

Cracks grow in Con-Dem coalition

From the start the Con-Dem government has been weak. The Tories were forced into a coalition because they could not win a mandate for massive cuts in public spending. With the biggest drop in family income since 1977, and the cuts starting to bite, the unpopularity of the government has grown dramatically. As a result, the cracks in the coalition are widening.

Like rats in a trap, the Liberal Democrats are spitting invective at their coalition partners. Nick Clegg has accused David Cameron of being a 'liar' and part of a 'right-wing clique'. Lib Dem energy minister Chris Huhne has threatened legal action against chancellor George Osborne for his claim that the Alternative Vote (AV) would require expensive voting machines.

Clegg and Co are kicking out in frustration because they are facing electoral disaster at the local government elections and in the Welsh Assembly and Scottish Parliament elections on 5 May as ex-Lib Dem voters punish them for joining the hated Con-Dem government.

If, as is likely, the Lib Dems also lose the AV referendum, the growing pressure on the leadership of the party from its rank and file could become intolerable. It is not excluded that Clegg could be removed as leader of the party or that the party could split. As a result

of that growing pressure Clegg has already had to promise that his party will be more "independent of the Conservatives after the referendum".

But what would this mean in practice? If the Liberal Democrats attempted to seriously oppose their coalition partners on any major issue, the government could become unworkable and a general election could be on the cards before the end of the year. If, on the other hand, Clegg and the rest continue to sign up to huge cuts in public services and workers' living conditions, the party is guaranteeing its own demise. Against this background, the claim by both Clegg and Cameron that the coalition will return to 'business as usual' after the election will be difficult to achieve.

Even if the 'yes to AV' campaign manages to scrape a victory by convincing Labour voters that voting 'yes' will damage the Tories, there will also be problems for the coalition government as right-wing Tory backbenchers would attempt to sabotage the introduction of AV.

Anger against cuts

AV is the issue around which the cracks in the coalition show most clearly, but the root cause is the growing movement against the

cuts. The effects of the gigantic trade union demonstration against cuts on 26 March are continuing to be felt.

The demonstration will be followed by coordinated strike action at the end of June by some public sector unions, including the PCS civil servants' union and teachers' unions NUT and the ATL. Even the head teachers' union, NAHT, is threatening strike action.

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Pressure is growing on the leaders of other trade unions to take part in a 24-hour public sector general strike. Regional demonstrations will give other workers a chance to show their opposition to cuts and support for strike action.

For millions of working class - and many middle class - voters the election is their first chance to punish the Con-Dems at the ballot box. There is no question that Labour will be the main beneficiaries of this trend. However, this does not reflect enthusiasm for the policies that Labour puts forward, but rather a hope that it is 'not as bad' as the Con-Dems.

In reality, Ed Miliband et al are also fully in support of massive cuts in public services,

albeit at a slightly slower pace than the Tories. At local level Labour councils have voted through cuts just as large as those carried out by Liberal and Tory councils. Many of the government's policies - including increasing tuition fees and the destruction of the NHS - are a continuation of those carried out by Labour governments.

If, as is possible, New Labour is thrown back into government within months, it - like the ex-social democratic governments of Spain and Greece - will attempt to carry out the will of the markets, of capitalism, and savage public services. They would, however, face massive and determined resistance. No doubt the leadership of New Labour dread such a prospect and are hoping that the Con-Dems will last a few more years.

To stop the cuts a mass working class struggle is needed, starting with coordinated public sector strike action. The National Shop Stewards Network conference on 11 June (see page 6) will discuss how to develop the struggle against cuts. However, it is also crucial that the working class begins to build a party which stands in its own interests.

The Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition challenge in the local elections and the Welsh Assembly elections, along with Coalition Against Cuts in Scotland, are steps in the direction of such a party.

Bin Laden's death won't end terror and poverty

Tony Saunois

Committee for a Workers' International

The killing of Osama Bin Laden will be used by the US government as a propaganda weapon, but it will not resolve any of the underlying social conditions which have resulted in the emergence of forces such as al-Qa'ida and the Taliban.

In Pakistan and parts of the Muslim world it will further undermine the position of US imperialism. Imperialist domination, landlordism and capitalism means organisations like al-Qa'ida will continue to exist.

Bin Laden was killed in a US military assault on a large mansion in Abbottabad, near Islamabad. The operation took place near to the Pakistani Military Academy, in an extremely wealthy area largely populated by retired military officers. This indicates that sections of the Pakistani state machine around the secret services, ISI, and especially retired military officers, have financed and colluded with al-Qa'ida, Bin Laden and the Taliban.

The operation represents a further development in US imperialism's foreign policy of targeted assassinations of its opponents. It follows recent attempts to assassinate Gaddafi in Libya. This strategy is enthusiastically backed by the current commander of US troops in Afghanistan and soon to be CIA chief, General Petraeus, dubbed a policy of "hot pursuit".

US imperialism has attempted a policy of assassination in the past. Such methods were tried against Castro following the Cuban revolution. While US imperialism's propaganda machine will attempt to portray Bin Laden's death as an indication of success and US power, in reality such a policy is a reflection of the weakening of US imperialism.

It is reduced to 'quick fix' solutions to remove 'rogue' leaders or opponents but is unable to resolve the underlying crisis.

Obama and US imperialism have undertaken this operation in the wake of the revolutionary movements which have swept the Arab world in an attempt to reassert US influence.

In the US this will be used to strengthen Obama's support and divert attention away from deepening social, economic and political crisis.

Socialist answers needed

Marxists and socialists lend no support to Bin Laden or al-Qa'ida, either ideologically or their vicious terrorist methods. While Bin Laden opposed both Mubarak and Ben Ali in Egypt and Tunisia, the uprisings in those countries clearly demonstrated it is mass movements, not the methods of terrorism, that show a way forward.

US imperialism is confronting a Frankenstein monster which it created, particularly through its support for such forces as Bin Laden and al-Qa'ida in Afghanistan in the 1980s. Later these forces were boosted by imperialism's support for rotten corrupt regimes.

Bin Laden employed the use of terrorist methods that caused devastating slaughter of and misery for ordinary working people. Yet US imperialism and other imperialist powers are also guilty of state terror and practicing a mirror image of what they denounce Bin Laden for. The use of the lethal drones in Afghanistan and other places has caused the slaughter of innocent working class and poor people.

The Pakistani government claimed it was not involved in the operation militarily but shared intelligence and information with the US.

But rather than strengthen US imperialism in Pakistan, Muslim countries and the neocolonial world, it is likely to increase anti-US sentiment. In particular, it will strengthen opposition to the war in Afghanistan which was justified on the basis of capturing Bin Laden.

The Indian government has also used this attack to try to gain some advantage for itself, arguing that it shows Pakistan is offering a safe haven to terrorist forces and urging that further operations be carried out.

Following 9/11, Bin Laden had 40-50% approval ratings in Pakistan. But recent polls now show 4-5% support for Bin Laden and the Taliban. This is partly due to attacks by his forces and the Taliban in urban areas, and indiscriminate killings of ordinary people in bombings and shootings.

However, it cannot be excluded that some al-Qa'ida forces may get a

certain boost from this operation in some countries.

Many in Pakistan, including the Taliban and al-Qa'ida, are currently refusing to accept that Bin Laden has been killed. If confirmed, the killing of Bin Laden will represent an important symbolic setback for al-Qa'ida's forces, although it is unlikely to affect its military effectiveness.

The horrors that capitalism and the reactionary forces of al-Qa'ida and the Taliban mean for the mass of the population can only be ended by the working class and poor struggling for a socialist alternative - the only solution to the carnage which has developed.

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