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Where now for politics in Britain?

Descent into nationalism?

We are on the edge of politics in Britain descending into competing nationalisms with all the dangers that will bring.

Recent events have plunged British politics into turmoil following the referendum on Scottish Independence, Prime Minister Cameron's sleight of hand in introducing the issue of 'English Votes for English Laws' and UKIP's recent victories. None of it portends well for the British working people.

While the referendum on Scottish independence delivered a clear NO vote, it did not settle the question. The SNP and the Yes campaign have not accepted the result. The country and the trade union and labour movement remain deeply divided.

Immediately following the announcement of the referendum result at 7am on Friday 19 September on the steps of Downing St., David Cameron raised the issue of 'English Votes for English Laws', wrong-footing Labour and playing the English nationalist card with an eye on UKIP and the forthcoming General Election.

Ed Miliband's response was to say, correctly, that this issue was never part of the 'Vow' by the three party leaders to give more powers to Scotland in the final days of the referendum campaign. He went on to call for a convention to be set up to deal with the constitution including the long unanswered and legitimate West Lothian question.

Alex Salmond claimed No voters had been "tricked" and pledged to keep "Westminster's feet to the fire" over extra powers to be devolved to Scotland. Meanwhile the Yes campaign continues to mobilise on the basis that independence has only been deferred.

The Yes campaign is increasingly hostile to Labour. There is a growing call to capitalise on where Yes had a majority and to have SNP or Yes Alliance candidates campaigning to defeat the Labour Party in its Scottish heartlands in the 2015 General Election.

Commentary

UKIP's recent victories and their momentum are threatening Cameron and the Tories and they are also a potential problem for Labour in England.

There is now the distinct threat of a descent into nationalism across Britain.

The SNP and UKIP blame the so-called 'Westminster elite' but neither blame capitalism for the problems affecting ordinary people. The SNP and UKIP feed off one another in their differing nationalistic stances and both parties have momentum.

Where is the Labour movement?

This is an extremely dangerous situation for the working people of Britain. The question must be asked: where are the trade unions and labour movement in all this?

During the independence campaign in Scotland the trade union and labour movement largely took a neutral stance on the issue. This was partly due to most trade unions being divided on the matter, exemplified by RMT's ballot in which Yes won a slender majority with 1051 votes, No received 968 and 365 members voted for the trade union to take a neutral position.

Unlike RMT, many trade unions did not make any recommendation to their members because the membership was so divided. The Scottish Trades Union Congress (STUC) took a neutral stance. Effectively the trade unions, as a movement, were divided and so neutralised.

Those on the left supporting the Yes campaign argued that it was wider than the SNP and that it was for democracy, social justice, equality, getting rid of Trident, not nationalism. Many of those suffering from Tory-led coalition attacks voted Yes in the hope that life would get better.

The fight against austerity and the cuts was largely put to the side as, for two years, energies were concentrated on the independence/devolution issue.

The Labour Party, although in many ways it led the successful No and Better Together campaign, could be the

main loser in Scotland following the referendum and that could well jeopardise the election of a Labour government at the General Election.

However, this has been looming for some time. The Blair/Brown years of New Labour left many disillusioned with the right-ward drift of the Labour Party on domestic policies and their war-mongering foreign policy. Hundreds of activists dropped out.

The SNP positioned themselves to the left of the Labour Party on some key issues, eg the Iraq war, and have been in government for seven years.

The trade union movement has never recovered from the Thatcher years and the defeat of the historic miners' strike in 1985. More recently, the savage attack on workers conditions at Ineos in Grangemouth and the humiliation of the trade union UNITE served to show the current balance of forces lies firmly with that of capital. The related debacle around the Falkirk selection of the Labour Party's parliamentary candidate provoked a further distancing of the Labour Party from the trade unions.

Further divided and weakened

A descent into nationalism across the nations of Britain could find the British trade union and labour movement further divided, weakened and marginalised.

We have seen elsewhere in recent times that when countries divide and descend into nationalism it rarely leads to positive outcomes for working people and often sets back their struggles against capitalism and imperialism.

The danger of this descent into nationalism is that it will continue to disunite the British working-class and divert its labour and trade union movement into arguments over independence, devolution and constitutional change rather than developing the struggle against capitalism and its wars.

A Britain further divided into its competing nations, regions and possibly new 'city states' will do nothing to loosen the control of the City of London and finance capital.

Where now for politics in Britain?



Scotland votes but it's still not over

The dust has still not settled following the Referendum on Scottish Independence and will not settle for some considerable time. Scotland may well have voted No, but it's still not over.

By **SCOTT McDONALD**

The "Vow" made by David Cameron, Nick Clegg and Ed Miliband to give extra powers to the Scottish Parliament in the event of a No vote has resulted in the establishment of the Lord Smith Commission.

This Commission has the remit to reach consensus on the extra powers for Scotland with a view to publishing a Draft Scotland Bill on 25 January to be included in the Queen's Speech in May 2015.

The Coalition Government has set up a Cabinet committee, under William Hague, to look at 'English votes for English laws' and if the three main parties do not reach agreement then the Conservative Party will make it a General Election issue.

Notwithstanding this, nor the Edinburgh Agreement of October 2012 in which all signed up to respect the result, the SNP have made it clear that they intend to continue their quest for an independent Scotland whilst participating in the Smith Commission; and the Yes campaign continues to mobilise.

The SNP and the Yes campaign don't intend to let the dust settle until they achieve what they failed to do in the referendum.

The constitutional questions will run and run. Meanwhile, austerity and cuts continue and Britain - including Scotland - is at war.

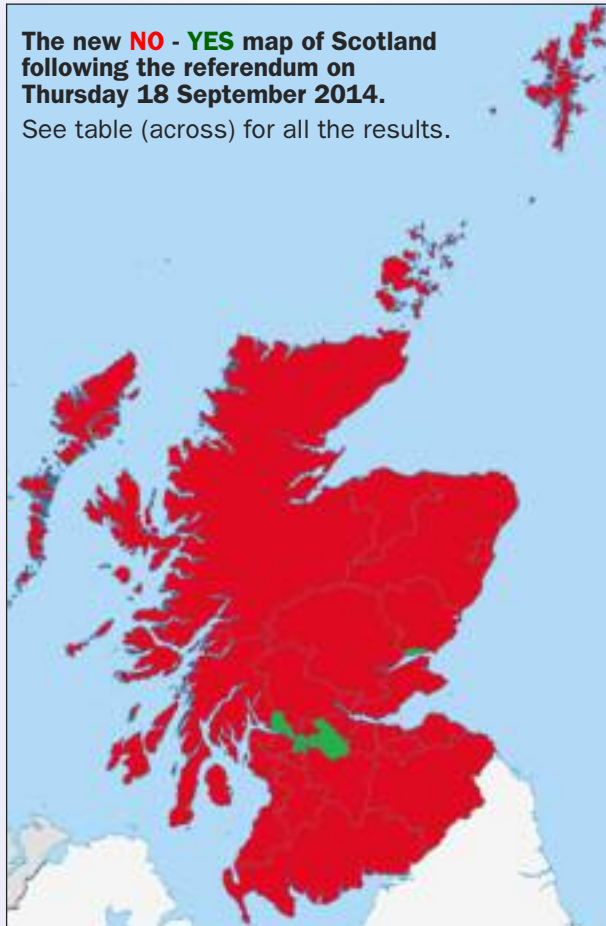
The Result

There has been much analysis of the result including by Professor John Curtice, the psephologist. According to Curtice four pat-

The SNP and the Yes campaign don't intend to let the dust settle until they achieve what they failed to do in the referendum.

The new **NO** - **YES** map of Scotland following the referendum on Thursday 18 September 2014.

See table (across) for all the results.



terns were evident in the polls throughout most of the campaign and in the result itself. Those who were relatively reluctant to vote Yes were:

- women;
- older people;
- those who were somewhat better off;
- those who were born elsewhere in the UK.

Curtice commented, "nothing seemed to matter more to voters in deciding whether to vote Yes or No than their perceptions of the economic consequences of leaving the UK. Doubtless those who were less well-off were more easily persuaded that independence might hold out the prospect of a better tomorrow ..."

He also wrote, "Nothing was more strongly correlated with the level of Yes support in each council area than the level of unemployment. In those areas with relatively high unemployment Yes support averaged 51%; in those with low levels of unemployment it was just 39% ... there were similar differences between places with a high (51% Yes) and low (40% No) proportion living in one of Scotland's most deprived neighbourhoods ..." (*What Scotland Thinks, "So who voted Yes and who voted No?"*, 26 Sept. 2014)

There were two polls conducted after votes were cast and, according to Curtice, "neither polls contain enough 16 and 17 year olds for us to make a definitive statement about how this newly enfranchised group voted. What we can note is that in both polls the highest level of recorded support for Yes was amongst those in their late 20s and 30s rather than those aged between 16 and 24." (*So How Well Did the Polls Do?*, 22 September)

However, neither a sociological perspective nor simple demographics fully explains the result. For example, assuming it is correct that a

THE QUESTION: Do you agree that Scotland should be an independent country?

THE RESULT: On a turnout of 84.59% of the electorate, 55.3% voted NO and 44.7% voted YES. Of the 32 council areas, 28 voted No and only 4 voted Yes, namely, Dundee, West Dunbartonshire, Glasgow and North Lanarkshire.

The votes - counted in the 32 council areas - are shown below:

Scotland	Electorate	Turnout	Yes	No
	4,283,392	84.59%	44.7%	55.3%
Council Areas				
Aberdeen	175,745	81.64%	41.39%	58.61%
Aberdeenshire	206,486	87.15%	39.64%	60.36%
Angus	93,551	85.77%	43.68%	56.32%
Argyll and Bute	72,002	88.15%	41.48%	58.52%
Clackmannanshire	39,972	88.53%	46.20%	53.80%
Comhairle nan Eilean Siar	22,908	86.17%	46.58%	53.42%
Dumfries and Galloway	122,036	87.39%	34.33%	65.67%
Dundee City	118,729	78.75%	57.35%	42.65%
East Ayrshire	99,664	84.49%	47.22%	52.78%
East Dunbartonshire	86,836	90.9%	38.80%	61.20%
East Lothian	81,945	87.56%	38.28%	61.72%
East Renfrewshire	72,981	90.4%	36.81%	63.19%
Edinburgh	378,012	84.27%	38.90%	61.10%
Falkirk	122,457	88.62%	46.53%	53.47%
Fife	302,165	84.04%	44.95%	55.05%
Glasgow	486,219	74.89%	53.49%	46.51%
Highland	190,778	86.91%	47.08%	52.92%
Inverclyde	62,481	87.34%	49.92%	50.08%
Midlothian	69,617	86.68%	43.70%	56.30%
Moray	75,170	85.36%	42.44%	57.56%
North Ayrshire	113,923	84.34%	48.99%	51.01%
North Lanarkshire	268,704	84.37%	51.07%	48.93%
Orkney Islands	17,806	83.61%	32.80%	67.20%
Perth and Kinross	120,015	86.81%	39.81%	60.19%
Renfrewshire	134,735	87.23%	47.19%	52.81%
Scottish Borders	95,533	87.36%	33.44%	66.56%
Shetland Islands	18,516	84.36%	36.29%	63.71%
South Ayrshire	94,881	86.05%	42.13%	57.87%
South Lanarkshire	261,157	85.31%	45.33%	54.67%
Stirling	69,033	90.05%	40.23%	59.77%
West Dunbartonshire	71,109	87.89%	53.96%	46.04%
West Lothian	138,226	86.11%	44.82%	55.18%

majority of the over 55s voted No, is it because they are more risk averse or have longer memories or other reasons? In some cases it was certainly because older people remember that it was the SNP who brought down the Labour government in 1979 and ushered in 18 years of Thatcherism.

Whereas, the late 20year-olds and 30 somethings have only direct experience of New Labour and the Tory/Lib Dem coalition at a UK level and seven years with SNP as the Scottish government.

The Campaign

The SNP had included the intention to hold a Referendum on Scottish Independence in their election manifesto for the 2011 Scottish election. They had gone into the election as a minority Scottish government with one seat more than the Labour Party and then, after winning an overall majority they were able to carry out their intention to hold a referendum.

This involved negotiations with the UK Government. The UK government allowed the SNP to decide the question to be put to the electorate, to lower the voting age to 16 and to set the date for the referendum but were unwilling to allow a third question - something short of independence but more devolution than currently exists - on the ballot paper.

It was widely believed that the SNP didn't think they could win a vote for independence and so wanted a third question, as a fall-back position, to give more powers to the Scottish Parliament.

The SNP decided to hold the referendum in 2014, giving a long time for campaigning and coinciding with the anniversary year of Bannockburn, the year of the Commonwealth Games in Glasgow and the Ryder Cup at Gleneagles. Scotland would be on the world stage.

The SNP also decided the question to be put to the electorate and the UK government, or more particularly David Cameron, accepted it. The question was "Do you agree that Scotland should be an independent country?"

Bill Paterson, the actor, writing in the *Scottish Review*, noted that, "...you don't have to be deep into conspiracy theories to feel that whoever was able to frame that referendum question loaded the dice right from the start." (*Paterson B., "Scottish referendum: oh, to belong to this clanjamfry of yes voters", first published in the Scottish Review. An edited version was published in The Guardian, 28 July 2014.*)

If the question had been posed as "Do you agree that Scotland should remain

part of the UK?” then those seeking independence would have been campaigning for a No vote.

As it was, the SNP were handed the advantage of a positive message. There is a big advantage in saying Yes rather than No as the SNP well understood.

SNP Elections/Referendum Strategy

The SNP prides itself on the positivity of their election strategies. This began before the 2007 election following a workshop with the Really Effective Management Company (REDco) where they learned about Martin Seligman's research on how it's the most optimistic candidate in American presidential elections who usually wins.

According to Paul Hutcheon of the *Sunday Herald*, the SNP MSP Brian Adam revealed the strategy for ensuring candidates remained upbeat: “We were all presented with a bag of pennies. Every time we said anything negative we had to put a penny in the middle of the table. This was to stop us saying negative things. It was a major change in approach.”

The SNP continued successfully with this approach in the 2011 campaign and continued with this type of training in the referendum campaign with Alex Salmond receiving performance coaching by Clare Howell REDco's Chief Executive Officer.

Angus Robertson MP, the SNP campaign director, said, “The SNP has learned the importance of positive and optimistic campaigning, and the language by which we communicate our messages.”

Ewan Morrison, the award winning writer and director, explained how he switched from being a Yes to a NO supporter in a blog that described the independence campaign as self-censoring, conformist and cult-like.

Morrison said, “The conformist dumbing down has been acute and noted by those outside Scotland who wondered where all the intellectuals went.”

Recalling his time in the Socialist Workers' Party back in the 1980s, he added, “The Yes movemnet started to remind me of the Trotskyists - another movement who believed they were political but were no more than a recruitment machine.

“The Yes camp ... have created an

illusion of a free space in which everything you've ever wanted can come to pass - overnight,” said Morrison.

It was reported that “SNP MSPs have been urged to drop the word ‘independence’ because the concept is off-putting to voters, and to talk instead of an ‘independent’ Scotland ... The theory is that being ‘independent-minded is a positive personal quality voters like, whereas ‘independence’ as a concept for Scotland is

reaucrats. They dismissed any and all suggestions of potential difficulties as negative.

The senior Yes people set out their agenda for Scotland and then simply expected the rest of the world to comply. Indeed, they never acknowledged that others - eg rUK or EU member states - might have their own agendas or interests.

When difficult questions were raised their answer was that this was “scaremongering”. They dubbed the Better Together campaign as “Project Fear” and often referred to it as not having confidence in the Scottish people to run their own affairs.

The notion that “Scotland is too wee, too poor and too stupid” to become independent mainly featured in the campaign via the Yes side. Often, it was the likes of Nicola Sturgeon who set this idea up as a straw man to be knocked down.

Throughout the campaign they branded the Better Together campaign as being negative. This was very successful with even some of the leading people in Better Together - eg Charles Kennedy, former Liberal Democrat leader and Gordon Brown -

going public about their concerns with the negativity of the Better Together campaign.

All of these labels, ‘scaremongering’, ‘Project Fear’ and ‘bullying’ fed into the SNP characterisation of the Better Together campaign as negative whilst they described themselves as optimistic, confident and positive.

The Yes campaign also used the deep anti-Tory sentiment in Scotland to tar the No campaign with that toxic brush. This also partly infected the Labour Party, now in alliance in the Better Together campaign with the despised Coalition Westminster government.

Gordon Brown's tacit refusal to join Better Together but rather to campaign under a Labour banner was a reflection of his and many others disquiet.

Appeal beyond SNP

The Yes campaign, while led by the SNP, also included the Greens and the Scottish Socialist Party (SSP). A number of groups supporting Yes emerged during the campaign including Radical Independence (involving Greens, SSP, some Labour Party members, ex-Communist Party members, various Trotsky-



An SWP poster on a shop window and a former Bank of Scotland (Helensburgh) being used by the Yes campaign

associated in voters' minds with risk” (Paul Hutcheon and Tom Gordon, *Sunday Herald*, 18 June 2012). Earlier, it was reported that they should ban the word ‘freedom’ (*Sunday Herald*, 8 January 2012).

All of this helps to explain their approach to difficult questions such as the currency options or membership of the EU. Throughout the campaign the SNP insisted that an independent Scotland would use the £ sterling even although the three main parties - Tory, LibDem and Labour - repeatedly made it clear that this would not be agreed by any of them.

Alastair Darling, leader of the Better Together campaign, kept asking for Alex Salmond's Plan B, most notably in the first television debate between the two. Salmond refused to present a Plan B insisting that it would be in both Scotland's and the rest of the UK's interest to accept a currency union. He attacked the “Westminster parties” for their “bullying” and their “bluff and bluster.”

Similarly on the question of EU membership the SNP did not accept that Scotland's membership would not be straightforward contrary to the views of many leading EU politicians and bu-

ists); Women for Independence; the National Collective of writers and artists and Common Weal, a project which had an acrimonious split from the Jimmy Reid Foundation.

Scottish CND came out in favour of independence largely because of the SNP's commitment to remove Trident from Scotland.

The trade unions, as a movement, were effectively neutralised because of the divisions within. Two unions, the Rail, Maritime and Transport (RMT) and the Prison Officers Association, came out in favour of Yes. In the case of RMT it was by a very slender majority in a ballot in which members in Scotland were asked to vote on three questions (Yes received 1051 votes; No 968; Neutral 365). Other unions took a neutral stance as did the Scottish Trades Union Congress (STUC).

Many on the Left, disillusioned with the Labour Party, supported the Yes campaign, often arguing it was about democracy, social justice and equality, not nationalism.

The SNP have also been wearing the Labour Party's social democratic clothes since the advent of New Labour. Repeatedly during the last weeks of the campaign the SNP appealed to Labour voters to vote Yes and specifically to Labour Party members to see a Yes vote as their opportunity to reclaim the Labour Party from the Westminster elite.

The Yes campaign was very visible throughout with posters in windows, flags and banners. The No campaign was muted. There was a nasty side to the Yes campaign: very much in your face; intolerant of other views, eg the barracking of Jim Murphy MP and Ed Miliband; and somewhat messianic.

When criticisms were made of the Yes campaign's behaviour, their response was to say that there was inappropriate behaviour on both sides. Some would point to the Orange Order's support for No and the violent scenes in Glasgow's George Square following the vote involving the extreme right. However, it was accepted by most neutral observers that those voting No were a very silent majority.

Kenneth Roy, wrote in the *Scottish Review*, "The inexcusable failure of the first minister to control or condemn the excesses of their supporters has created

an atmosphere in which hatred thrives out of sight. I'll give one example which I know to be true. I have no doubt there are many others.

"In a small town in central Scotland – for the protection of the people involved I do not intend to name it – a couple put a No sticker in the window of their house. A neighbour – a woman they 'knew' – came over and said: 'Oh, I didn't realise you were moving home'.

"'We're not,' said the man, surprised.



Alex Salmond and Nicola Sturgeon when they launched their referendum campaign two years ago.

A Yes campaigner's tricycle in Jamaica Street, Glasgow.



'Well, you will be after we win,' she told him. 'You won't be welcome in this street.'

"I hold the first minister personally responsible for such intolerance. Had he chosen to utter a few statesmanlike words months ago, the nastiness of the present mood could and probably would have been avoided. He chose not to utter them." (Roy, K., "My country has been broken by the hubris of Alex Salmond," *Scottish Review*, 17 September 2014.)

The SNP and the Yes campaign claim that the campaign has been enriching, energising and has brought many people into politics for the first time. Whilst some of this is true for some people, it has also been a most divisive campaign

for the country and its trade unions.

One Poll, Big Panic

The polls had fairly consistently given the No campaign a 20% lead over the Yes campaign until nearer the referendum date when the polls began to narrow. Then, on Sunday 7 September, ten days before Polling day YouGov published a poll in Murdoch's *Sunday Times* giving the Yes campaign 51% and No 49%. This was the first and only poll to give Yes the lead.

The poll, plus the clearly panicked reaction from Westminster, caused the pound to plummet and £2.3 billion was wiped off the value of the six FTSE companies based in Scotland. A frantic operation was mounted. Cameron, Clegg and Miliband missed Prime Minister's Questions in the House of Commons and flew to Scotland.

Gordon Brown re-entered the fray, promising extra powers to the Scottish Parliament and setting out a timetable for this.

The aim was to persuade those traditional Labour voters, who had looked like voting Yes, back into the No camp. Brown's answer over the years to defeating the SNP has always been more and more Home Rule so this was just a further step in that strategy, albeit a desperate one.

Interestingly, the polls conducted after the referendum vote suggest that 'more devolved' powers was the key issue for only some 20% of No voters. In other words, 80% would have voted No without this being offered.

John Curtice, commenting on the polls, said that towards the end of the campaign, they had all consistently underestimated the level of support for No.

Immediate aftermath

In the immediate aftermath of the referendum result being declared Prime Minister Cameron, on the steps of 10 Downing St., raised the issue of 'English votes for English laws' and stated that this would be dealt with in tandem with the issue of extra powers to Scotland.

Cameron's proposal, with an eye to the forthcoming General Election, was designed to wrong foot Labour. The 'Vow' had never referred to anything other than extra powers for Scotland. It is generally assumed that for Labour to win enough seats to form the govern-

ment they would rely on their Scottish MPs. The 'West Lothian question' was back on the table and put Labour on the back foot.

Labour's response was to separate the two issues: deal with the Scottish issue according to the timetable set by the three Party leaders and to establish a Constitutional Convention to deal with the issues relating to rUK after the May 2015 General election.

In his response, Salmond declared that No voters had been "tricked" and that the SNP would hold Westminster's "feet to the fire" if they tried to renege on the promise of more powers to the Scottish Parliament.

He added that for Scotland to gain independence they did not necessarily need another referendum. He also announced his intention to resign as SNP leader and Scotland's First Minister in November 2014. His deputy, Nicola Sturgeon, is destined to be the next SNP leader and First Minister.

Lord Smith of Kelvin was appointed to convene a Commission, which would bring all the parties together to reach a consensus on the further powers to be devolved to Scotland.

Detailed proposals are scheduled to be published at the end of October, consultation concluded by the 30 November (St Andrews Day) and a draft Scotland Bill to be published by 25 January 2015 (Robert Burns anniversary).

The timetable for consensus is so tight, and given the differing positions on extra powers, it is difficult to see how agreement can be reached unless one or other of the parties, Labour most likely, is bounced into acceptance. It is hardly a sensible way to make constitutional changes.

Implications of the result

The SNP and the Yes campaign have not accepted the result of the referendum. Their approach will be to seek devo-max from the negotiations in the Smith Commission. Even if they achieve this, it will only serve as a further platform for their continuing aim of independence.

The Tories have gone the furthest towards devo-max of the other three parties. They have proposed all income tax should be returned to Scotland and that the Scottish Government should be responsible for all its spending. Accountability is their slogan.

They know that this would mean austerity and cuts. They are not unhappy with that but the bonus would be that they think that Holyrood would have to take the blame.

The Tories will also hope to re-gain lost ground in what used to be Tory

territory in Scotland. The sizeable No victory in Aberdeenshire (60-40 in favour of No), which contains Salmond's constituency, and other defeats for the Yes campaign in SNP-held seats indicates that a significant number of SNP voters said No.

The SNP are reporting a huge rise in the membership of their party since the vote. They are claiming that their membership has trebled to some 70,000 since 18 September. They have set their sights on defeating Labour in Glasgow at the General Election. Labour holds all the Westminster Glasgow seats but Yes won the referendum in all of Glasgow's constituencies.

SNP aim to destroy Labour

It has been a long-term aim of the SNP to oust the Labour Party as the main party of working people, particularly in

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Glasgow and the west of Scotland.

Donald Dewar, former Labour Party leader and the first First Minister of Scotland, pointed out that "the SNP had made it brutally clear that its top political priority was the destruction of the Labour Party." (*Quoted in Maria Fyfe, A Problem Like Maria, Page 161, Luath Press, 2014*)

As reported by Paul Hutcheon in the *Sunday Herald* (21 September 2014), several SNP MSPs have called for the Yes campaign to stand in the forthcoming General Election. Edinburgh Pentlands MSP, Gordon McDonald, wrote in an email to all SNP MSPs: "The next round is GE (General Election) 2015. What about getting agreement with Greens, SSP, etc and stand as Yes Alliance? The unionist vote would split between Labour, Tory & LibDem. We would do considerably better than the small numbers of MPs we got elected

last time. The SNP only got 491k votes in 2010 & referendum achieved 1.6M for YES!"

Joan McAlpine MSP, one of Salmond's parliamentary liaison officers, said: "I was thinking along the same lines. We have some very talented people who could stand such as Richard Arkless of Business for Scotland." Fellow MSP Chic Brodie commented: "Think Gordon's idea is right. We intend to keep the campaign group together locally."

Michael Coyle, an SNP councillor in North Lanarkshire, said he backed the idea of a cross-party alliance at the General Election. He said: "All political parties involved in Yes should sit down together and co-operate. We should try and get rid of every sitting Labour MP who was against the Yes campaign."

Bruce Crawford MSP, SNP Minister for Parliamentary Business and Government Strategy, brought that discussion to a close, at least in public. He wrote, "... can we keep our own Counsel on these ideas at the moment. Let's wait and see what the next few days bring and let the dust settle before we start mapping for the General Election."

The SNP with their big growth in party members, Yes victory in all Glasgow Labour constituencies and the long-term aim of destroying Labour, will be reluctant to share the spoils accrued from the Yes campaign.

The Scottish Labour Party, alienated from their traditional working-class support through the New Labour Blair/Brown years, and having lost hundreds of disillusioned activists, many to the SNP, could be facing a major loss of seats in Scotland at the General Election in 2015.

Colin Fox, leader of the Scottish Socialist Party, wrote, "... next year's Westminster General Election offers the independence movement the chance to take the fight to Labour. The referendum results in their so-called 'heartlands' show how vulnerable many of its MPs might be to a single independence candidate.

"Talks are now under way between the three Independence parties about establishing an Independence Alliance to stand candidates ..." (*Fox C., Independence Deferred, Scottish Left Review, Issue 83, October 2014.*)

If this was to happen then the possibility of Labour winning the General election and forming the next UK Government would be in severe jeopardy.

A Tory/UKIP government at Westminster would be regarded by the SNP as another boost for their prospects of winning independence for Scotland.

Where now for politics in Britain?

Change looms for Britain's constitution

On 7 September You-Gov released an opinion poll which for the first time put the 'yes' campaign ahead by 51% to 49% in the Scottish independence referendum campaign.

By **PAUL SUTTON**

It caused panic in the leadership of the 'no' campaign and within days David Cameron, Ed Miliband and Nick Clegg were in Scotland campaigning for 'Better Together'.

Then on 16 September they jointly issued 'the Vow' on the front page of the *Daily Record*, a mass circulation paper in Scotland.

It promised three things:

1. "extensive new powers" for a "permanent" Scottish Parliament "delivered by the process and to the

timetable agreed";

2. an agreement by the three leaders that "the UK exists to ensure opportunity and security for all by sharing our resources equitably across all four nations"; and

3. "the continuation of the Barnett allocation for resources, and the powers of the Scottish parliament to raise revenues".

These events brought devolution from the periphery to the centre of the campaign in its closing few days. And once

the referendum on 18 September had delivered a 'no' to independence it put it into the centre of the agenda in Scotland for the period up to and including the general election in the UK scheduled for 7 May 2015.

It also put it as a major issue for those elections in the form of 'English votes for English laws'.

These two issues of 'devolution in Scotland' and 'English votes for English laws' are closely interlinked but in fact can be seen as distinct and are better understood separately.

Devolution in Scotland

The Scottish Conservative, Liberal Democrat and Labour parties had all published proposals for further devolution during the independence campaign.



**Parties VOW more Powers for the Scottish Parliament
But will it be Devo Max? Devo Plus? or Devo More?**

The new Scottish Parliament building at Holyrood, Edinburgh was opened by the Queen in October 2004. It was designed by the Catalan architect, Enric Miralles at a cost of £414 million, £374 million over budget.

The Scottish Liberal Democrats favour the greatest amount of devolution which would see the Act of Union between Scotland and England repealed to be replaced with some form of yet to be determined federalism. The Scottish Parliament would raise and spend most of its taxes reserving for the UK Parliament the management of oil, welfare and pensions, defence and foreign affairs.

The Scottish Conservatives now also favour significantly more devolution having been opposed to any further devolution than that agreed in the Scotland Act of 2012. The Scottish Parliament would now be given enhanced powers over income tax, including the ability to decide on rates and bands, and responsibility for issues such as housing benefits and attendance allowance.

Scottish Labour also favour greater devolution in welfare areas such as housing and benefits, including the attendance allowance for over-65s and the work programme for the unemployed. There would be enhanced powers to vary income tax by up to 15% but no powers to cut the top rate below 45% (although it could be varied upward). Most other powers would remain with the UK Parliament.

These proposed powers represent a further development of those devolved by the Scotland Act of 2012. It aimed primarily at increasing financial accountability in Scotland.

The Scottish Parliament was to be given new income tax and borrowing powers, including a Scottish rate of income tax and borrowing powers of around £5 billion.

Other small limited powers were devolved in the criminal justice sector and in broadcasting. The Act was to be fully implemented by 2016.

The Scotland Act, however, fell far short of offering any control or real influence over macro-economic policy which could begin to determine a distinct Scottish approach to economic development different from the rest of the UK and did not fundamentally question the political parameters of the union.

As such it was bound to fall far short of what the Scottish National Party wanted which was independence or, failing that, 'devo-max'.

Devo-Max

'Devo-max' can alternatively be conceptualised as 'independence-minus'. It gives full powers to the Scottish Parliament in domestic affairs alongside full fiscal autonomy i.e. tax raising powers in every area.

The only powers it would not have



1 July 1999, Queen Elizabeth II at the official opening of the Scottish Parliament with the then First Minister, Donald Dewar (left) and the new Parliament's first Presiding Officer, Sir David Steel, now Lord Steel. The first meeting of the Scottish Parliament took place on 12 May 1999.

are over defence and foreign affairs which would be jointly shared with the rest of the UK. There are many problems with this proposal which in essence make it unworkable. They include issues such as tax competition with the rest of the UK.

For example, would Scotland be allowed to have a lower corporation tax than the rest of the UK as proposed by the SNP in their Independence White Paper?

What about VAT collection? At the moment it is defined as an exclusive national responsibility by the European Union.

And revenues from North Sea oil? How would they be determined? Would they include the apportionment of costs for the decommissioning of exhausted oil fields?

More to the point it is not clear that the revenues raised in Scotland would be enough to cover the present level of services that are provided, leading either to a reduction in services or some form of fiscal transfer from the rest of the UK.

In that case it is clear to see that the real objections would be political.

'Devo-max' would have to be agreed by the Scottish Parliament in Holyrood and by the Westminster Parliament representing the United Kingdom.

Would Holyrood want to reduce serv-

ices or make itself subject to a level of grant over which it has no control? And in respect of Westminster, is it likely to concede powers which might put it at a considerable disadvantage compared to Scotland or agree to what many voters in the rest of the UK might see as the full dismemberment of the United Kingdom?

'Devo-max' would be a continual and escalating area of conflict between Scotland and the rest of the UK which would satisfy no one and inevitably lead to a call for Scottish independence.

The question therefore becomes whether there are other forms of devolution which are more workable. In fact there are many, but in terms of practical proposals put forward in Scotland they have clustered around two options: 'devo-plus' and 'devo-more'.

Devo-Plus

The proposals for 'devo-plus' were launched in September 2011 with a report from Reform Scotland entitled Devolution Plus. It argued for the Scottish Parliament to raise more or less enough taxes to cover expenses.

The taxes listed included income tax, corporation tax, oil revenue, selected excise taxes such as fuel, tobacco and alcohol duty while the benefits to be funded by this taxation included housing benefit, council tax benefit, child benefit and many others.

It also proposed including a share of government borrowing for expenditure in Scotland. In 2011/12 figures this would mean that the Scottish Parliament would be responsible for raising some 73% of its own expenditure through taxes and overseeing some 46% of current benefit expenditure in Scotland.

The intention of the report was to bring revenue and expenditure into closer line in Holyrood to encourage greater accountability. It also proposed devolving significant revenue and expenditure downward to increase the powers and responsibilities of local government.

In February 2012 the 'Devo-plus Group' was formed to promote these ideas with membership drawn from former and current members of the Scottish Parliament representing the Conservative, Labour and Liberal Democrat parties.

These proposals give significantly more powers to the Scottish Parliament over revenue and expenditure, particularly the former, than provided for under the Scotland Act. They also exceed those put forward by the three major political parties in 'Better Together'.

The comment by 'Devo-plus' on these

devolution proposals was: "Each party's proposal has a mixture of radical and timid proposals. Labour lags behind the Conservatives and Liberal Democrats when it comes to devolving fiscal powers. The Conservatives are behind in terms of making the Scottish Parliament permanent. And the Liberal democrats are timid in their reluctance to devolve additional welfare powers. ... Instead, we want the parties to pick the best bits of all their proposals and put them together" ⁽¹⁾.

The last sentence exposes both the strengths and weaknesses of the 'Devo-plus' approach. The strengths are the technical reports it has put together which provide a wealth of detail on the fiscal issues surrounding devolution. The weakness is the political vision which accompanies it.

In 2013 Reform Scotland called for all three parties in the 'Better Together' campaign to come together to back its vision of a 'new Union' between Scotland and the rest of the UK. This urged them to find common ground before the referendum and agree further proposals

... the SNP ... will of course be satisfied with no outcome other than 'Devo-max'.

for devolution before the referendum to strengthen the 'no' vote in the referendum. It didn't happen until defeat stared 'Better Together' in the face on 7 September.

They then adopted 'the Vow'. It was ill-considered and all three parties must now see it as a millstone around their necks which they will be obliged to enact. Differences in interpretation have already emerged and will no doubt grow larger in the coming months.

The major beneficiary here will be the SNP who will of course be satisfied with no outcome other than 'devo-max'.

Devo-More

'Devo-more' and 'devo-plus' are often considered as two ways of stating the same thing. They are not. 'Devo-more' seeks to devolve less and is more explicitly 'pro-Union' than is 'devo-plus'.

And it seeks to do so through a different objective: strengthening the 'social union' in the UK as against the prime objective of strengthening political and fiscal responsibility in 'devo-plus'.

The concept of a 'social union' was a core feature of the Calman Commission, which examined the experience of devo-

lution in Scotland and reported in June 2009.

It argued that in addition to an economic union between Scotland and the rest of the UK there was also a 'social union' embodying common social rights and responsibilities, expressed in particular in a common system of social security.

Examples include the National Health Service, generally available to all on a 'needs' basis everywhere in the UK (whatever its local shortcomings), along with benefits such as state pension and unemployment benefit paid at the same rate throughout the UK and funded by a centrally levied income tax and National Insurance.

An effective 'social union' encompasses elements of redistribution in which rich parts of the country make transfers to support poorer areas. It does not rule out devolution but seeks to marry local calls for devolution to resources to support it and determine how needs are to be met.

The case for it has most recently been made in a report published in March by the Institute for Public Policy Research entitled *Devo More and Welfare* which sets out a detailed argument as to how this can be achieved.

It proposes that the best way to maintain welfare in the UK as a whole, including Scotland, is to pool risks and share financial resources across the widest possible area.

It claims that there are no strong arguments for devolving benefits which are core to the 'social union' such as job seeker's allowance or state old age pension but there are arguments for devolving housing benefit, the work programme, attendance allowance and aspects of childcare.

It also makes a case for devolved governments to be given a general power to supplement welfare, so the UK government sets a floor but not a ceiling on payments which could be higher in Scotland. Nearly all of this would be continued to be financed by a block grant determined by Westminster.

The Institute for Public Policy Research states: "The proposals set out in this report are intended to strengthen the union by addressing Scottish concerns regarding welfare in a way that does not undermine the interests of the rest of the UK; creating a better, less dysfunctional politics within the union by increasing devolved autonomy and clarifying the intergovernmental politics of welfare; and fostering greater public awareness of which government does what for its citizen" ⁽²⁾.

The recommendations in the report

echo those recently made by the Scottish Labour party for greater devolution. This is not surprising since the concept of a 'social union' has been a fundamental aspect of the development of the Labour Party from its earliest days and throughout its discussions on devolution.

They also echo the phrase in 'the Vow' which talks of "sharing our resources equitably". This is the point at which English votes for English law enter the equation.

English Votes for English Laws

In 1977 Tam Dalyell (pictured below), the then Member of Parliament for West Lothian in Scotland, asked in the case of Scottish devolution why members representing Scottish constituencies in the House of Commons may vote on legislation which extends to England but neither they nor members representing English seats can vote on subjects which have been devolved to the Scottish Parliament.

This is not a new question. It was first considered by Gladstone in the 1880s when he was proposing Home Rule for



Tam Dalyell, the former Labour MP for West Lothian was a staunch opponent of Scottish devolution. He described it as like being on a "motorway with no exits."

Ireland. The issue was that under Home Rule Ireland would get considerable powers over domestic Irish matters but could not raise enough revenue in Ireland to support itself financially. Ireland would need continuing assistance from the rest of the UK (as is the case with current funding arrangements for Scotland).

What did this mean for representation in Westminster? Should Irish MPs continue to be elected? If so, what number and what powers should they have? For example, would they only be able to comment and vote on Irish matters and

the UK wide budget or what?

Gladstone did not have an answer and Home Rule failed to be approved.

Nor, it must be noted, did Tam Dalyell have an answer that “can be reconciled with Britain’s continued existence as a unitary state” (3).

Instead, precedent shows that a ‘devolution discount’ has been applied. Between 1923 and 1972 the Northern Ireland Parliament (Stormont) had considerable powers over domestic matters. But in return it sent only 12 MPs to Westminster when in terms of its population share it should have been 18.

It is easy to conclude that should there be a large measure of devolution in Scotland a similar situation might arise. The present number of 59 Scottish MPs, of which 40 are Labour, could be significantly reduced.

This would give both a considerable advantage to the Conservatives and make it more difficult to form a majority Labour government at Westminster in the future. Taking the 2010 election as an example, if there were no Scottish MPs at Westminster the Conservatives would have had a majority of 21 in the House of Commons, enough to form a government on their own.

Alternatively it is easy to consider another scenario under which Conservative rule is guaranteed. This is ‘English votes for English Law’.

The ‘West Lothian Question’ is resolved here by a form of devolution which allows only English MPs to vote on English issues in a separate legislative chamber considering only English matters, assuming they can be identified as such without challenge from non-English MPs.

Simple statistics demonstrate the problem. The population of England is 53 million (83.9%), Scotland 5.3 million (8.4%), Wales 3 million (4.8%) and Northern Ireland 1.8 million (2.9%).

In such a situation England can do no other than set the agenda for all the others. Its concerns and its budgets will provide the benchmark against which others will need to compete or to which they will need to accommodate.

More to the point, given the number of Conservative MPs elected in England compared to Labour MPs, Conservatives could dominate numerically in England even though there was a Labour government at Westminster.

This would have been the case in the Labour governments elected in 1964 and twice in 1974. And it could be the case for an incoming Labour government elected with a narrow majority in May 2015.

This would lead to a situation where a UK Labour government implemented laws passed by an English Conservative legislative assembly. The senior Conservatives who met at Chequers on 22 September to discuss with Cameron the issue of ‘English votes for English laws’ were apparently mindful of this and for this reason opted for a set of arrangements that would precisely deliver this outcome (4).

And so the difficulties go on with other many objections that could be raised and have been considered over the years, none of which provide an answer likely to be satisfactory to any of the major political parties within the UK (5).



Pictured at sunset, down by the Thames, the Houses of Parliament in the Palace of Westminster in London.

Where To Now?

As such there is no easy or quick fix to these problems. There are however two considerations that should be borne in mind and should shape socialist policy.

The first is that the devolution that is finally agreed for Scotland should have at its core the social union.

This is a devolution that uses the resources of the entire UK to focus on the needs of the most disadvantaged parts of the UK.

Its purpose will be to begin to level out the gross inequalities between and within the various parts of the UK, including but not exclusive to Scotland.

It is a form of devolution close to ‘devo-more’ and it maintains a significant and decisive role for the Westminster Parliament.

The second is that the problems associated with the ‘West Lothian Question’ and all its ramifications cannot be resolved without UK wide agreement. There is only one way to reach this to the satisfaction of all concerned and that is a comprehensive constitutional convention that includes not only political party representation, but representation through locally elected delegates and representatives of civil society, including of course the trade union and labour movement.

A constitutional convention will take time to convene, to deliberate, and to recommend, but it is the solution most likely to deliver an outcome which is radical in conception and also favourable to the interests of the majority. The lessons of history show that this is so.

A comprehensive study by two academics of 460 of the 806 national constitutions promulgated from 1789 to 2005 suggest that there is “an intuitive expectation, and preliminary evidence, that the most fundamental institutional political reform is accomplished through specially convened constituent assemblies operating independent of existing government” (6).

It is just such an independent constitutional convention delivering fundamental institutional political reform that is so desperately needed, not only for Scotland but the rest of the UK as well.

The constitutional settlement in the UK has been the cement of British capitalism for many years – a new constitutional settlement which is the product of widespread democratic participation and socialist application is an essential tool to weaken that cement and lay the basis of a different future.

FOOTNOTES

1. Reform Scotland. Press release 16/6/2014.
2. Institute for Public Policy Research. Press release 11/4/2014.
3. Dalyell, *Devolution: the end of Britain* (1977) p. 246
4. ‘EVEL Plans at Chequers’, 24/9/2014, Conservative Home Page, www.conservativehome.com
5. House of Commons, the West Lothian Question, 18/1/2012, www.parliament.uk
6. Elkins, Z. and Ginsburg, T. (2011) *Constitutional Reform in the English-Speaking Caribbean*, Social Science Research Council, USA.

Where now for politics in Britain?

UKIP bandwagon keeps on rolling

The right-wing British/English nationalist UK Independence Party's electoral bandwagon has rolled through Clacton-on-sea and into Westminster for the first time ever. As with its previous victories - most notably the European Parliament elections in May - it has been almost entirely at the expense of the British ruling class's premier party, the Conservatives.

By **MARTIN S. GIBSON**

For some people it may seem like good news that someone is at long last dividing and defeating the dastardly Tories.

However, when it comes to the right-wing, nationalist and racist UKIP we should be careful what we wish for: rather than the Tories' defeat or demise, we may be witnessing the emergence of a new right-wing alliance that could dominate British politics for many years to come.

Tory defector, Thatcherite and Euro-sceptic Douglas Carswell's (pictured) 44% swing from the Tories to UKIP in the Clacton parliamentary by-election (see table below) on Thursday 9 October has heightened the turmoil and tension inside the Tory Party, most especially over Britain's continued membership of the European Union.



Europe has dogged and divided the Conservative Party for more than half a century and the question being asked in the Palace of Westminster's tearooms and bars is: who else will 'rat' from the Tories' ranks before the country goes to the polls on 7 May 2015?

UKIP's Westminster victory has heightened the prospect of a Tory-UKIP electoral pact.

Whether that might metamorphose into an official alliance - like the Liberals and the SDP in the 1980s - or even a Tory-UKIP Coalition Government, will depend on how the UK's 46 million strong electorate votes in May.



Four party politics

For the first time since the Social Democratic Party (SDP) breakaway from Labour, the UK now has four main political parties. UKIP's rise has led Britain's broadcasters to propose that the forthcoming party leaders' General Election TV debates should include UKIP's Nigel Farage MEP.

The SDP was formed in 1981 and lasted only until 1989 when the Liberal Party - led by David Steel - took it over and renamed the merged party, the Liberal Democrats, ending almost a decade of that particular form of four party politics which was almost entirely at Labour's expense and most beneficial to Margaret Thatcher's premiership from 1979 to 1990.

Such a similar alliance and takeover by the Tories of UKIP is not yet on the cards but it is inching ever closer with

every UKIP victory and every Tory defection.

David Cameron became leader of the Conservatives in 2005 back in the days when UKIP was a far right adolescent irritant. In 2006 Cameron attacked UKIP as "fruitcakes, loonies and closet racists." Pro-Europe Tory grandee, Kenneth Clarke dismissed them as "clowns." Today, a somewhat contrite Clarke claims his jibe was taken completely out of context.

Whatever we think of them UKIP has come of age. Having been formed in 1993 UKIP is now 21 years old with a membership it says of 48,000. Britain's ruling class is well aware of such political and electoral potential.

For some time now the Tory rhetoric about UKIP has moderated significantly. At the Tory party conference in Birmingham, barely a word of criticism about UKIP, although not Farage, came from the Conservative platform.

A Survation poll (10 Oct.) for the *Mail on Sunday* newspaper on voting intentions at the next General Election put UKIP at a staggering 25%, that's up 22% from its 2010 General Election result and 2% more than the LibDems achieved in that election when they won 57 seats.

Survation suggests UKIP's 25% could win them over 70 seats at Westminster. No wonder they are now being taken

CLACTON 9 October 2014				HEYWOOD & MIDDLETON 9 October 2014			
Party	Votes	%	±%	Party	Votes	%	±%
UKIP	21,113	60	+60	Labour	11,633	41	+1
Con	8,709	25	-28	UKIP	11,016	39	+36
Labour	3,957	11	-14	Con	3,496	12	-15
Green	688	2	+1	LibDem	1,457	5	-18
LibDem	483	1	-12	Green	870	3	+3
Majority	12,404			Majority	617		
Turnout	51%			Turnout	36%		
Swing from Con. to UKIP: 44%				Swing to UKIP: 18%			



David Cameron MP

Boris Johnson

Nigel Farage MEP

very seriously by Britain's ruling class.

Gone are the flippant, throw away Tory lines of "fruitcakes" and "closet racists" and "clowns." In their place are the well thought through and well crafted lines which Cameron delivered in Birmingham in his leader's speech, "Go to bed with Farage and you wake up in the morning with Miliband."

Cameron's choice of Farage not UKIP shows he is trying desperately to let those Tory Party voters and members who have switched to UKIP, that it's not them he disrespects, but UKIP's leader.

Another straw in the wind of a Tory-UKIP alliance came the day after the 18 September Scottish Independence Referendum.

A much relieved Cameron announced his intention to press ahead with 'English Votes for English Laws' in tandem with new powers he promised for the Scottish Parliament.

A few hours later Nigel Farage staged an 'English votes' photo-call of him posting letters to all 59 Scottish MPs calling on them not to vote on any English-only matters.

This English Votes harmony between Cameron and Farage may well have been coincidence but it has more than a whiff of collusion between the two parties' PR strategists and go-betweens of which there are many.

One such go-between is the Tory MP for North East Somerset, Jacob Rees-Mogg, the son of the former editor of the *Times*, William Rees-Mogg. The "anachronistically posh" Jacob Rees-Mogg has openly advocated collaboration with UKIP for over a year now. After Clacton he is now calling for a Conservative-UKIP pact. Rees-Mogg knows what every Tory MP knows: UKIP's rise has been at their expense.

More recently, Boris Johnson, the "injudiciously posh" and ambitious Tory Mayor of London and the recently

selected Tory candidate for the safe seat of Uxbridge and South Ruislip has also weighed-in on the side of UKIP. Barring mishaps, Johnson should become the MP for Uxbridge and South Ruislip in north west London.

Johnson said, "there's not very much between us" and added that only the Tories could deliver what "UKIP people want" on immigration and an In-Out referendum on membership of the EU. (The Andrew Marr Show, BBC, 12 Oct.) And if Cameron can't talk turkey with Farage after 7 May, then his old Etonian and Oxford Bullingdon chum, Boris, most certainly will.

Farage attacks Labour

Like Boris Johnson, Nigel Farage should become the MP for South Thanet in Kent whose Tory incumbent - Laura Sandys MP - is standing down at the next election. This is an ideal contest for Farage whose Tory opponent in May will be the unknown and relatively untested Medway Cllr, Craig Mackinlay.

If Farage wins he will be both an MP and a Member of the European Parliament, an institution to which he was first elected in 1999, which is part of the European Union which he scorns and from which he wants Britain to secede.

Farage's Westminster strategy is clear, win enough seats to hold the "balance of power": coalition talk if I ever heard it.

But killing the Tories in the process defeats UKIP's anti-EU, anti-immigration coalition purpose. If Labour comes first in a hung Parliament - UKIP, are the last people with whom Ed Miliband would wish to coalesce.

It's no coincidence UKIP's annual conference was held in Doncaster: Labour leader Ed Miliband is MP for Doncaster North. And it's also no coincidence that Farage played down UKIP's anti-Tory Clacton success and played up it's anti-Labour near miss in the other

by-election in the Labour stronghold of Heywood & Middleton in Greater Manchester. Farage has to show UKIP can harm Labour as well as the Tories.

Labour's share of the vote in Heywood & Middleton actually rose by 1%, giving credence to the claim that their vote held up and it was the collapse to UKIP of the Tory vote, down by 15%, and the LibDems, down by 18%, that made it so close.

Most important election in a generation

David Cameron claims this coming General Election is the "most important election for a generation."

Eight years ago UKIP was a "closet-racist" irritant to the Tories - today it is the elephant in the Tories' room. That's why, Cameron's only focus between now and 7 May will be to shore up his party's vote in its most vulnerable seats and in its Tory heartlands. Talk of coalition will only be permitted behind closed doors.

What won't be behind closed doors is the next UKIP-inspired by-election in the Tory seat of Rochester & Strood on 6 November.

In September, Euro-sceptic Tory MP, Mark Reckless followed Douglas Carswell's August defection to the letter by joining UKIP and resigning as MP for Rochester and Strood - deliberately triggering another by-election in the Kent constituency. This is UKIP putting the boot into Cameron when he is on the floor.

Independence silver lining for Tories

One possible silver lining for Cameron may come from north of the border. The bitter aftermath of the Scottish Independence Referendum of 18 September could turn out to be to the Conservatives' electoral advantage.

It is highly probable the Scottish Labour Party may suffer a serious backlash at the General Election for leading the victorious NO campaign: this may turn out to be a pyrrhic victory.

The SNP and many of those involved in the Yes campaign have vowed to make the Labour Party pay for its unionist treachery particularly in the four areas - Glasgow, Dundee, North Lanarkshire and West Dunbartonshire - which voted Yes. There is serious talk that the SNP will agree to back Yes Alliance candidates in key Labour constituencies.

Some commentators, not unreasonably, believe Labour's current tally of 40 Scottish MPs could be cut in half and make the SNP/Yes the largest Scottish bloc in Westminster.

Such a serious diminution of Scottish Labour MPs at Westminster would play right into Cameron's hands and may de-

liver a fatal blow to Labour's chances of winning the election and forming a Government. In such a scenario Miliband's only hope is that Scotland's silent NO majority will, where it matters, be tactically astute enough to vote Labour.

What the Polls say

Pollsters are already feverishly trying to work out what Douglas Carswell's victory could mean for the Tories and the others in the General Election.

If the spectacular Clacton swing of 44% from the Tories to UKIP reaches even half of that in May Cameron's humiliation could go off the scale.

Clacton and Manchester were bad for Cameron but they were equally bad for LibDem leader Nick Clegg: he must have been hiding behind the sofa as the results from both by-elections came in.

Since Clegg formed his coalition with Cameron his electoral misery has continued unabated: he has now become known as the leader of lost deposits.

Clacton, historic though it has become, like many by-elections before it, was not a General Election in which voters are more considered because they understand they are electing a Government, not an individual. A Government that will set taxation, take us to war, build up or knock down our NHS and public services and determine the general distribution of wealth.

Cameron's hope is that the loss of this formerly safe Tory seat - in the white-hot heat of a by-election - will be temporary and it will return to the Tories' fold at the General Election.

We can only wait and see how vain that hope is, but what is certain is that Europe - the issue at the heart of Carswell's defection and UKIP's meteoric rise - is anything but temporary.

For Carswell is not alone and it's possible that Mark Reckless won't be the last Tory defector before May. It is guesstimated there are 80-100 Tory MPs who are deeply unhappy with their party's approach to Europe and immigration and who have UKIP "sympathies."

The Mirror newspaper (6 Sept. 2014) claims it knows of at least 12 Tory MPs who flatly refused to campaign in Clacton against Carswell and UKIP. The paper adds that many more are afraid of a UKIP backlash if they had criticised Carswell. Their fear is that UKIP will put up candidates against them in the General Election.

They understand only too well that UKIP's Clacton success is no passing fancy nor is it a fluke. It comes hard on the heels of its historic first place in the European Parliament elections in May in

which UKIP beat the Tories into third place with Labour second and the Europhile LibDems utterly humiliated.

So what do the Clacton and the Scottish Independence Referendum results mean for the forthcoming UK General Election in May?

A YouGov poll (11 Sept. 2014) for the Murdoch-owned, Europhobic *Sun* newspaper put Labour at 35%, four points ahead of the Tories, followed in third place by UKIP with a game changing 16%.

At the Tory Party conference in Birmingham the Tory Peer and millionaire partyfunder and pollster, Lord Ashcroft told a fringe meeting, "... the polling I have already done in individual seats ... shows the Tories already behind in 24. ... And the current national polls ... suggest the number of (Tory) losses could extend to the point where Labour have a comfortable working majority." (Lord Ashcroft, Conservative Conference, 28 September 2014).

Following an alleged Tory conference bounce for Cameron, Ashcroft's National Poll (6 October) had the Tories ahead on 32%, Labour 30%, UKIP 17%, LibDem 7% and Greens 7%. The suggestion is that this was due to Cameron's "good" party conference and Ed Miliband's "bad" party conference and of course Miliband's and Ed Balls stubbornly abysmal personal poll ratings.

Lastly, the Survation poll (10 Oct.) for the *Mail on Sunday*, mentioned earlier, put Labour and the Tories neck and neck on 31%, UKIP 25%, LibDems 7% and others 9%.

With 650 UK seats up for grabs, some 326 seats are required to ensure a Parliamentary majority. In the 2010 General Election the percentage of the vote and the share of House of Commons seats was:

Cons	36.4%	- 306 seats;
Lab	29%	- 258 seats;
LibDem	23%	- 57 seats;
UKIP	3.1%	- 0 seats;
Others	8.5%	- 29 seats.

What emerges from the polls is that which ever party comes first it is most unlikely it will have a clear majority.

The precedent set by Nick Clegg at the 2010 General Election - when no party achieved an overall majority - means Labour could have first try at forming a government in May 2015. In 2010, Clegg announced - much to Gordon Brown's chagrin - that the party that came first, ie the Tories, should have the first chance at putting together a Government.

If that precedent stands, Ed Miliband could have first chance at forming a Government and would have to decide

whether to go it alone as a minority government or form a coalition of 326 MPs. Labour is unlikely to consider coalescing with its historic enemy, the Tories, or its new enemy, UKIP.

Liberal Democrats like Vince Cable - a former Glasgow Labour councillor - would be much more suitable as Labour coalition partners. In the same way that UKIP needs the Tories to win a required number of seats to make a coalition with them possible, so Labour requires the same of the Liberal Democrats.

However the LibDems' performance in the Clacton and Manchester by-elections only underlines their dismal prospects for May. Currently they have 57 seats from a 23% share of the vote. National polls put them at 7% which, if repeated in May, could mean yet another huge collapse. The portents for a Lab-Lib pact are not good.

The Green Party and Northern Ireland's SDLP would also be likely Labour partners. The Greens increased their share of the vote in the two by-elections, albeit by a very small percentage.

If Labour fails to win outright or form a coalition, then a Conservative-UKIP coalition becomes more than a possibility. That may need Ulster's unionist MPs to get them close to a working majority.

During the Scottish independence referendum, the SNP made much of the likelihood that the UK General Election would result in a lurch to the right with a Conservative-UKIP coalition.

Who will hold the balance of power?

Currently, the SNP have six Westminster MPs. In the 1970s they had 11, their highest ever. Given their post-referendum surge some commentators believe they could more than double that and replace Labour as the largest Scottish bloc in Westminster.

If this was to happen, what will the Scottish nationalists do and what demands will they make? Would they support - or even join - a Labour coalition to stop a Tory-UKIP one and thus keep Scotland in the EU as the Scottish nationalists desire?

The irony could be that instead of UKIP nationalism, it could well be Scottish and Welsh nationalism which holds the balance of power in a United Kingdom Parliament which they scorn and from which they want Scotland and Wales to secede.

As for the working people of Britain - assaulted on all sides by British, English Scottish and Welsh nationalism - their political struggle for progress and working class unity will be more complex and more difficult but no less important.

Stop the support for Islamic State terror

The US, French and British air strikes against the terrorist organisation, the “Islamic State” (IS, previously ISIS and ISIL), will not kill it. However, many civilians will continue to lose their lives and homes in Iraq and Syria as a consequence.

By **ALEX DAVIDSON**

The way to defeat IS is to cut off its support. That means ending the funding for terrorist organisations by the Arab monarchies and other countries in the Gulf Cooperation Council and forcing Turkey to end the use of its border crossing into Syria by foreign terrorists.

Now, even pillars of the British military are calling for action to be taken against the Gulf states. Former Chief of the General Staff, General Sir Richard, now Lord Dannatt, wrote: “It is completely unacceptable that some individuals in Qatar, Saudi Arabia and elsewhere see advantage in channelling large sums of money to the so-called Islamic State.” (*Sunday Telegraph*, 5 October 2014).

In the same newspaper, Liam Fox MP, former Defence Secretary, wrote: “Isil is well-funded. Money has been flowing from rich individuals in the Gulf States, if not their governments, to finance it and its Sunni allies in their battle against the Assad regime in Syria.”

Sir Richard Dearlove, former head of MI6, accused Qatar and Saudi Arabia of, at the very least, turning a blind eye to terror fund-raising. He said: “For Isil to be able to surge into the Sunni areas of Iraq in the way that it has done recently has to be the consequence of substantial and sustained funding. Such things do not happen spontaneously.” (*Sunday Telegraph*, 5 October 2014)

At Harvard University’s John F Kennedy Forum on 2 October 2014, America’s vice-president, Joe Biden, said: “The Saudis, the Emiratis etc. What were they doing? They were so determined to take down Assad and essentially have a proxy Sunni-Shia war ... they poured hundreds of millions

of dollars and tens, thousands of tons of weapons into anyone who would fight against Assad, except that the people who were being supplied were Al-Nusra and al-Qaeda and the extremist elements of jihadis from other parts of the world.”

The “Islamic State” (IS), which has gained control of substantial parts of Iraq, is now the main force attempting to overthrow the Assad government in Syria.

IS has taken over from the largely defeated so-called Free Syrian Army and other rebels in Syria. It is estimated that it now has some 12,000 foreigners from 74 countries in its ranks. Of these, some 60-70% come from other Middle Eastern countries and about 20-25% from Western nations.

In the September 2014 debate at the United Nations the Syrian Ambassador,

Bashar Ja’afari said that the unanimous adoption of Resolution 2170 was important. The UN report went on to quote him as follows: Bashar Ja’afari (Syria) “stressed that ISIS and other groups had no connection with Islam or the heritage of the region. He said that Syria had been beset with the crimes of such groups for the past three years, and had been fighting them, while influential States in the region and elsewhere had continued their support for the groups while portraying them as moderate opposition.

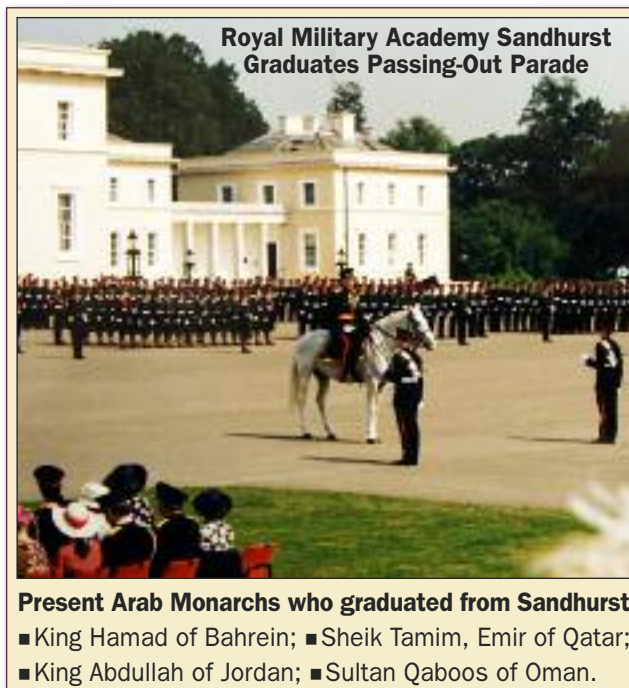
“His Government had long been trying to call attention to the crimes of those organizations, he went on to say. The sales of Syrian oil by the groups had been ignored, as well as the traversing of their personnel and resources through Turkey and other countries. Had his warnings been acted on, there might be no need now to deal with the growing threat. He called on the Council, in the future, to consult with his country and others in the region in order to make its actions against terrorism effective. Furthermore, efforts should be made to fight media that encouraged extremist ideologies.”

IS has to thank the America-led war in Iraq and the Arab monarchies for its increasingly pre-eminent position among terrorist organisations, including al-Qaeda. The US led-war in Iraq, supported by Britain and others, acted as a recruiting ground for the “Islamic State” and its predecessor organisations.

The jihadists have long been funded by wealthy individuals in the Arab monarchies. Gerhard Mueller, Germany’s Development Minister, has pointed his finger at Qatar.

Kuwait has been described as “the epicentre of fund-raising for terrorist groups in Syria” by David Cohen, the US Treasury’s under-secretary for terrorism and financial intelligence. Britain has approved hundreds of arms licences to Kuwait.

Then, of course, there is Saudi Arabia. According to Hilary Clinton, in a leaked memo, Saudi Arabia constituted “the most sig-



Royal Military Academy Sandhurst Graduates Passing-Out Parade

Present Arab Monarchs who graduated from Sandhurst
■ King Hamad of Bahrein; ■ Sheik Tamim, Emir of Qatar;
■ King Abdullah of Jordan; ■ Sultan Qaboos of Oman.

nificant source of funding to Sunni terrorist groups worldwide.”

The United Arab Emirates (UAE), Bahrain, Oman have also played their part in bank-rolling the terrorists. These countries plus Qatar, Kuwait and Saudi Arabia comprise the Gulf Cooperation Council.

Britain has a very close business and military relationship with the Arab royals, not least through training their military leaders and selling them armaments.

Sandhurst

The Royal Military Academy Sandhurst has trained generations of foreign royals, particularly from the Middle East. Four reigning Arab monarchs are graduates of Sandhurst and its affiliated colleges – King Hamad of Bahrain; Sheik Tamim, Emir of Qatar; King Abdullah of Jordan; and Sultan Qaboos of Oman. Past monarchs to be trained there include Sheikh Saad, Emir of Kuwait; Sheikh Hamad, Emir of Qatar; and King Hussein of Jordan.

Sandhurst’s links have continued from the time when Britain was the major colonial power in the Gulf.

In 2012 Sandhurst accepted a £15m donation from the UAE for a new accommodation block, named the Zayad building after that country’s founding ruler.

In 2013, Sandhurst’s Mons Hall, a sports centre, was re-opened as the King Hamad Hall, following a £3m donation from the monarch of Bahrain, who was educated at one of Sandhurst’s affiliated colleges.

According to Peter Sincock, chairman of the Bahrain Society and former defence attaché to Saudi Arabia, “The king has always felt that Sandhurst was a great place. Something like 20 of his immediate family have been there as cadets.” (*Sandhurst and the Sheikhs, BBC Radio 4, 27 September 2014*)

Major General Arthur Denaro, Commandant at Sandhurst in the 1990s, talking about the funeral of King Hussein in 1999 said, “Coming to the funeral were the heads of state of almost every country in the world and our Prime Minister was there, Tony Blair. He happened to see me talking to heads of state – the Sultan of Brunei, the Sultan of Oman, the Bahrainis, the Saudis – and he said, ‘How do you know all these guys?’ The answer was because they went to Sandhurst.”

The May 2014 intake to Sandhurst included 72 overseas cadets, around 40%



Bicom’s annual dinner 30 December 2009.

Left to right: Hadas Prosor and her husband, Ron Prosor, Israeli ambassador; Anita Zubludowicz; Martin Indyk; and Bicom chairman, Poju Zabłudowicz

of whom were from the Middle East.

The officer cadet course is for 44 weeks and its final term is on counter-insurgency and managing public unrest.

Michael Stephens, deputy director of the Royal United Services Institute, Qatar, said of Sandhurst “It’s a place where future leaders get to know each other.”

Peter Sincock commented, “For British people who are drifting around the world,

Major General Arthur Denaro, Commandant at Sandhurst in the 1990s, talking about the funeral of King Hussein in 1999 said, “Coming to the funeral were the heads of state of almost every country in the world and our Prime Minister was there, Tony Blair. He happened to see me talking to heads of state – the Sultan of Brunei, the Sultan of Oman, the Bahrainis, the Saudis – and he said, ‘How do you know all these guys?’ The answer was because they went to Sandhurst.”

as I did as a soldier, you find people who were at Sandhurst and you have an immediate rapport. I think that’s very helpful, for example, in the field of military sales.”

Think tanks and lobbying

The Gulf monarchies do not stint in buying influence. They contribute vast

amounts of money to various think tanks and lobbying groups. For example, Qatar is not content with just running its worldwide Al Jazeera television station, it is the single biggest donor to Brookings, the American think tank with a worldwide network of operations.

Martin S Indyk (pictured) is Vice-President and Foreign Policy Director of Brookings. He founded the Washington Institute for Near East Policy, which had strong links to the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC), estimated

to be the second most powerful American lobby group after the American Association of Retired Persons.

The Britain Israel Communications Research Centre (BICOM) is the main Israeli lobbying organisation in the UK. Poju Zabłudowicz, its chairman (pictured), is a major funder of the Conservative Party.

Indyk was appointed US Ambassador to Israel by President Clinton. More recently, John Kerry, US Secretary of State, appointed him as US Special Envoy for the negotiations between Israel and the Palestine Authority. He has now returned to his day job at Brookings.

In 2012 when a revised agreement was signed between Brookings and the Qatari government, the Qatari Ministry of Foreign Affairs itself praised the agreement on its website, announcing that “the center will assume its role in reflecting the bright image of Qatar in the international media, especially the American ones.”

Brookings officials acknowledge that they have regular meetings with Qatari government officials about the centre’s activities and budget, and that the former Qatari prime minister sits on the centre’s advisory board.

Last year, Qatar agreed to make a \$14.8 million, four year donation to Brookings, which has helped fund a Brookings affiliate in Qatar and a project on United States relations with the Islamic world.

It is not only Qatar which funds think tanks and lobby groups. The United Arab Emirates is a major supporter of the American Center for Strategic and International Studies. It provided \$1m to help build the the center’s gleaming new glass and steel headquarters not far from the White House.

The United Arab Emirates paid the research organisation to sponsor a lecture series to “examine the strategic importance of the Gulf region” and “identify opportunities for constructive U.S.

A EUROFIGHTER TYPHOON of the ROYAL SAUDI AIR FORCE
The Typhoon was designed and manufactured by a consortium of three companies: BAE Systems, Airbus Group and Alenia Aermacchi and their holding company, EurofighterJagdflugzeug GmbH. The project is managed by the NATO Eurofighter and Tornado Management Agency.



engagement.”

It also paid the centre to organise annual trips to the Gulf region during which dozens of security experts from the United States would get private briefings from government officials there.

These and other events gave the UAE's senior diplomats an important platform to press their case. At a round table in Washington in 2013 Yousef Otaiba, the ambassador to the United States, pressed General Martin E. Dempsey, the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff about whether the U.S. would remain committed to his country given budget restrictions in Washington.

General Dempsey's reply was quickly posted on the *Facebook* page of the United Arab Emirates Embassy. "The country," he assured the Ambassador, was one of America's "most credible and capable allies, especially in the Gulf region."

Military links

Both Qatar and the UAE host large United States military bases. The base in Qatar is the largest US base in the Middle East.

Britain's largest ever export agreement was the Al Yamamah armaments deal with Saudi Arabia. In 2005 it was estimated to have earned £4.3 billion in 20 years and that there was another £10 billion to come.

BAE, and its predecessor British Aerospace, was the main contractor and has some 5000 employees working directly with the Royal Saudi Air Force.

There were numerous allegations that the Al Yamamah contracts were the result of bribes to members of the Saudi Royal family and government officials. In 2003 the UK Serious Fraud Office (SFO) began an investigation. It was still running after three years and looked likely to continue when a new contract was about to be signed with Saudi Arabia.

The SFO dropped the investigation in 2006 after pressure from Prime Minister, Tony Blair, who said, "Our relationship with Saudi Arabia is vitally important for our country in terms of counter-terrorism, in terms of the broader Middle East, in terms of helping in respect of Israel and Palestine. The strategic interest comes first."

BAE was sentenced in March 2010 to pay a \$400 million fine, one of the largest fines in the history of the US Department of Justice. The judge said BAE's conduct involved "deception, duplicity and knowing violations of law ... on an enormous scale".

Jonathan Aitken, a former government minister under Mrs Thatcher and convicted perjurer, who was connected with the deals in the 1980s, said that even if the allegations were true, it was correct to end the investigation to maintain good relations with Saudi Arabia.

In 2006 Saudi Arabia signed a contract with BAE for 72 Eurofighter Typhoons (pictured above) at a cost of £34.43 billion and the full weapons system will cost some £10 billion.

In 2007 BAE announced that the United States Department of Justice had launched its own investigation into Al Yamamah. It was looking into allegations that a US bank had been used to funnel payments to Prince Bandar of Saudi Arabia.

Under a plea bargain with the US Department of Justice BAE was sentenced in March 2010 by US District Court

Judge John D. Bates to pay a \$400 million fine, one of the largest fines in the history of the Department of Justice.

US District Judge John Bates said the company's conduct involved "deception, duplicity and knowing violations of law, I think it's fair to say, on an enormous scale". BAE was not convicted of bribery, and is thus not internationally blacklisted from future contracts.

Arab Royals and business in Britain

Qatar owns lucrative parts of Britain including London's tallest building, the Shard, a large portion of Sainsbury's, a bit of the London Stock Exchange and parts of Mayfair and Knightsbridge. And this goes for all the Arab Royals.

Britain is so deeply involved with the Arab monarchies that it is not difficult to see why the real answer to terrorism is not given. Britain's Middle East allies are up to their necks in complicity with terrorism but while there is business to be done and armaments to be sold there will be resistance to putting pressure on these friends and the training at Sandhurst will continue.

However, recognition that the situation in Iraq and Syria has now got so out of hand that it poses a threat to the west and its Middle Eastern interests and allies means that influential people within the establishment are making calls for something to be done about the funding and support for IS by the Gulf states and Turkey.

It was acceptable to fund terrorists to bring down Assad. Now that IS has control of oilfields, is threatening Baghdad and could soon be sending jihadists on foreign missions it has become a different matter.

If Britain had used its influence over the Arab Royals it could have stopped IS growing into the monster it has now become.

Syria is facing new attack from West

The Syrian Arab News Agency (SANA) claims the process of Syria returning to some semblance of normality after three years of West-inspired war is threatened by a new plan of attack from the US and NATO.

By PAT TURNBULL

On 21 August 2014 the SANA reported in an article entitled, *Scores of families return to al-Qadam neighbourhood in Damascus* that the families had gone back to the war-battered al-Qadam neighbourhood to check on their properties as the first step of implementing a national reconciliation agreement there.

SANA added, 'Nadia Moshli, who had lived for 30 years in her house in al-Joura quarter before she was forced out, expressed happiness that she will see her house again after three years she spent moving from one place to another.

"We want to see security and safety returning to al-Qadam and each place in Syria," she told SANA.

SANA continued, 'Abu Hamza, a member of the National Reconciliation Committee, said that the positive approach shown by the relevant authorities has helped build bridges among the Syrian people. Meanwhile, workshops have continued opening roads and removing the debris for rehabilitating infrastructures and returning basic services to the neighbourhood ... 300 food baskets offered by the Syrian army [were] distributed among 250 families which entered the neighbourhood.'

On 22 August SANA reported that the army had established control over the Tameco pharmaceuticals factory and neighbouring farms in Damascus Countryside. 'The terrorists who had been holed up in the factory and the neighbouring buildings and farms were killed, [and] huge amounts of weapons and ammunition were found and confiscated as well' and a tunnel was destroyed intended to transport weapons between Adra and Douma areas.

On the same day a 5-day Media Forum entitled *Through our pens and with our Army, we protect the Homeland* began in Damascus Countryside, attended by 100 journalists and organ-

ised by the Damascus branch of the Revolution Youth Union. It aimed to introduce young people to methods and techniques of making the news, using the expertise of journalists working in the national media – which has continued to operate despite a greatly reduced budget.

On 23 August in an article headed *180 gunmen from Damascus Countryside turn themselves in* SANA reported that the surrender of the men, from the town of Bassima, had been 'carried out thanks to efforts from national reconciliation councils, and that the gunmen's legal status was settled and they were released after they pledged not to take part in any act that could endanger the safety of the country... the total of gunmen from Damascus Countryside who turned themselves in during the month of August is 547.'

On 24 August SANA reported from a seminar organized to mark the 47th anniversary of the foundation of the General Union of Syrian Women. Speaking at the seminar, Caretaker Deputy Foreign and Expatriates Minister, Fayssal Mikdad, underlined 'the achievements of Syrian women amidst a state of narrow-mindedness and regressive tendencies in the Arab world.'

On 25 August an archaeological expedition at the site of Tal Dubat Breikieh in Sweida Province was reported to have discovered a burial ground dating back to the Middle Bronze Age, around 2000 – 2500 B.C.

So the process to try to normalise life in Syria continues. The more than three-year long war has already killed 160,000 people and created nearly 3 million refugees, as well as displacing many more people inside Syria. Yet if the hawks in the West had had their way it could all have been so much worse.

On 21 August *Russia Today* carried

an article *On the brink of Syria invasion: one year since Ghouta chemical attack*. It stated, 'A year has passed since a chemical attack in the rebel-held suburbs of Damascus killed more than 1,400 people. A US strike on Syria seemed a reality. Yet an international effort managed to forge a path to averting military intervention.

'The attack took place in the early hours of August 21, 2013 in Ghouta ... It was on the very day that a UN team of inspectors arrived in the city to investigate the March 19 alleged chemical attack in Khan al-Assal... By September 2013 US admiral Jonathan Greenert said that US ships in the Mediterranean were "fully ready" for a potential Syria strike.'

Despite the fact that the attack appeared much more likely to be a provocation carried out by the Syrian rebels to draw in foreign intervention, this threat was only halted when the Syrian government agreed to give up its stockpile of chemical weapons to international control for destruction.

On June 23, despite difficulties delivering the chemicals safely in the midst of a war, Syria finished handing over 100% of its chemical weapons stockpile to the United Nations' Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons, and on 19 August the destruction of the chemicals was completed on US maritime vessel Cape Ray.

Now Syria is faced with another attempt to find an excuse for bombing the country – the execution on video of American journalist James Wright Foley by a terrorist member of the organization currently called Isil (Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant) in the western press.

While original reports said that it was impossible to pinpoint the location of the filming – suggesting it could be in Iraq or Syria – on 25 August the *Daily Telegraph* reported that Eliot Higgins, 'a Leicester-based video and photo analyst who specialises in Syria' had calculated the precise coordinates, near 'Raqqa in northern Syria, the Isil fighters' capital'.

Raqqa had also been highlighted in a *Sunday Telegraph* report on 24 August

by Ruth Sherlock in Beirut, drawing her information from a website claiming to base itself in Raqqa and to disclose the locations of jihadists' headquarters and training camps.

Sherlock added: 'As America considers whether to extend its air campaign against Isil to Syria, the publication of such details could prove lethal for the jihadists.' The website temptingly complains: 'The people of Raqqa are tired: the regime, the Free Syrian Army rebels and the international community have given up on us.'

Contradictorily, the *Daily Telegraph* also reported on 25 August: 'It emerged last night that the video of Mr Foley's slaughter might have been staged ... a study ... carried out by an international forensic science company which has worked for police forces across Britain, suggested camera trickery and slick post-production techniques ... no blood can be seen ... Sounds allegedly made by Foley do not appear consistent with what might be expected ... The company ...

requested anonymity...'

Syrian Caretaker Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign and Expatriates Minister Walid al-Muallem held a press conference on 25 August where he said that Syria welcomes UN resolution No 2170 and is committed to it, despite the fact that this decision came late.

He noted that the consensus at the UN Security Council on combating terrorism is in line with Syria's calls for drying up the sources of terrorism and facing the risks of its spread to neighbouring countries and beyond.

He also noted that the Security Council resolution is binding for all sides, and called for putting a stop to the instigation and funding of terrorism, as well as calling for refraining from facilitating the movement of terrorists.

He suggested that all neighbouring countries must pay attention to the danger threatening the region out of concern for their own national interests, and must cooperate to combat terrorism, adding that it is in the best interests of Turkey

and its people to reconsider its foreign policies because terrorism knows no borders.

Most importantly, al-Muallem emphasized that combating terrorists is carried out through serious political work to dry up its sources, cooperation with the Syrian government, and joint international work, not through transgression against countries' sovereignty, and he asserted that any breach of Syrian sovereignty by any side constitutes an act of aggression. Those who want to cooperate with Syria in combating terrorism must be honest and serious, and relinquish double standards.

The Minister asserted that Syria strongly condemns the killing of the American journalist James Foley as well as the killing of any innocent civilian. At the same time he wondered why there hadn't been any western condemnation of the massacres committed by the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) terrorist organization against the Syrian army and citizens.

As the bombs fall, the people of Damascus rally round Assad

On 17 April the *Daily Telegraph* published a report from Damascus, Syria by Peter Osborne. This was before the presidential election in June which Bashar al-Assad won by a large majority. Below are extracts from Peter Osborne's report.

It was a simple three-hour trip from Beirut to Damascus. The border crossing caused no problems, and thereafter the journey was interrupted by only a handful of checkpoints. My first impression of the Syrian capital, too, was that it is surprisingly safe...Residents even claimed that President Assad often drives himself to his office from the relatively modest flat where he lives, and can sometimes be seen stuck in the rush-hour traffic....

But after only a few hours in this city, it becomes clear that Damascus is not normal in the slightest. Several of its suburbs are held by rebel fighters, who pound government-held areas with mortars.... On Palm Sunday, I went to the Old City ... On the way back, I passed a man looking dazed next to his ruined car. A mortar had struck it just a few minutes earlier. When I picked up the shell casing, it was still warm.

Over the past few days, I have talked to shopkeepers, students, soldiers, doctors, a dentist, MPs and government ministers (including the minister for tourism, who must have the most thankless job in the world). On the basis of these conversations, I would judge not just that support for the regime is holding up, but that President Assad could

very well win a popular election, even if carried out on a free and fair basis.... Discussing this vote, I found – to my surprise – that even people outside the governing Ba'ath party, including some of Assad's political opponents, said they would support him. Maria Saadah, an independent MP for Damascus, told me that ...she had entered politics at the beginning of the crisis because she wanted to reform the system. But she added that the middle of a war against what she described as foreign-backed insurgents ... was not the time for that....

People see their country as being threatened by foreign powers (above all Saudi Arabia, Qatar and Turkey, all backed by the West) who are sponsoring the jihadist groups that make up the opposition. I was struck by the fact that this argument is made not only by the Alawite coterie round the president. I also heard it from Sunni Muslims, Christians and members of the various other cultural and religious groups that abound in Syria....

Only a handful of members of Assad's 30-strong cabinet (I was told two) are Alawite. The prime minister is Sunni, as are the interior minister, the justice minister, the foreign minister, even the defence minister. The delegation that travelled to Geneva for the failed peace talks several months ago was also almost entirely composed of Sunni Muslims (though they would probably reject sectarian terms, and prefer to think of themselves just as Syrians)....

When I was in Bab Touma [a suburb of Damascus], I was approached by a shop-

keeper, who insisted on taking me to his antiques shop. There, he served me tea and told without rancour that no customers came to visit any more, and there were no jobs.

He walked me along an alleyway to his home and pointed to a destroyed balcony where his mother had liked to sit. Two months ago, she had been resting there as usual when she was killed by a direct hit from a mortar.

"Your government," he told me, "is the worst ever; they want Syria to be a democracy and ally themselves with Saudi Arabia, which has nothing to do with democracy."...

I am well aware that the government has committed dreadful atrocities, though I suspect that some of the accounts have been exaggerated. Nevertheless, I do think the words of my shopkeeper friend are worth pondering. If the insurgents who killed his mother win the war, there will be no Christian churches in Syria any more (just as there aren't in Saudi Arabia at the moment). Life will be similarly terrible for many of the ordinary Muslims who make up the great majority of the population.

There are no "good guys" in Syria's civil war. But we should not be blind to the fact that there is a project out there to destroy its rich, pluralist and unbelievably intricate culture and replace it with a monochrome version of Wahhabi Islam, of the kind favoured by Saudi mullahs. And for reasons that history may come to judge very severely, Britain, the United States, and the West have been aiding and abetting this project.

Boycott of Israel gathers support

The toll of dead and injured in Operation Defensive Edge - especially its one-sided character and how Israel's onslaught on Gaza was reported in the mainstream media - has provoked global outrage and a new surge of support for Palestine.

By **BRIAN DURRANS**

As I write, Israeli breaches of the terms of the 'permanent' ceasefire are already coming to light, quite apart from its biggest land-grab in the West Bank for three decades.

In the meantime it's unclear whether the unity of Hamas and Fatah factions will hold; whether the Palestinian Authority will at last take Israel to the International Criminal Court for its war crimes; and whether popular pressure can convert into effective sanctions the criticism which Israel's actions have provoked even from the US, the UK and the EU.

What is beyond question, however, is that there will be no peace without justice for Palestinians, which means achieving the three key demands on which all strands of the resistance movement are united:

- ending the illegal occupation of Palestinian territory (including Gaza, whose occupation consists of a siege and collective punishment) from the 'Six-Day War' in 1967;
- equal rights within Israel itself for its Jewish and Palestinian citizens (the latter comprise 20% of Israel); and,
- honouring Palestinians' right of return to land from which their families were expelled in 1948.

Media distortion of the Gaza conflict usually starts with allegations that Palestinian 'rockets' provoke an Israeli 'response'. This then frames the debate around whether that 're-

sponse' is 'proportionate' or not.

In the propaganda stakes, however, Israel has painted itself into a corner. Trying to justify attacks on kids playing football on the beach, or on five UN schools in as many days, exposes even the best trained pro-Israeli apologist as a liability to his cause.

But for all the point-scoring, the background still gets overlooked, and that is more important than ever. Two aspects are crucial: Israel's colonial status and its value to its main sponsor, the US.

Imperialism and Settler Colonialism

Israel's occupation of Palestine began

with slaughter and expulsions which established Israel as a Zionist state in 1948.

The new nation had a long prehistory. Although many Jews were engaged in struggles for social advancement alongside fellow-citizens wherever they lived, European Zionism gained support from the late 19th century onwards with the idea of a 'homeland' to protect Jews from (Christian) persecution and discrimination.

This notion attracted not only a minority of Jews but also the ruling classes of the main imperial powers, who alone had the power to make it a reality.

Even if it remained elusive, the promise of a 'homeland' served ruling class interests by confirming the stereotype of the 'unintegrated' Jew as a permanently-available scapegoat for the cyclical crises of capitalism, sowing disunity among the organized workers and their allies, dividing Jews from non-Jews.

But the Jewish 'homeland' also looked like a game-winner in geopolitics. After several other locations were proposed and rejected (including Uganda and Argentina), Palestine seemed to serve Anglo-French designs at the strategic and oil-rich crossroads of Europe and Asia.

This found expression in the duplicitous Balfour Declaration of 1917 which promised the Zionist lobby part of Palestine while also assuring Palestinians that their rights would not be jeopardized.

The Zionist pipe-dream became reality only after the defeat of Fascism in 1945, a beneficiary of the monstrous but rarely-challenged claim that the West had been powerless to prevent the Nazi Holocaust.

In fact, Fascism could have been nipped in the



May 1948: David Ben-Gurion proclaims Israel's independence below a picture of Theodor Herzl. Herzl (1860-1904) was born in Budapest, Hungary and is regarded as the father of modern Zionism. Long before the Nazi Holocaust he promoted Jewish migration from across the world to Palestine with the purpose of forming a Zionist state.

bud by defending the Spanish Republic, or by entering into an earlier anti-Nazi alliance with the Soviet Union.

As for Palestine, there never was any possibility that Palestinians would lightly accept British-brokered colonization, especially at a time when old empires began crumbling across the world and not least in the Middle East.

Neither was there any doubt that imperialists would hold on wherever they could; and here, above all – and then as well as now – in the interest of oil and strategic control.

In the current exacerbating turmoil of the Middle East, and elsewhere, US-led repression and interference in the affairs of other countries is aided and abetted by Israel, though at an enormous price and in a way that sometimes gets out of hand.

Hitherto, that price has been affordable and the waywardness tolerable. But if the more thoughtful Zionists and their allies are beginning to ask whether either will continue to be so for much longer, what's forcing them to rethink is the tenacity of the Palestinians themselves: a resistance encompassing both armed and non-violent struggle and increasingly effective use of social media.

And it is supported worldwide by an increasingly confident solidarity movement whose main inspiration is Palestinians but also the proven success of solidarity in helping end South African apartheid two decades ago.

Hearts and Minds

Operation Defensive Edge (ODE) itself, directed at Gaza, was preceded by 'Operation Brother's Keeper' directed against the Palestinians of the occupied West Bank.

Both operations were undertaken on the pretext of 'provocations', the first the killing of three teenagers from an illegal West Bank settlement, which Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu blamed on Hamas without a shred of evidence and for this reason lost much of his limited credibility in the outside world; and the second the firing of rockets from Gaza following a series of increasingly intolerable attacks and restrictions on the already besieged territory by Israel itself.

The real 'provocation' for both these (co-ordinated) lethal Israeli offensives, however, was the earlier announcement of a unity government by Hamas and Fatah, which Netanyahu



2013: Israeli soldiers arrest Palestinian youths

declared unacceptable. But if the assaults on the West Bank and Gaza were meant to break that unity, they appear so far to have failed. Israel sought to force Gaza to 'demilitarise' but as the last ceasefire was agreed had to admit that this had

not been possible.

High though their casualties have been, Palestinians are correct to interpret the agreed ceasefire as a victory; not only has the resistance not been disarmed but Israel has had openly to agree to measures to lift the siege, which now makes it more difficult for it not to do so.

In the wider arena, Israel has lost sympathy not only by its grossly disproportionate attacks on Gazans and during Operation Brother's Keeper, or by its latest land-grab in the West Bank, but also for its patently grotesque attempts to justify its actions.

Solidarity and political bankruptcy

I referred above to the annexation of Palestinian land in the occupied West Bank – a thousand acres, so the most serious in three decades – which was announced shortly after the end of ODE and thus immediately called into question (for anyone naïve enough to have been taken in by it) Israel's commitment to even a resuscitated 'peace process'.

But ODE, Palestinian resistance and the terms in which Israel seeks to justify its post-ODE land-grab also high-

Boycott, divestment and sanctions

Boycott, divestment and sanctions (BDS) worked in South Africa and despite the different context they can work in Israel-Palestine. BDS has reached a tipping point. In the last few months alone, BDS-related successes include the decision by the Presbyterian Church and the Methodist Church to divest from companies involved in the Israeli occupation.

This was followed by the world's richest person, Bill Gates, withdrawing his entire stake – more than \$180 million – from a security company (G4S) involved in Israel's human rights abuses.

Earlier this year the second largest (\$200 billion) Dutch pension fund, PGGM, divested from five Israeli banks and a month earlier the largest Danish bank, Danske, blacklisted Israel's Hapoalim bank.

In January 2014 the Norwegian sovereign fund, the largest in the world, divested from two Israeli companies that were part of its portfolio. In July 2014, TESCO, the UK's largest supermarket chain, decided to stop selling Israeli products originating from the Occupied Palestinian Territories.

In July 2013, three major supermarket chains in the Netherlands Aldi, Hoogvliet and Jumbo announced that they will no longer sell products coming from Israeli settlements in the Occupied Palestinian Territories.

In April 2012, UK supermarket chains "The Co-op" adopted a complete boycott of Israeli companies. Last year, the South African agricultural company Karsten Farms terminated its relations with Israel's Hadiklaim.

light something else of great importance to Palestine and to the solidarity movement.

It's not just that Israel is losing friends but that it seems to have no idea how to win them back, or to stop losing more of them.

Despite previous losses of public sympathy in (for examples) Operation Cast Lead (2008-09) or during the murder and piracy against the Mavi Marmara (2010), Israel was able to count on some credibility among waverers.

But Israel's own actions are now the best recruiting sergeants for the solidarity movement. Waverers would have had to have watched TV very selectively to have kept Gaza's suffering out of their living rooms this summer, whatever the commentators were saying.

In the past, Israel's apologists have tried justifying the construction of illegal settlements on Palestinian land by claiming the land is theirs anyway, some even using the Bible as proof.

When Israel was established in 1948, the land was represented, in slightly different though still compatible terms, as a haven for those who had survived the Holocaust; and if those were the terms in which the 'guilt-ridden' West came to view the arrangement – provided the awkward fact of indigenous Palestinians could be pretended away – who then could deny its morality?

But if citing the Bible as the word of God is no longer a serious way of conducting an argument, neither is denying Palestinian rights a corollary of respecting those of Jewish Israelis.

This is why the terms in which Israel tries to justify its latest land-grab reveal such moral and political bankruptcy.

The establishment of Israel – the obliteration of hundreds of Palestinian villages and the killing or expulsion of their inhabitants who were never Nazis – was presented by Zionists as both a justifiable response to the slaughter of Jews in the Holocaust and the fulfilment of a religious or quasi-religious destiny.

Now comes a theft of land as groundless vengeance. The latest annexation of part of the occupied Palestinian West Bank is officially justified as a response to the killing of the three Jewish Israeli settler teenagers for which no branch of the Palestinian resistance has either claimed or credibly been accused of responsibility.

The only way to deal with the Israeli apartheid state is action to isolate Israel and to pile on the pressure.

Summer 2014 may be recorded in history as the beginning of the final victory for Palestinian self-determination. Israel seems to be running out of options.

Jewish Chronicle - 24 January 2014

Take a lawyer's advice - visit the occupied territories

By **David Middleburgh**, a partner in Gallant Maxwell solicitors, London.

"...conviction rates are 99.7 per cent ... there is no longer any point in fighting for basic rights ... the court system was clearly a figleaf for a system of arbitrary justice where the guilt of the child is beside the point ... a system that effectively keeps Palestinian society in a state of constant fear and uncertainty ... convictions routinely obtained based upon forced confessions and defendants facing remand without bail pending trial for periods in excess of sentences when pleading guilty. No sane defendant would plead not guilty in this Catch 22 situation ... can we complain if we awake one day and Israel has sleepwalked into the status of a pariah country?"

I have just returned from a three-day tour of the West Bank and east Jerusalem, organised by the pro-Israel, pro-peace organisation, Yachad. The participants were all passionate Zionists and, were it not for some grey hairs and wrinkles, we could have been a youth group. In fact, we were all senior lawyers or individuals with a particular interest in the rule of law.

The purpose: to understand the legal context to the occupation. The centrepiece, a unique visit to the IDF military courts that maintain law and order (for Palestinians only) in the West Bank, unique in that we were the first organised group of British Jews to visit the courts. In the course of the tour we met a very broad spectrum of people from representatives of Israeli NGOs, a senior employee of the Yesha Council, which represents settlers, and a senior adviser to Foreign Minister Avigdor Lieberman.

My conclusions? First, there is no substitute for finding out what is really happening on the ground by visiting and asking difficult questions. I had made numerous assumptions from both Jewish and non-Jewish media, which were simply wrong.

Secondly, those who consider that stories of systemic breaches of human rights under the occupation are an anti-Israel myth are deluding themselves.

We spent a morning at the military courts observing young Palestinian boys, aged 13-17, being processed, and speaking to their mothers. It is clear that children are invariably arrested in night raids by the army at gunpoint, cuffed and blindfolded and held, often for hours, in that condition, denied access to food, water and toilet facilities, interrogated without being advised of their rights, without a lawyer and without their parents.

Military Court Watch, an Israeli NGO, has carried out a detailed forensic review and they found over 50 per cent of children were arrested in night raids and 83 per cent of children blindfolded. All of the children we saw in court were in leg shackles.

There was a shocking passivity of the Palestinians we observed at court. Parents and detained children smiled and joked with each other and we did not see a single case of anger. That's not to say parents did not care that their children were being imprisoned.

But conviction rates are 99.7 per cent. The passivity bespeaks a people who have become resigned to their reality. They recognise there is no longer any point in fighting for basic rights. I felt that the court system was clearly a figleaf for a system of arbitrary justice where the guilt of the child is beside the point. The courts are part of a system that effectively keeps Palestinian society in a state of constant fear and uncertainty.

So why do the authorities bother with the expense of maintaining the pretence of justice? The answer is that without scrutiny it is possible to pretend that the system is fair. So, defendants are legally represented and proper rules of evidence apply.

Scrape away the veneer, and the charade is exposed with convictions routinely obtained based upon forced confessions and defendants facing remand without bail pending trial for periods in excess of sentences when pleading guilty. No sane defendant would plead not guilty in this Catch 22 situation.

I would argue that diaspora Jews who are true friends of Israel have a duty to visit the territories to understand the problem, and then to lobby friends in Israel to strive for a just end to this situation.

If we do nothing, can we complain if we awake one day and Israel has sleepwalked into the status of a pariah country?

West pulls Ukraine into its orbit of war

The western move to radically extend its influence over Ukraine - central to the US strategy of encircling Russia and halting the return of a rival power - has created a dangerous fault-line that risks escalation in future.

By SIMON KORNER

The Ukraine crisis deepened over the summer. Over 2,800 people have been killed in eastern Ukraine - 1800 of these since July - and up to a million refugees have fled the fighting, 800,000 of them to Russia, according to the UN.

The ceasefire agreed on September 5th - though forced on the Ukrainian regime by the military advances of the anti-Kiev forces - represents a strategic gain for the western powers. If the ceasefire holds and a form of federalization is eventually agreed, the West will still have won decisive control over most of Ukraine, which hitherto served as an important buffer between Nato and Russia.

Domestically, the fascist-riven government has consolidated its power - recent measures include the banning of Ukraine's Communist Party from parliament, effectively silencing opposition to the western-orchestrated austerity being imposed, and the shutting down of all Russian media, a move the OSCE has called "repressive", affecting the 40% of Ukrainians for whom Russian is their first language.

Ukraine's summer offensive

A catalyst for the intensification of the conflict was the election in May of the chocolate billionaire Poroshenko as president.

This 'legitimised' the reinforcement of the weak Ukrainian army with fascist shock-troops from the Right Sector - aided by western mercenaries from Greystone, formerly Blackwater - as well

as the use of heavy weapons against civilian areas.

The shooting down of the Malaysian Airways airliner MH17 in mid-July was used as a further pretext to deploy missiles, artillery and planes against major population centres.

Throughout July and August, Ukrainian forces pushed anti-government fighters out of about 60 residential areas, which protestors had taken over in May



Donetsk May 2014 - Victory Day protest against US and EU support for the fascist-riven Ukrainian coup government led by chocolate billionaire, Petro Poroshenko.

and consolidated with Crimea-style separatist referendums in Donetsk and Lugansk.

The neo-Nazi Azov battalion - which uses the neo-Nazi Wolf's hook symbol and is run directly from the Ukrainian Interior Ministry, giving the lie to Kiev's denials of its reliance on fascist support - boasted of its role in reversing the

army's earlier failures.

By the end of August, about half the area formerly under anti-Kiev militia control had been retaken, including parts of Lugansk close to the Russian border, though resistance forces in the besieged city were still able to receive supplies and continue fighting.

Elsewhere, the Ukrainian army penetrated the outskirts of militia-held Donetsk and Horlivka, cutting these cities off from the east and capturing the airport. Residents of Donetsk reported in mid-August seeing white fire and white glowing particles coming down from the sky, according to the Russian news agency RIA Novosti.

These have been caught on numerous video recordings. The use of white phosphorous - as used in Israel's Operation Cast Lead against Gaza and by the US against Fallujah - repeated the pattern established in the government assault on Slavyansk in June, a city in which, *Süddeutsche Zeitung* reported, 1,500 homes had been destroyed or damaged, and the inhabitants deprived of food, water and electricity.

CNN reported that Kiev had also been using short-range Scarab ballistic missiles, which are not "precise weapon systems". Their warheads of up to 454 kilograms categorise them as weapons of mass destruction. Human Rights Watch condemned such indiscriminate killing of civilians. Such bombardment of civilian areas has revealed the true brutality of the Kiev regime to its eastern population, serving to strengthen anti-government, federalist feeling.

People's Republics fight back

Kiev almost succeeded in splitting the anti-government territories of 'Novorossiya' into two parts - which would have ensured rapid victory for the

Ukrainian army. But tenacious urban warfare by the insurgent militias held off the threat until reserves could reinforce them.

Counterattacks in mid-August by fighters of the Donetsk People's Republic (DPR) encircled several Ukrainian army units, surrounding up to 7,000 men of the Azov and Dnieper battalions in different pockets near Donetsk. Lugansk airport was retaken, and government-held Donetsk airport surrounded.

The capture of substantial amounts of enemy guns, including 'Pion' self-propelled artillery, enabled the DPR to move away from small-unit operations to larger-scale counterattacks by the end of the month.

By August 22nd, the pro-separatist website Slavyanograd could claim that the war was turning against Kiev. Kiev's crude frontal assaults had led to "huge losses for modest results", with Ukrainian troops too easily exposed to encirclement.

This disparaging view of the Ukrainian military leadership was echoed by David Marples and Myroslava Uniat in *Open Democracy*. Not only are the generals "utterly incompetent", but there is "large-scale corruption among generals and lower-ranking officers".

Ukrainian nationalist website Kyiv Post commented: "In what is becoming a repeated refrain, the apparent failure of the government to provide its soldiers with even the most basic supplies is undermining both the conduct of the war and the morale of those fighting it."

Following the loss of port city Novoazovsk on August 28th, protestors in Kiev demanded changes to the military leadership and adequate weapons for soldiers.

After four mobilisations, the entire male population between 18 and 55 has been called up. Refuseniks face 15 years imprisonment and there have been demonstrations against the draft. Mass desertions have been a persistent problem on the battlefield.

By contrast, the anti-government militias in the east were able to capture increasingly large amounts of weapons – over 200 tanks, Infantry Fighting Vehicles and self-propelled artillery.

In a single week from August 16-23rd, 14 tanks, 25 Infantry Fighting Vehicles, 18 armoured personnel carriers, a rocket



An anti-Nazi barricade in Donetsk

launcher, howitzers and other guns were taken.

This was on top of weapons seized from the old Soviet-era arms stores at the start of the protests, enough to arm 15,000 men.

The high morale on the anti-Kiev side – with a volunteer force fighting with a clear defensive purpose and excellent local intelligence and knowledge – facing a conscript Ukrainian army, under-equipped and disastrously led, is sufficient explanation for Kiev's military defeats, without recourse to the Russian "invasion" narrative that has dominated western discourse.

Accusations against Russia

Warmongers such as Michael Gordon of the *New York Times* and NATO chief Anders Fogh Rasmussen – both of whom led the chorus over Iraq's possession of Weapons of Mass Destruction in 2003 – declared unequivocally in late August that NATO satellite images "proved" a Russian invasion was under way.

Poroshenko cancelled a visit to Turkey in the face of the "invasion" and the western media denounced Putin's aggression, including Panorama's (BBC1, Sept 8th) sustained polemic.

But Thomas Greminger, the Swiss OSCE permanent representative in Ukraine, said there was "no evidence of an invasion of regular Russian troops in Ukraine", but a large presence of Russian volunteers.

While the use of volunteer ex-Russian soldiers and serving soldiers on leave may be a technicality, the salient point remains that Russia has been acting defensively throughout, and – apart from strategically essential Crimea – was gaining no territory.

Earlier reports of an incursion by 23 armoured personnel carriers reported by the *Guardian* on August 14th and the *Daily Telegraph*, and confirmed by NATO, were also disputed by reliable sources. Reuters reported seeing armoured personnel carriers "moving near the border" with Ukraine – but not within Ukraine. Mark Galeotti of New York University's Center for Global Affairs said on CNN that the evidence was "largely circumstantial.

NATO's images did not show the tanks actually crossing into Ukraine."

Poroshenko's claim that Kiev had "eliminated" most of the column – denied as 'fantasy' by Moscow – has to date never been corroborated.

The capture of Russian paratroopers in late August, since handed back, was the only tangible evidence of direct Russian involvement – and its small scale does not constitute evidence of an intention to invade. Indeed, Putin has faced criticism from Russian nationalists such as Zhirinovskiy for not supporting 'Novorossiya' sufficiently.

Even if NATO's figures of 1,000 invading Russian troops were correct, such a small number adding to the militias' roughly 30,000 fighters would not have made a crucial difference against Kiev's army of 40-50,000 men. "Such Russian reinforcements could only have performed a local and marginal role in the fighting," according to French commentator Jacques Sapir.

Russia's strategy has throughout been to avoid a costly military involvement in Ukraine, despite the best efforts of Poroshenko and his American backers – in particular US vice-president Joe Biden, with whom he is in close contact, and whose son, Hunter Biden, has recently become a director of Ukrainian gas and oil company Burisma Holdings.

The reshuffle of leaders in the People's Republics in mid-August was regarded by many commentators as an attempt to de-escalate tension, given that the leadership of men such as Igor Strelkov, a "hero of Russian nationalists", made any future compromise with Kiev more difficult.

In the Minsk contact talks between Ukraine and the militias which began on Sept 1st – following the swift collapse of the Kiev offensive – the DPR and the Lugansk PR offered to remain within

Ukraine given an end to hostilities, the east's recognition as a region with special cultural and economic ties to Russia, and the reinstatement of Russian as an official language.

In the face of Yatsenyuk's hardline call for an escalation of the war and redoubled western support - backed by his request for rapid Ukrainian entry to NATO - the Russian ceasefire proposal was agreed on Sept 5th. At the time of writing, it is holding but by no means secure.

Disinformation campaign

The shooting down of the Malaysian airliner MH17 on July 17th showed western propaganda at its most active. Ukrainian intelligence released a YouTube clip showing fighters of the 'Bes' militia group using a Russian anti-aircraft missile. US spy satellites over Ukraine also monitored an SA-11 Buk missile battery firing a missile just before the plane crashed.

John Kerry and Philip Hammond blamed Russia, and the western press universally echoed them.

Malaysian newspaper the *New Straits Times* accused the US of relying on grainy *YouTube* footage to prove its case after the US State Department's Marie Harf publicly cited social media as evidence that rebels under Russian control shot down the plane.

Stern Online concluded that "no clear evidence has been published for who shot down the plane" and cited aviation expert David Cenciotti that "some parts of the whole story are missing."

The same website quoted a letter from disaffected American intelligence veterans to Obama warning that accusations against Russia "should be based on convincing, tangible evidence."

It later transpired that the "smoking gun" video - which by then had been taken off the internet - had been posted the day before the plane crashed. Moreover, the Soviet-designed SA-11Buk missile batteries were in use by both Ukrainian and Russian forces.

According to a report by *ex-Newsweek* journalist Robert Parry: "US intelligence agencies do have detailed satellite images of the likely missile battery that launched the fateful missile, but the battery appears to have been under the control of Ukrainian government troops dressed in what look like Ukrainian uniforms." The US has withheld the definitive information in its possession.

Altogether, the timing of the plane crash soon after the consolidation of the illegitimate coup government, and the clear benefit it gave the government side, suggests the hand of Kiev in the disaster.

Other unanswered questions remain, such as why Kiev's air traffic control diverted the flight to cross the Donetsk region away from its scheduled route, and whether Putin was flying over the same route at the time, and might have been the intended target.

Further western disinformation dogged the Russian aid convoy to Lugansk, carrying 2,000 tons of urgently needed aid - bottled water, milk, baby food, tinned meat, medical supplies, sleeping bags etc.

Kiev denounced the aid convoy as a "direct invasion", accusing Russia of "smuggling" the aid across the border, while the British press denounced it as a Trojan horse "delivering weapons to the beleaguered rebels, or a spearhead of the Russian military invasion force".

Kiev and other major cities are now without hot water, and Kiev has only half the necessary gas for the winter.

... Mayor Klitchko has warned that firewood may be the only fuel available.

Thus, both western and eastern Ukrainian populations have become victims of the coup government's policies.

Euro Daily dismissed this as a misreading of Russian strategy, which is not military invasion. "By sending the convoy, Vladimir Putin sought to ... present Russia as the one country that cared about the people of Donbass."

Divisions in the Ukrainian government

The right and far-right coalition government, led by Yatsenyuk's Fatherland party, fell in late July. Fascist party Svoboda and Klitschko's Udar left the coalition in the hope of gaining extra seats in new elections - penciled for October 26th - riding the wave of nationalist feeling engendered by the war.

With the opposition Party of Regions massively depleted since the February coup against Yanukovich, the government has silenced remaining dissent: the Communist Party has been banned from parliament, as have United Russia and the Russian Bloc.

Before the ban, every single Communist MP was beaten up in parliament -

after the Communist leader Symonenko denounced the "special operations" in eastern Ukraine as a war against the people, a denunciation that provoked an assassination attempt.

The parliamentary ban on Communists will soon be matched by new legislation suppressing all expression of socialist and anti-fascist views, which will serve to outlaw anti-austerity and anti-NATO protests.

Meanwhile, the government is coming under increasing Nazi control. On August 18th, the Right Sector threatened to withdraw its fighters from the east and march on Kiev unless members jailed following a violent confrontation with the authorities were released from prison.

The government acceded, not only handing back confiscated weapons but dismissing the "Moscow puppet" Interior Minister Yevdokimov, as demanded by Right Sector leader Dmytro Yarush.

Ukraine economy

The war has so far cost Ukraine at least \$8 billion - more than the entire \$7.4 billion loan promised from the IMF. The economy is set to shrink by 6-7% this year, with industrial production down 12%, and the harvest down by 15%.

Inflation will rise to 19% this year, and interest rates have risen to counteract it - from 6.5% to 17.5% in 7 months.

Coal production centred in the east - providing a third of Ukraine's energy - has shrunk drastically, with the knock-on effect on the important metallurgical industry, which accounts for 60% of Ukraine's exports.

In compliance with IMF loan conditions, Kiev has lifted its trade barriers to the West, cut social spending and state employee's wages, and removed fuel subsidies, and has promised to sack 3% of all public sector workers. The low pay of Ukrainian workers will fall a further 3.3% this year.

Kiev and other major cities are now without hot water, and Kiev has only half the necessary gas for the winter. The mayor Klitchko has warned that firewood may be the only fuel available. Thus, both western and eastern Ukrainian populations have become victims of the coup government's policies.

New legislation has allowed foreign - in particular US - companies to buy up 49% of Ukraine's gas transport system (GTS), one of the world's largest, worth \$25-35 billion, handing over what has up to now been regarded as a strategically important national asset.

Once the US owns the pipeline, it will be able to choke off Russia's rival pipelines which bypass Ukraine: Nord

Stream already complete; and South Stream under construction from southern Russia via the Black Sea to Bulgaria, Serbia, Hungary and Austria.

US attempts to prevent South Stream's completion, if successful, would also give the US greater control over gas delivery to the EU, its imperialist rival, and preserve the value of its pipeline investments in Ukraine.

Western involvement

Following Zbigniew Brzezinski's dictum that "deprived of the reunion with Ukraine, Russia is not destined to reclaim the status of a great power", US strategy has been to pull Ukraine into its sphere and lay the basis for a possible European war in order eventually to install a compliant regime in Moscow and weaken the EU.

As George Friedman commented on the rightwing US geo-political website *Stratfor* on Sept 2nd: "The United States saw the events in Ukraine as either an opportunity for moral posturing or as a strategic blow to Russian national security. Either way ... it created a challenge to fundamental Russian interests and placed Russian President Vladimir Putin in a dangerous position."

Anne Appelbaum, a leading hawk who is married to Poland's Foreign Minister, called for direct military action, writing in the *Washington Post* on August 30th: "So is it hysterical to prepare for total war? Or is it naive not to do so?"

Another leading warmonger, Jorge Benitez, Senior Fellow at the Brent Scowcroft Center on International Security, argued that if NATO was too divided to agree on war, it should be bypassed via a 'coalition of the willing' bombing campaign by the US, Britain, France, Poland and Romania.

But Obama's approach has so far been more nuanced - as in Syria, as Friedman outlines: "First, Washington uses proxies; second, it provides material support; and third, it avoids direct military involvement."

The US policy takes into account the internal divisions within NATO's 28 member states and Russia's clearly stated position that enlargement of NATO up to the Russian border is a red line - which was why Russia secured Crimea to prevent NATO control of the strategically vital Black Sea.

A US official said before the NATO-summit in Wales that: "This is not an enlargement summit...There is not unanimity within the alliance about enlargement."

This echoes Brzezinski's view that Kiev should be armed against Russia, but outside NATO, and Kissinger's, who also

opposes enlargement - both men playing a long game, wary of a premature confrontation with Moscow.

Nevertheless, NATO is preparing for war, creating a new rapid response "spearhead" force, boosting its missile "defence" system and its physical presence in eastern Europe, with increased air patrols and exercises and stores of weapons ready for use.

This falls short of permanent US bases in eastern Europe, which the Baltic states have called for, but which Germany has resisted - a sign of its own growing military confidence independent of the US. Nonetheless it represents a significant strengthening of NATO's European footprint.

... (US) warmonger, Jorge Benitez, argues that if NATO was too divided to agree on war, it should be bypassed via a 'coalition of the willing' bombing campaign by the US, Britain, France, Poland and Romania.

Germany, for its part, seized on the Maidan demonstrations as a Yugoslavia-type opportunity to transform Ukraine - via the EU association agreement, rejected by Yanukovich but signed by Poroshenko - into a vassal state similar to other central European countries in the German orbit.

But with 75% of its population against military involvement and a ruling class split over the issue, it is worried that a major Ukrainian war would threaten its plans. Vice-chancellor Sigmar Gabriel has called for a federal Ukraine and accepted Crimea's current status for the foreseeable future.

With exports - including high performance cars - to Russia worth £30 billion last year, the highest in the EU, Germany was also reluctant to impose harsher sanctions - particularly as 30% of its fuel comes from Russia.

Britain, meanwhile, though echoing hardline US rhetoric, has remained reluctant to close the City as a financial centre to Russian business and has held back from calling for "full-scale energy and banking sanctions", in order to protect its own interests. France, likewise, has a billion pound deal to sell Mistral helicopter assault ships to Russia - temporarily suspended but unlikely to be terminated.

Following the late August gains by anti-Kiev forces, all the European powers threatened new sanctions - threats which will be strengthened by the appointment of the bellicose premier of Poland Donald Tusk to the presidency of the European Council - but there has clearly been reluctance to act; the September round of sanctions against Russia's state-owned oil companies was suspended on Sept 10th, according to BBC news.

The limited sanctions so far have, nevertheless, affected Russia, whose economy flat-lined between April and June. Capital flight of up to £90 billion is predicted this year.

In response, Putin banned imports of food from countries imposing sanctions against Russia, which will damage EU agriculture, which sends 10% of its produce, worth £9 billion, to Russia.

Russia is already in negotiations with BRICS partner Brazil, as well as Argentina, Ecuador and Chile, to boost imports of food from Latin America. The Ukraine crisis is thus speeding up the development of rival economic centres.

While capitalist Russia's ambitions have acted as a brake on NATO - and for this reason played a positive role - it is clear that Putin has been acting in the interests not of the Russian people but of the bourgeoisie. Western disinformation about Russia's aims in Ukraine should not blind us to the class Putin represents during this conflict.

Conclusion

The West's humiliation of post-Soviet Russia lies at the heart of the current conflict. Instead of halting NATO expansion at the end of the Cold War, as promised to Gorbachev, NATO absorbed twelve former Soviet nations.

This "triumphalist, winner-take-all approach" was apparent, once again, in the EU association agreement, according to Professor Stephen Cohen writing in the *Nation*.

Cohen called the agreement a "reckless provocation compelling the democratically elected president of a deeply divided country to choose between Russia and the West."

In pulling most of Ukraine into its orbit, the West has succeeded in shrinking the buffer that protected Russia and re-establishing a menacing military presence in eastern Europe.

Though the "point of no return" may for now have been averted in Ukraine, the conflict has underlined the return of global politics - in the absence of a Socialist bloc - to pre-1914 danger levels, when competing capitalist powers sacrificed millions to divide the world.

Venezuela: coup attempt defeated

The anti-democratic violence which was launched by the extreme right in Venezuela in January this year was justified by its leaders as a response to the problems that the country faces, such as crime, inflation and shortages.

By **FRIEDA PARK**

But the violence was instigated by the representatives of the wealthy, who suffer least from these issues.

Its real motivation was class hatred and an unwillingness to accept the democratic will of the Venezuelan people. The deeper origins lay in the response of the right to developments since the death of Hugo Chavez over a year ago.

Furthermore it took place in a context of the US being more active in the continent, where it is attempting to push back the tide of socialist and progressive governments. This has included the ousting of President Zelaya of Honduras and President Lugo of Paraguay.

When Nicolas Maduro (pictured) won the Presidential election by the narrowest of margins then the right felt that they had a great opportunity.

It has been said that the result reflected complacency or abstention by some Chavistas who wanted to protest about the problems in Venezuela.

As a landslide had been predicted for Maduro, no-one expected his opponent Capriles could come so close.

The right over-estimated the significance of this result and believed that they could make big gains in the regional and mayoral elections which followed. This did not happen and the Venezuelan Socialist Party did well, gaining 55% of the vote – a 10% lead over the opposition.

The right also under-estimated Maduro who, once in office, moved quickly to try to bring all elements of Venezuelan society together to engage in constructive dialogue.

The moderate political message and tactics of the leader of the opposition Henrique Capriles were seen to have failed and its more extreme wing called a news conference on the 22nd of January calling for “La Salida” – the exit or ousting of Maduro and the elected

government.

There were peaceful opposition protests which happened freely, but there was also coordinated and planned violence including:

- the building of barricades where people were shot dead or garrotted;
- access to vital services like hospitals were denied;
- public buildings were attacked;
- services like the social missions were attacked;
- over 40 people were killed and many injured;
- Cuban agencies were a particular target and there were 162 attacks on Cuban doctors.

In an article in the *New York Times* President Maduro said, “Anti-govern-



ment protesters have physically attacked and damaged health care clinics, burned down a university in Tachira State and thrown Molotov cocktails and rocks at buses.

“They have also targeted other public

institutions by throwing rocks and torches at the offices of the Supreme Court, the public telephone company CANTV and the attorney general’s office. These violent actions have caused many millions of dollars worth of damage. That is why the protests have received no support in poor and working-class neighbourhoods.”

Indeed the protests were confined to middle class areas and most of Venezuela continued as normal. It is estimated that fewer than 2000 people were involved in the violence.

Protesters were also remarkably white in a country whose population is overwhelmingly of black, indigenous and mixed descent. There were no protests in the working class areas or among the peasants.

The government’s response was measured and astute. They did not simply deploy the police and army to crush the attempt to destabilise the country. Rather than a blatant show of force they instead called for dialogue and instituted talks.

Incidentally the main demands of the opposition at the talks were not remedying Venezuela’s problems, but the release of those who took part in the coup against Chavez in 2002 and individuals currently charged with corruption.

Working-class Venezuelans also reacted in a mature fashion despite their anger at the rightist revolt against democracy. The garrotting of a motorcyclist at a roadblock was a deliberate provocation as most motor-cyclists are Chavistas, having benefited from government grants to get them mobile.

But people remained calm and did not feed into the attempt by the right to stir up chaos on the streets and give the US a pretext for intervention.

In a further effort to maintain order, there were arrests of government supporters and police suspected of killings which might be unlawful. The Venezuelan government took the evidence of how it responded to the UN Human Rights commission in Geneva and got a clean bill of health.

Continued on page 21

Obama called on to pardon the Cuban 5

The International Commission on the Cuban 5 held at the Law Society in London in March this year was a truly inspirational and moving event.

By **FRIEDA PARK**

It follows in a tradition of quasi-judicial enquiries into significant injustices. The first was on the legality of the Vietnam War and there has also been one on Palestine.

The 5 were jailed in the United States in 1998 on spurious charges and given sentences ranging from 15 years to double life. Two of them have now served their full sentences and are back in Cuba.

It was alleged that they were engaged in planning terrorism, but they were trying to do the exact opposite, prevent terrorism.

The first of the 5 to be released, René González was due to attend the Commission in person to give evidence, however, at the last minute was refused a visa by Theresa May, the Home Secretary. It was hugely disappointing that this politically motivated act meant that René could not physically be there, however, he did speak live to the Commission via Skype from Cuba.

During another session Antonio Guerrero phoned from prison to his mother's mobile phone and the commission was able to hear him and he to hear the ovation that greeted him from the participants.

The commission heard testimony from many eminent people including US citizens Alice Walker (pictured above), Pulitzer Prize winning author of the Color Purple, and former Attorney General Ramsey Clark.

Both spoke powerfully about the significance of the Cuban Revolution. Alice Walker described sitting in a plantation in the South and hearing of the



men and women in Cuba who had come out of the mountains to claim their freedom.

She spoke of her own political journey and how good it is to wake up in the morning and realise that you are an old revolutionary.

Ramsey Clark described the revolution as the most important event of his lifetime.

Altogether the Commission was attended by 300 people from 27 countries and it heard from 20 expert witnesses.

The purpose of the Commission was to pull together all the evidence relating to the case of the 5 and for a panel of senior judges to question witnesses, consider the evidence and produce a judgement on their case.

The judges were Phippe Texier, former President of the Chamber of the Court of Appeal in France; Zak Yacoob, former Justice of the Constitutional Court in South Africa; and Yogesh Sabharwal former Chief Justice of India.

The first day concentrated on the impact of terrorism in Cuba. Since 1959 nearly 3500 Cubans and others have been killed by attacks from Miami based terrorists.

Cuba made constant efforts to liaise with the US to end these assaults, but when these failed then the 5 went as agents to gather intelligence on the activities of these groups.

None of this was secret information and none of it related to US national security, none of it involved planning violence. Indeed the Cuban government fed this information back to the US in a continued effort to try to get them to reign in the terrorists. Describing this work was one of the key areas where René gave evidence.

It was clear from the evidence that the motivation to arrest the 5 bore no relationship to the alleged offences that they were charged with, but rather had to

do with the political context of the time.

The arrests followed two significant events in US-Cuban relations.

Firstly was the decision by the US to uphold international law and return the child, Elian Gonzalez, to his father in Cuba after he was abducted by his mother and taken to the States.

Secondly there was the shooting down by the Cubans of a "Brothers to the Rescue" plane which had illegally entered Cuban airspace.

The second day of the Commission comprised a forensic analysis by two of the lawyers to the 5 of the judicial processes and the patent injustice that they experienced at every stage from their arrests onwards.

Initially they were held in solitary confinement for 17 months. They were denied proper access to their lawyers and to vital evidence. They were tried in a part of Miami where they could not possibly get a fair trial and were subsequently denied rights of appeal.

Two of the wives were also denied visitation rights. They all received ex-

remely lengthy sentences.

It has recently been discovered that the US government paid hundreds of thousands of dollars to journalists to write negative articles about the 5 during the trials. All of this again shows that it was not the 5 who were the conspirators, but the US government, which perpetrated this gross miscarriage of justice.

The testimonies of the family members of the 5 came on the afternoon of 8th March, International Womens Day. All the speakers were women and the witnesses wore red roses to mark the occasion.

These were powerful contributions which demonstrated the suffering and loss experienced by mothers, wives and daughters but also demonstrated their resolution to fight for justice. These were not just emotional appeals, but also statements grounded in political analysis.

The preliminary conclusions of the Commission were read out at the end of the final session. The judges raised serious concerns about whether the judicial process met international standards of

the right to a speedy and fair trial before an impartial court.

They pointed out that the 5 did not plot violence nor was any of their activity directed against the US government or people, but sought to protect Cuba from terrorism emanating from US soil which was not being stopped by the US government.

They called on President Obama to pardon the 5.

The justice of the cause of the 5 contrasts sharply with injustice of their treatment. In a world which often seems populated with people who are famous for slender accomplishments these 5 men stand out as real heroes who risked everything – their lives, their family relationships and their liberty – to prevent terrorism. They deserve our continuing efforts to set them free.

More information about the commission, developments regarding the 5 and what you can do to support the campaign can be found at the **Voices for the Five** website: www.voicesforthefive.com

Venezuela: coup attempt defeated

Continued from page 19

The government did, of course, also take action against those plotting against democracy and planning and inciting violence. Some Opposition leaders such as Leonardo Lopez, were arrested – he was one of those at the January press conference calling for La Salida.

A key organiser of the barricades was also arrested and described, for example, how he paid snipers responsible for the killing of National Guardsmen.

There were also arrests of a number of top people in the armed forces for plotting with the opposition, including some generals. The mayors of two cities have been imprisoned for supporting the street barricades.

In addition to this the government has sought to help those affected by the violence, for example, giving new buses to drivers whose vehicles were burnt out.

Apart from occasional incidents, the violence on the streets has now ended, failing in its intent to create the chaos which would have been the launch-pad for a coup.

This has left the right in even greater disarray. But the anti-democratic forces will not give up and they have powerful backers abroad.

A bill currently progressing through

the US Congress and Senate would increase annual aid to undermine democracy in Venezuela from \$5m to \$15m.

On the other side, however, are the majority of the Venezuelan people and the overwhelming support of nations across Latin America. At an Organisation of American States summit only Canada and Panama sided with the US against Venezuela.

In the words of President Maduro, "They wanted to create a civil war. But here, there was no civil war, there was no coup, nor will there be a coup."

Throughout all this the gains of the Bolivarian Revolution have continued such as the social missions, housing initiatives, the self-organisation of local communes, the development of democratic grassroots structures and the gains in workers' rights, the rights of indigenous peoples and women.

Indeed new developments continue to be implemented, unaffected by the right-wing violence. This included, for example, "Red Sundays of Social Missions" targeting the poorest communities with the services of, among others, doctors, nurses, teachers and sports instructors. This is what the right detests.

US support for destabilisation in Venezuela

Like so many trouble spots across the

globe the US has had a role in stirring up the violence and supporting anti-democratic forces in Venezuela.

It has been estimated that in the last 15 years \$90 million in "aid" has been pumped into opposition groups through agencies such as the inappropriately titled National Endowment for Democracy.

The objectives of this funding are to support "transition", build organisational infrastructure and develop things like the use of social media. Aid has gone to political figures leading the violence such as Leopoldo Lopez and Maria Corina Machado, and their organisations.

This recently included concentrating funding to student organisations so it is no coincidence that they were in the vanguard of the violence. Though it should be noted that only a minority of students were protesting.

In addition to financial support the US has also been actively involved in supporting the right in other ways, for example three US diplomats were expelled in February because of their links to the violent opposition.

In recently uncovered e-mails between Machado and other rightists she indicates not only a desire for the overthrow of the government, but also for the "annihilation" of Maduro. She cited support from the US Ambassador to Colombia, Kevin Whitaker, for her views.

With my head above the parapet

WITH MY HEAD ABOVE THE PARAPET

By Ben Turok

Published by Jacana Media, Cape Town, South Africa.

Review by DAVID KENVYN

Anyone who knows Ben Turok would expect his book, reflecting on the 20 years since the end of apartheid to be perceptive, witty, acerbic and honest to the point of brutality. Which it is.

And which is why it is essential reading for anyone who wishes to understand present day South Africa. Ben has spent the last 20 years as a Member of the South African Parliament, representing the African National Congress.

He was a Treason Trialist in the 1950s, then a political prisoner and fled the country to spend years in exile in Kenya, Tanzania, Zambia and the UK. He has without question dedicated his life to the liberation of his country, and this is what makes this book so interesting.

In the six chapters of this book, Turok analyses the Mandela presidency, the Mbeki years, the rise of Jacob Zuma, his own work as an MP and an activist, the “malaise” that he considers to be affecting the ANC, and the way forward.

Turok argues that one of the failures of the Mandela presidency was the delivery of the Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP), and its replacement by the Growth, Employment and Redistribution Strategy (GEAR).

The abandonment of the RDP was, Turok argues, the time when the ANC deserted radical economic strategies for the orthodoxies supported by the IMF and the World Bank.

Turok regards this as detrimental to the transformation of the economy for the benefit of the majority of South Africans. He argues that Black Economic Empowerment should not just apply to the few, and he is clear that “trickle down” does not work.

Turok is also concerned about the lack of capacity of the ANC to deliver political education. He has made considerable efforts to run programmes in the Parliament to enable MPs to come

to understand the political and economic environment in which they operate, but he is concerned that this has not been delivered at branch level.

One of the areas of difficulty that he cites is the failure of the ANC to publish political education leaflets for their members. He feels that this is a key area in which the ANC is failing its members to the detriment of future political activity.

He is also concerned about the levels of corruption that appear to be affecting the ANC in government at every level. It appears to me that this is an area in which we British have to be very careful before leaping to judgements.

We have a hereditary head of state; a government that is chosen from four or five fee-paying schools (incidentally, these schools claim charitable status and we subsidise the parents heavily) and two universities; land ownership concentrated into the hands of the descendants of thieves, brigands and murderers, or people who obtained ownership by bribery and corruption, or by sleeping with Charles II.

It seems to me that we are in no position to condemn other countries as corrupt, when it is so endemic in our political system that we do not even consider the possibility that it is so.

Turok, however, is right to be concerned about the situation because this means that something can be done to address the problem before corruption takes root. And, as the chair of the parliamentary committee on ethics and standards, Turok has led the charge, taking successful action against a number of ministers and officials.

Turok is also clearly not enamoured of the current administration. He particularly dislikes the demagoguery and populism which is Jacob Zuma’s style at mass meetings. He is critical of the singing of inflammatory liberation songs

such as “Umshini Wam” which has become a trademark of Zuma speeches. He is also dismissive of what he describes as the opportunism of Julius Malema.

This, however, is nothing to the criticism that he launched publicly against The Protection of State Information Bill, which he describes as “unnecessary” and “overkill”. Turok did not vote for the bill and as a consequence received a document from the ANC charging him with “counter-revolutionary conduct”.

Unsurprisingly, Turok found this offensive and he says that it was only the intervention of Pallo Jordan that persuaded him to respond in an appropriate manner. He was eventually brought before an ANC disciplinary committee, chaired by Derek Hanekom, and the charges were dismissed.

All this sounds as if Turok only has criticism for the ANC record as government. This is not the case. He is justifiably proud of what has been achieved in terms of service delivery, such as housing, access to clean water, education and a host of other areas.

He argues however that there is still much to be done to deliver the second phase of transition – a change in the balance of economic power – following the success of the struggle for national liberation. This requires a radical shift in priorities for the economic management of the country, and Turok is very aware of that.

He does not believe that this can be achieved by the waving of some kind of magic wand. Turok believes that the transformation of the economy is a long-haul objective.

One of the things that I am aware of is that, in such a short review, it is more than possible to distort the subtleties and intricacies of the arguments that Turok puts forward. The need to simplify can mislead. That is why I would urge people to try and read this book themselves.

There is, of course, one problem with this. The book is published by Jacana Media in Cape Town and I have no evidence that it is available in the UK. The marginalisation of African publishing is of course another issue entirely.

A woman's struggle against fascism

This is a small part of the story of a person's life. I shall call her Sarah. She was born in 1917 and grew up in the East End of London, an only child but part of a very large extended family.

By **RUTH SELWYN**

Her mother and several of her aunts worked in the garment industry, and at least three of them had been involved in a strike of garment workers.

She joined the Communist Party very young – probably when she was seventeen. One of her aunts also joined about the same time.

She vividly remembered the battle of Cable Street, when Mosley attempted to march his fascists through the East End.

She and a friend were chased by a mounted policeman down the steps of a ladies' lavatory. She feared the horse would stumble on the steps and fall on top of them. Fortunately it kept its balance, and she and her friend locked themselves in the cubicles until the policeman gave up and went away.

Soon after this, CP headquarters sent for Sarah and told her that she was needed to train in the Soviet Union. She went, telling her mother that she was going to Paris.

Near Moscow she, along with other

similar volunteers from various countries, was trained as a radio operator. The volunteers all had pseudonyms, and for security reasons were not allowed to know each others' real names. The ra-



dios they used were small, and easily dis-assembled. The various parts were made to look like parts of a sewing set, or a manicure set.

Once trained, she was sent to Spain, which at the time was in the middle of the civil war, and billeted on a farmer and his wife behind the Fascist lines. There she regularly sent and received radio communications. She was one of a

cell of four which was managed by a particular General, whose name she did not tell me, and knew nothing beyond that.

She said that the farmer's wife looked after her like a daughter, although Sarah couldn't speak Spanish. This was deliberate: if she was interrogated by a non-English-speaking person, she couldn't give anything away.

Once, a fascist plane came flying over the fields towards the farmhouse, strafing as it went. She leaned out of the window, shaking her fist and shouting. The farmer's wife pulled her in and admonished her severely. It was too dangerous.

The general in charge of her cell betrayed them. What happened to the other three members she never knew, and assumed they had been executed.

There was no way to search for them, because she never knew their real identities. She was saved by

another general, who smuggled her across the French border as his daughter.

Being black-haired and dark-eyed, she could pass for a Spaniard. Being a general, he was able to get her out of Spain with no papers, no passport.

Later, in the beginning of the war, in London, Sarah continued to operate her clandestine radio, each night assembling and then dis-assembling it.

The Socialist Correspondent

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