bankruptcy and impotence of the existing revolutionary organizations. In our forthcoming conference we will fight to achieve a greater unity between our four organizations, in such a way that can be held up as a beacon to the rest of the working class movement. We are all already committed to participating in joint work, in left unity, on international solidarity, women's liberation and anti fascism. Our initial unity conference should provide a space for moving closer together in this work, and beginning to forge commitments to joint organisation and a resulting coherent strategy in these fields. Furthermore, we should build on the good work done together in jointly producing three issues of "The Exchange" - a publication which went down very well, inside and outside the organisations involved. Coming out of our first unity conference, we propose that those organisations and individuals committed in the long term to the idea of a new united multi-tendency revolutionary organisation launch a regular publication together. This would be under the democratic control of those involved and would seek to contribute to the rebuilding of the working-class movement as well as pushing forward the unity project.

At the same time, we recognize the imperative not to sacrifice debate and discussion to some over arching call to unity, and a strategy of regroupment that puts quick and hasty organizational unity before strategic unity and discussion . Indeed, one of the issues with the fissiparous nature of the left is the elevation of tactical disagreements into questions of quasi-principle and the resulting inability of comrades to stay in the same organizations with people they disagree with.

Between 2014 and 2018 the bourgeoisie will drown us in their history; patriotic and sentimental recollections of the years 1914-1918 designed to wash over the misery and pauperism they are raining on our class. These years, of course, have a different significance for our class; the October Revolution, Red Clydeside and the German Revolution. As we approach the centenary of the dates when our class came perhaps closest to victory we should be clear on our priority; to build an effective working class revolutionary organization that can fight for independent, revolutionary working class politics.

We look forward to the first step of this process at our unity conference, and urge participating comrades to argue out the beginnings of a shared programme of work.

## The way forward for revolutionary unity

*This paper was originally presented by Socialist Resistance (SR) as a contribution to the current discussions in February 2014.*

Divisions on the far left have long been damaging for the wider struggle. The current situation in anti-cuts campaigning (for example) directly reflects the divisions in the far left. The Socialist Workers Party (SWP) has Unite the Resistance (which actually does precisely the opposite) and the Socialist Party (SP) has its Shop Stewards Network. The People's Assembly is an attempt to unite across these divides, which is hugely important, but the old disunity still weakens the movement.

The same situation has long hampered the emergence of the kind of broad party of the left that has been both necessary and possible since the emergence of New Labour. [Left Unity](#) (LU) is also enormously important, and is starting to address this, but the far left divisions are still damaging. The Trade Union and Socialist Coalition (TUSC) is constrained by the SP to remaining a non-aggression pact between the SP and SWP, rather than the sort of new left party that is needed. The decision of the SP to back the dire nationalism of the Communist Party and No2EU can only lead down a blind alley.

Tackling such disunity, moreover, is even more urgent given the depth of the crisis, the way it is being exploited by the government and the employers, and the chronic weakness of the trade union response. If the far left is to play a significant role in turning this around it has to start to tackle its own divisions. It is for all these reasons that we have been strongly in favour of revolutionary regroupment since the current possibilities for this opened up last year, with the crisis of the SWP and the emergence of the [Anti Capitalist Initiative](#) (ACI). We remain fully committed to this and we are ready to dissolve our organisation into a viable regroupment project if it can be got together.

The far left today is weaker than for many years. This has been compounded by the crisis of the SWP following its failure to support women members struggling against sexual harassment and rape. The important thing, however, is to learn the lessons from this and ensure that a new and dynamic organisation comes out of it. The emergence of both the [International Socialist Network](#) (ISN) and the ACI, and much more recently, [RS21](#), creates an opportunity to rescue something very significant from the otherwise completely negative implosion of the largest far left organisation.

Any regrouped organisation must be unambiguously revolutionary in character. But it must also embrace a much higher level of heterogeneity and pluralism – reaching across the various traditions of the far left for example – than most of the existing far left organisations. A new organisation would need to develop an internal culture where differences could be discussed without rancor in a democratic framework. It must be an organisation where sharp debates become a point of development and not of division.

In our view the prevalent British far left model of rigidly top down organisations operating a form of 'democratic centralism' drawn from Stalinist traditions, excluding real democracy or engagement by the members, is neither effective nor desirable in today's conditions – if indeed it was ever effective or desirable.

SR has long ceased to use the term 'democratic centralism'. Instead we say revolutionary democracy. This is not because we reject the collective formulation of policy and collective implementation – maximum participation in the decision-making processes and maximum unity in action. Far from it. It is because we reject the undemocratic practices which have long been associated with 'democratic centralism' and practiced in its name.

For example, we think that the requirement that members must advocate in public something that they disagree with internally is not only wrong in current circumstances but perverse. Whilst members are expected to carry out the decisions of the organisation, they are not expected to advocate policies with which they disagree. However, when minority views are expressed in public they should be presented as such.

Another example of revolutionary democracy in our view is minority representation on leadership bodies. In our view, a revolutionary organisation cannot be democratic unless all properly established minority views are proportionately represented on all the leadership bodies.

The way we see internal democracy also has an effect on the way we work in organisations like LU. Block voting in line with a party mandate deprives members of independence when working in such organisations and undermines the democracy of the organisation itself. We don't agree with this way of functioning in a broad left party that we are trying to build as a political alternative, and we don't practice it.

One of the things which triggered the discussion around revolutionary regroupment was Luke Cooper and Simon Hardy's book 'Beyond Capitalism?' which advocated a new kind of more democratic and heterogeneous model for the far left. We supported this idea at that time and we support it now.

We have to be clear, however. We cannot resolve all the divisions of the far left in a single regroupment – that is impossible. What we can do, if we go about it the right way, is create a significant new grouping, based on a new conception of revolutionary organisation, which could chart a new course and hopefully lead to further regroupments in the future. This means regrouping, at this stage, those who agree with this approach – SR, ISN, ACI and we would hope, the newly launched RS21.

It is for these reasons that we continue to be concerned about the inclusion of Workers Power (WP) in this process. They are the embodiment of most of the conceptions, including on internal democracy, which we are trying to get away from – and they show no signs of changing. They routinely demand the implementation of the full revolutionary programme. Our fear is that if WP is included in this process we will find it very difficult to find the balance between internal discussion and external work which will be so important. Political discussions would have to continue after a new revolutionary organisation emerges, of course, and we don't want to institutionalise an endless debate on the minutiae of programme.

We think that there is an opportunity in the relatively short term of creating an organisation that can be grounded in a common conception of revolutionary politics and democracy and have a common approach to the need to build Left Unity as a successful broad party of the left. We believe that RS21 could be a crucial part of this process and would seek to involve them in the discussions and processes to bring about the first stage of such a revolutionary regroupment.

This brings us to the matter of what discussions we need to have in advance of a regroupment taking place. We do need a process of discussion and debate, and we have always made our priorities clear on this: we want to deepen the discussion we have been having on feminism, and we are keen to discuss ecosocialism and internationalism. In fact, it is important to move on from the more general discussion to some more specific issues.

But there is an urgency in this and a need for boldness. When opportunities such as this arise they do not last forever. Given the difficult terrain we will be fighting on over the next period – the decline of the far left in the wake of the SWP crisis, the pressure among some sections of the left and trade unions not to rock the boat in the forlorn hope of a Labour government coming to the rescue in 2015, the deepening economic and ecological crisis and its effect on the working class in Britain, Europe and globally – there is a danger of the small forces that need to be assembled in such a new revolutionary nucleus dissipating and dropping out into inactivity if the process does not accelerate.

The need for urgency is not about settling everything in advance, but of creating a culture under which discussions could continue on a positive basis in the early years of the new organisation. Such a new organisation would also act as a pole of attraction for many currently non-aligned militants and through strength in numbers and political conviction could start to put pressure on the sectarian practices of the SP/SWP. We would argue, though we don't make it a precondition, that the most fruitful way for the regroupment process to proceed would be on the basis of the original participants: SR, the ACI, the ISN together with RS21 and also others who have left the SWP but are not currently in the ISN or RS21.

RS21 has come into this process but only as an observer organisation. We think that these comrades have a tremendous amount to contribute to rebuilding the far left and that we should strongly urge them to come fully into the regroupment initiative.

In terms of practical proposals:

That we develop joint work in as many areas as possible including especially: Left Unity where we are all already working, so this is of greatest importance.

Work in the Peoples Assembly.

We should continue to organise joint events. Excellent examples of this are the forum on feminism with Cinzia Arruzza in Manchester, the up-coming forum on Syria in London, and the work on the woman's magazine.

Organise discussions around political issues as appropriate. We would like to see discussions on feminism and ecosocialism in particular, but we are happy to discuss any of the issues proposed by Workers Power, though we don't want to be too prescriptive because such discussions are often thrown up by events.

We should encourage maximum collaboration and joint work amongst our comrades at local level.

We are in favour of continuing the current arrangements for these discussions and for publishing Exchange up until the conference.