

weekly worker



**Origins of religion and the
human revolution: Jack Conrad
looks at the main theories**

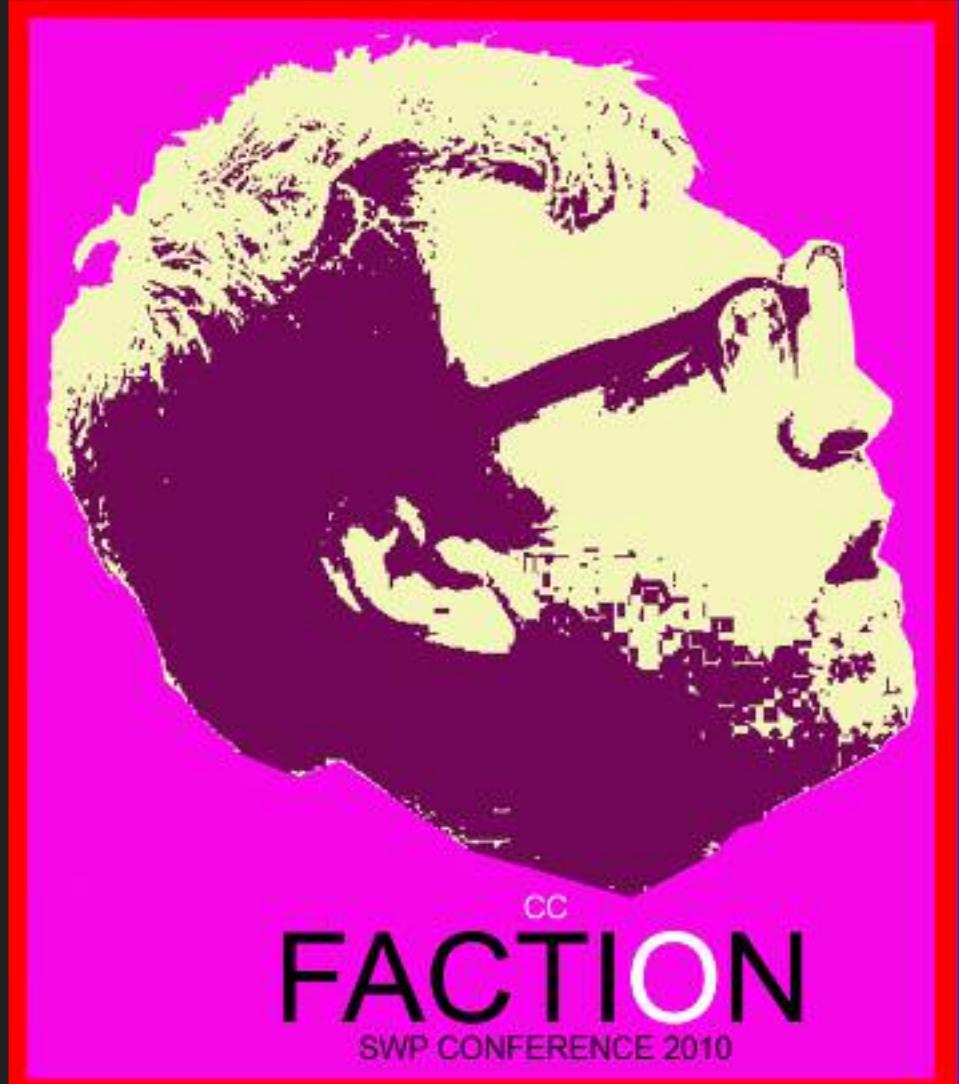
- Copenhagen's rich club
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Towards a Communist Party of the European Union

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LETTERS



Letters may have been shortened because of space. Some names may have been changed

Nationalisation

James Turley writes: "Rather, we have to confront the political issues involved. There can be no question - the nationalisation of the banks is an immediate economic measure which should be high up the agenda for any Communist Party. Nationalisation is not a panacea in itself, as is obvious from these developments at RBS [Royal Bank of Scotland]. A nationalisation that puts the banking system under the democratic control of the masses, however, is a necessary measure for revolutionaries" ('In another world', December 10).

In his *Critique of the Gotha programme*, Marx ruthlessly criticised such demands, particularly the idea of socialists trying to cover their shame in raising them with meaningless phrases about "democratic control of the masses".

He wrote: "Instead of arising from the revolutionary process of transformation of society, the 'socialist organisation of the total labour' arises from the 'state aid' that the state gives to the producers' cooperative societies and which the state, not the workers, 'calls into being'. It is worthy of Lassalle's imagination that with state loans one can build a new society just as well as a new railway! ..."

"From the remnants of a sense of shame, 'state aid' has been put - under the democratic control of the 'toiling people' ..."

"Secondly, 'democratic' means in German *volksherrschaftlich* [by the rule of the people]. But what does 'control by the toiling people' mean? And particularly in the case of a toiling people which, through these demands that it puts to the state, expresses its full consciousness that it neither rules nor is ripe for ruling!"

In his letter to Bebel of March 1875, Engels, in opposing similar demands by the German socialists for the bourgeois state to intervene, is no less scathing. He wrote: "Fourthly, as its one and only social demand, the programme puts forward - Lassallean state aid in its starkest form, as stolen by Lassalle from Buchez. And this, after Bracke has so ably demonstrated the sheer futility of that demand; after almost all, if not all, of our party speakers have, in their struggle against the Lassalleans, been compelled to make a stand against this 'state aid'! Our party could hardly demean itself further. Internationalism sunk to the level of Amand Goegg, socialism to that of the bourgeois republican Buchez, who confronted the socialists with this demand in order to supplant them!"

More than 100 years later, socialists are still showing that they "neither rule nor [are] ripe for ruling!" and they continue to "demean" the programme of Marxism.

Are we to believe that Brown's government will voluntarily grant such "democratic control of the masses"? If not, then does anyone seriously believe that the working class here and now are going to force this demand upon a Brown government, let alone a Tory government? If not, then who exactly is this demand aimed at, what is the means of its achievement? It is thoroughly pointless, and in fact less than that.

Trotsky in the *Transitional programme* says of the demand for the nationalisation of the banks: "However, the statisation of the banks will produce these favourable results only if the state power itself passes completely from the hands of the exploiters into the hands of the toilers."

Are we seriously to believe that power is about to pass into the hands of the toilers? Are we on the verge even of the coming to power of a workers' government? Of course not, so the demand for nationalisation is and can be nothing more than the old Labourite, Fabian and Lassalleen demand for workers to place their faith in the good offices of the bourgeoisie and their state!

Arthur Bough
email

No green

Is there anything radical, let alone 'communist', about opposing large-scale industrialised farming, whilst promoting practices like 'roof gardens', 'little farms', and allotments as serious alternatives ('Blue wave needs red vision', December 10)?

I don't think there is. I don't think that there is much progressive about opposing nuclear energy either, especially since wind turbines and solar panels aren't any time soon going to be providing enough electricity to fuel the urgent large-scale economic development that more than half of humanity has been denied by the capitalist system.

Nor do I think it very radical to attack airport expansions. I wish to see a world where there is far more human mobility and travel beyond national borders, and I believe that eco-attacks on air travel will help further price poorer people out of international travel.

Marxism has nothing in common with the western, Malthusian, middle class movement that is modern environmentalism. Yes, we should recognise and explain that capitalism, as an unplanned, irrational system of production, can negatively impact upon our natural surroundings. But that does not mean that we should for a single moment accept the reactionary conclusions drawn by the bulk of green ideology, which is, in the main, diametrically opposed to Marxism.

Jeff Leese
email

Closed borders

Phil Kent takes Willie Hunter to task for his opposition to the CPGB shibboleth 'open borders' position (Letters, December 3). It is suggested that Hunter is a victim of the "...confusion common on the left around open borders". Unfortunately, in my opinion, Kent does nothing to lessen this confusion.

First the positive. It is excellent that Kent has replied to Hunter's letter when the response of much of the 'left' would be to scream 'Nazi scum' or some such variation. It's a useful device for them - much easier than thinking.

Kent claims: "The Marxist position has remained the same since its inception in the 19th century." When one appeals to authority, it is as well to cite the reference, allowing the reader to decide the validity of the source material. Was whatever reference he is seeking authority from relevant initially and is it still relevant in the 21st century in a period of resource exhaustion, peak oil and environmental degradation? Concerns which *simply did not exist* for classical Marxism. Religion requires its adherents to take such things on trust, but this is of no use in a rational discussion. To be blunt, exactly what "Marxist position" is Kent referring to?

He goes on to argue: "We are for open borders because that offers the working class the best conditions for defending itself against capitalist exploitation." This is a large claim and it would be interesting to know what evidence, if any, can be produced to

support it. As it stands in Kent's missive, it is simply an assertion.

In a non-sequitur the next sentence reads: "Historically in Britain freedom to immigrate has succeeded pretty well - incorporating Irish, Jews and West Indians, for example. So the proof is in the pudding."

Possibly Kent simply 'forgot' more recent immigration - that of various Pakistani, Ethiopian, Somalian, etc nationalities, some of whom are inculcated with the most reactionary and barbaric ideas which they express via the Islamic religion. Far from wishing to integrate into British society, a - thankfully relatively small - minority wish to *impose* their barbaric ideas regarding women, jurisprudence and personal morality onto mainstream British culture. One does not have to be a lefty, simply someone who does not wish to live in the 13th century or before, to reject sharia law and all that goes with it as absolutely non-negotiable. Unless carrying out terrorist attacks on public transport in London is rated as "succeeding pretty well", then it appears that immigration is not always the painless process that Kent describes. After all, the proof is in the pudding.

Kent rightly argues: "It would be truer to say that there are millions of people who would like to earn their living in their own country surrounded by family and friends." If I wanted to be facetious, it could be pointed out that Kent's use of the term "own country" rests on the notion of people feeling/beings rooted within a nation or specific geographical area, which he seems to (quite rightly) regard as a Jolly Good Thing for everyone except, of course, the British working class, who, presumably, for fear of being labelled racist, must take on the cloak of anonymity in the face of our glorious, classless multiculturalism.

Colin McGhie uses the old and threadbare 'argument' that stops all debate: Hunter, with his 'nationalist socialist' paradigm, must be a 'Stalinist' of some type (Letters, December 10). Wow! That puts Hunter immediately outside the parameters of legitimate leftist discourse: no need to actually address his arguments then.

McGhie states that the British working class should "recognise its common cause with all sections of the working class, no matter what their racial or ethnic background". This is clearly a correct position, but does not address the ongoing debate about migration and global population increase in the context of the very real issue of finite natural resources. "Common cause" is not the same as saying we should have open borders.

It seems to me that what both of these writers are saying is that the question of population increase in Britain and, as a corollary to this, immigration are forbidden topics.

If the left cannot or will not have a discussion about these issues, then it is leaving the door open to the British National Party, English Defence League *et al*. For a group which has cogently argued against the no platform position, this is something of a contradiction.

Of course, the answer to the growing number of British working class people - not all of them white, by the way - who are feeling increasingly oppressed by circumstances beyond their control (cramped living conditions, degraded environment, etc), is that when we have the revolution, everything will be fine. Does most of the middle class left have any conception that this seems so far from the lived, material reality of many working class people that it almost appears as an abstraction? This is not to argue against positing communism as the only real solution for

humanity. Far from it. But we are not going to get very far by sticking our heads in the sand.

If the *Weekly Worker* position is that the working class living in the inner-city estates can be expected to put up with mass unemployment, rotten housing conditions and a complete lack of hope for the future, and furthermore to keep quiet about it lest they be labelled as 'racist' by the 'left' - who appear to draw their 'theory' from a bizarre amalgamation of local council political correctness, social work procedures and community 'empowerment' nonsense - then at least be honest about it.

Ted Hankin

email

Paradise

I enjoyed comrade Laurie McCauley's report on Jack Conrad's presentation to a London student meeting, and I would like to share further impressions from the same controversial evening ('Jesus the communist', December 10).

I was unsure how the meeting would unfold, as the deep division between Christians and Marxists suggested that the discussion was likely to be fundamentally split. Perhaps contrary to the expectations of most communists in the room, the Christians who attended were very eloquent and perfectly capable of carrying an argument without getting irrationally defensive or overly emotional.

They knew their way around biblical history very well, were familiar with the most common arguments put forward by atheists and knew how to respond in a rational manner when, for instance, biblical inconsistencies were pointed out.

However, it was almost a bit saddening to hear the same people making the insane claim that 'every single word in the Bible is true'. No doubt these were bright and passionate individuals, and I could not help but feel that it was a terrible waste to dedicate their enthusiasm to superstition and folklore when they could use it to make a difference in the real world.

One of our Christian guests made an impressive and unexpected move

when she attempted to discredit atheism by employing identity politics. According to her, our presumed arrogance towards believers betrayed a typically European sense of superiority over the belief systems of the naive, uncivilised tribes from the developing countries, which would eventually come around to our enlightened ways. Apparently, we also neglected the fact that religious people have been massively involved in anti-imperialist struggles, the civil rights movement, and so on.

Comrade Tina Becker made a timely response when she pointed out that our approach differed, or should differ, from the patronising attitude of Richard Dawkins. Correspondingly, Conrad aligned himself with the central Christian ethic of loving one's neighbour. This was all good and well;

however, I think that in the midst of these assurances one important aspect got lost and remained undiscovered: the by and large reactionary role that organised Christianity has been playing in modern history, its unerring alliances with the political right, and the hostile and divisive attitudes towards various groups within the working class that it regularly displays.

This leads us to consider the question: is organised Christianity, through its nature, in league with the forces of reaction and consequently inherently intolerant to us as Marxists? As Conrad noted in his presentation, the Romans turned Christian philosophy into its opposite when they declared it to be their official state religion. In this respect, it might have been interesting to explore how the *Old Testament* and *New Testament* present us with two entirely different gods: one jealous, vengeful and fearsome; the other forgiving, caring and loving. In the *New Testament*, the Jesus character even goes as far as to render the *Old Testament* redundant, replacing the 10 commandments with only two, one of them being the famous "Love your neighbour as yourself". Despite nominally adopting the Christian narrative, one may well claim that the Roman Catholic church, as well as all major Christian churches in its wake, felt it more suitable for their purposes to revive the vengeful god of the *Old Testament*.

Can you be a faithful Christian who believes that every word in the *Bible* is true, whilst personally maintaining communist politics? Is atheist propaganda a necessary component of our struggle? Unlike a comrade I spoke to over a drink after the event, I don't believe it is a good idea to liken our vision of a future society to a 'paradise on earth' in order to appeal to the Christian mindset. Our society will be a superior, truly democratic and classless society that will ensure a dignified existence for every human being. But because we are human rather than divine, a communist society will confront us with a new set of problems that need to be resolved.

As the CPGB maintain in their 'What we fight for' statement, communism is not the end of human history, as 'paradise' is in the Christian narrative, but its true beginning. There was no time to discuss these and other questions, but I'm looking forward to the prospect of exploring them in a follow-up session.

Zuri Zurowski

email

Iron laws

Although much of this letter is a reiteration of what I've said in programmatic material elsewhere, Arthur Bough is being overly dismissive of so-called 'Lassalleanism' (Letters, December 10).

This letter will address three things briefly: Lassalle's agitational skills regarding the situation of workers; the national question; and cooperatives.

I've written about how boring and academic 'relative immiseration' sounds, and I reflected upon Lassalle's agitational skills. One should admit, first off, that between Lassalle and Marx, Lassalle was by far the superior agitator. I've summed up relative immiseration in modern conditions, and have termed it the 'iron law of disproportionate immiseration':

1. In the 'trickle-down' best of times, workers' incomes do not rise as rapidly as the incomes of those above them, and while immiserated further by interest on the growing but hidden consumer debt slavery, they can be subject to the disproportionately immiserating effects of inflation.
2. When rates of industrial profit fall during recessions and otherwise, workers' incomes are fully subject to the disproportionately immiserating pressure coming from elsewhere in the 'freely' and 'socially' exploited labour market - "namely from the reserve armies of the unemployed" - and, specifically, unprotected workers' incomes are fully subject to the disproportionately immiserating effects of inflation.
3. When rates of financial profit fall during recessions and otherwise, much of workers' incomes are diverted to consumer and mortgage debt payments, while still fully subject to the disproportionately immiserating pressures and effects noted above.
4. During depressions, the absolute

immiseration of workers' incomes towards subsistence levels is in full effect.

On the national question, I of course oppose nationalism, but nationalist sentiments amongst workers could be used in the short term as a two-edged sword. As part of the proletariat 'rising to be the leading class of the nation, constituting itself the nation' (*Communist manifesto*, chapter 2), populist charges can be levelled against national bourgeoisies everywhere regarding their common financial cosmopolitanism - 'industrial' (via outsourcing) or otherwise (look no further than to capital flight phenomena and discussions on half-hearted 'Tobin tax' measures). Outsourcings and capital flights should be described as 'ever-unpatriotic' whenever communists appeal to nationalistic workers, while the capital flight phenomenon can even be described as a form of 'economic terrorism' (terrorising the population at large to the whims of the capital flight lobbyists).

As for cooperatives, of all people, Bough should know the political weakness of cooperatives as a movement foundation. I wrote of the need to partially rehabilitate the 'producer cooperatives with state aid' slogan. No, it isn't the stuff of maximum programmes, but there are justifications: 1. The Eisenach programme; 2. The Paris Commune (by compensating capitalists who abandoned factories taken over by workers, the state is providing 'aid' in what should be seen as a *de facto* worker purchase of the factories); and 3. Venezuela (well, not so much this case of abuse, because lots of 'coops' are mere means for individuals to get state credit for more personal reasons).

The second justification is the primary basis for what I wrote programmatically: the genuine end of 'free markets', including in unemployment resulting from workplace closures, mass sackings and mass lay-offs, by encouragement of, and unconditional economic assistance (both technical and financial) for, pre-cooperative worker buyouts of existing enterprises and enterprise operations.

Jacob Richter

email

Past it

There is strategic sense in the 'two papers' approach suggested by comrade Jacob Richter (Letters, December 10).

We already have two publications - a website and a paper - and perhaps it is a limit of our conception that the online and the paper editions carry the same content, because there is a case for the website to be much more than just the electronic *Weekly Worker*.

The paper edition could be freed up to contain more agitational material in weeks where we might plan to do street work, or when we anticipate an event that won't only be attended by the organised left, and to contain more left group specific content when we have an opportunity to meet Socialist Workers Party and Socialist Party comrades, and so forth.

It is obvious to me that in order to reforge the left you have to go through the left and argue for a strategy with the left that will lead to progress and bring about the rehab of socialism as an idea accepted as a credible possibility by hundreds of thousands of people once again. However, to neglect the needs of those outside the left who are likely to become new recruits to the SWP or other sections is to surrender those comrades to the existing left, rather than winning them to its potential new and improved future.

The Leninist/CPGB has as an organisation from 1979 to 2009 been clearly fighting above its weight against the Eurocommunists, the 'Brit-

ish roaders' and the 57 varieties of Trotskyism and has achievements to boast for those years. I wonder, however, what it can achieve if it attempts to put a bit more meat on our bones in the coming decade, and whether, in order to go through the left, you sometimes have to go past it before it will take notice.

John Masters

Hertfordshire

Greek party

On Saturday December 6 2008, 15-year-old anarchist Alexander Grigoropoulos was shot dead by police in the Exarchia district of Athens.

This was to spark weeks of rioting and the ascendance of a new movement in Greece. With this new movement came a rise in urban guerrilla activity, primarily from the Revolutionary Struggle and Popular Action groups. They believed that they could be the vanguard of this new resistance to capitalist and state oppression. However, their unrelenting attempts to avenge the death of Alexander by killing a policeman have lost them all sympathy. It is the masses that must bring about a revolution, not a handful of arrogant militants.

During the height of the demonstrations and direct action last year, students occupied university and school buildings, activists occupied radio stations and a general strike was called on December 10. Rioting spread throughout the country and even around Europe with clashes in Berlin between anarchists and police. Reports of arson and fighting between the police and protesters continued well into January. In the weeks after the main rioting, urban guerrillas began a wave of attacks on policemen and banks. The last attack was an explosion outside the Athens stock exchange on September 2.

But why did this violence occur? No doubt the Greek people were shocked and disgusted by the murder of Grigoropoulos. However, there were many other reasons that led to such a large-scale and sustained period of disturbance. Serious unemployment, privatisation, numerous government scandals and education reforms opposed by the majority all led to this struggle emerging. As well as this, the police in the country are hated by many for their 'heavy handedness' and cooperation with the fascist organisation, Golden Dawn.

The workers' disgruntlement stems from the fact that capitalism has left them in a powerless and exploited situation. On top of this, they have been forced to put up with a particularly oppressive state. The workers showed their desire for change in the elections on October 4, ousting the conservative New Democracy party. It was clear for some time after the riots that the masses were no longer going to tolerate the ongoing scandals and neoliberal economic policies.

Although the movement born of the riots will undoubtedly have contributed to the victory of the Panhellenic Socialist Movement in the election, the workers and students will not forget how both the Greek Communist Party and the ruling party condemned their 'blind rage' last year. The solution to the problems faced by the workers lies with a radical Marxist organisation of the workers, not with the allies of the state.

It is no surprise then that the first anniversary of the death of Alexander Grigoropoulos saw more rioting. The 'socialist' government announced a zero-tolerance policy. Again we have seen pitched battles between youths and the police. The anarchist flag was flying from occupied buildings in Athens and police rode at protesters with motorbikes. Bricks and Molotov cocktails were thrown, but what will be achieved? Although we sympathise with the anger displayed by the Greek

workers, it is crucial that the working class in Greece organise and use this militancy to change their society. Only through Marxism can liberation and equality be achieved. Only through fighting for Marxism can the Greek working class free itself from mass unemployment. Otherwise they are doomed to fighting more futile battles in the streets with the police for many years to come.

It is also a necessity that the working class across Europe takes notice of the struggle in Greece. This capitalist crisis will see heightened class conflict across the world and we must be able to set out our demands and our aims for the future, defending what we have won and pushing to achieve what we have yet to win. This means that the workers must have a party, without which we can never achieve political power and cast aside the bourgeoisie and their socio-economic system.

Callum Williamson

email

Great ignorance

Whatever 'sophisticated' theory of the oil industry Cyrus Bina has developed will make no difference if the world is at, or near to, the world oil production peak, as predicted by geophysicist and petroleum geologist Marion King Hubbert ('Is it the oil, stupid?', November 19).

Those who support Bina doubt whether politics in the Middle East can be explained solely or mainly through attempts to gain control over oilfields and pipelines. This approach, they argue, has certainly been the approach of much of the left in Britain and elsewhere.

According to Bina, there is a myth on the left about 'war for oil' which is hard to resist and the globalisation of the oil industry since the 1970s has rendered the *sui generis* categories of access and dependency meaningless. Bina also argues that the new world disorder results from the loss of America's hegemony and has nothing to do with the *ad hoc* oil scenario. Can political ignorance regarding petroleum-based capitalism be any greater than this?

In fact, the loss of America's world hegemony is inextricably bound up with the oil scenario, and is related to the fact the US oil production peaked in 1970, as was predicted by Hubbert in 1956, leading to a situation where America now imports more than 50% of its oil needs, and the Middle East Islamic countries now controls about 60% of the world's reserves. Bush's war on terror was the pretext to prepare for impending oil shortages. Bush is in the know. Bina does not.

What Bina and his acolytes do not see is that if global oil production has now peaked, or is near to peaking, the globalisation of the oil market does not remove the problem of access or dependency. If peak oil theory is now coming true in regard to world oil production, as it did in regard to US oil production in 1970, what the nations of the world now face is either a fight over the remaining oil (the Bush approach) or the implementation of some form of international rationing system. Either way, the era of cheap oil has come to an end, together with the consumer capitalist societies which depended on it, and its free-market, neoliberal economic theory.

If the left is to be criticised, it should not be for focussing on the importance of oil as a primary factor driving world politics, but rather for lack of awareness of the issue of peak oil theory and the coming oil shortages which it presages, together with the consequences for machine-based industrial societies, whether capitalist or socialist, and the implication for the political strategy of the left.

Tony Clark

London

ACTION

Communist Forums

London: Sunday evenings. Study topic, plus weekly political report from Provisional Central Committee. Ring 07950 416922 for details.

December 20: No forum.

December 27: No forum.

January 3: John Bellamy Foster *The ecological revolution: making peace with the planet*. Subject: 'Ecology - the moment of truth'.

Oxford: Study group, every Monday evening, studying David Harvey's *Limits to capital*.

Details: oxfordcommunists@googlemail.com.

South Wales: Call Bob for details: 07816 480679.

CPGB podcasts

Every Monday, we upload a podcast of commentary on the current political situation. In addition, the site will feature voice files of public meetings and other events: <http://cpgb.podbean.com>.

Communist Students meetings

London: Every Wednesday, 7.30pm: Introduction to Marxism series, Institute of Education, 20 Bedford Way, WC1 (Russell Square tube). ben@communiststudents.org.uk; 07792 282830.

Manchester: Every Tuesday, 7pm, University of Manchester Student Union, Oxford Road, Manchester M13. www.communiststudents.org.uk.

Oxford: Mondays. oxfordcommunists@googlemail.com.

Sheffield: Every Sunday, 7pm. 07730 682193; sheffield@communiststudents.org.uk

No isolation prisons

Friday December 18 - Sunday December 20, international symposium against isolation. Friday, 7.30pm, Bolivar Hall, 54 Grafton Way, London W1; and 8.30pm, YMCA Indian Student Hostel, 41 Fitzroy Square, London W1; Saturday, 10am to 7pm, Bolivar Hall; Sunday, 3pm to 10pm, Ocean Hackney, 270 Mare Street, London E8.

Organised by International Platform Against Isolation: <http://www.ipai-isolation.info>.

Save our steel

Monday December 21, 7pm: Public meeting in support of Corus workers, Corus Sports and Social Centre, 33 South Avenue, Redcar TS10. Organised by Right to Work: www.rightrightwork.org.uk.

Beats beat bullets

Tuesday December 22, 8pm: Benefit, Vibe Bar, Brick Lane, London, E1. With Lowkey and Shadia Mansour.

Organised by Stop the War Coalition: www.stopwar.org.uk

Remember Gaza

Sunday December 27, 3pm: Demonstration - one year on since Israel's attack on Gaza, Israeli embassy, High Street Kensington, London W8. Organised by Stop the War: www.stopwar.org.uk.

Climate and capitalism

Saturday January 23, 10.30am: Day school on ecology, capitalism and Marxism, Manchester Metropolitan University, John Dalton Building, Oxford Road, M1. Organised by Socialist Resistance and Green Left: www.socialistresistance.org.

Progressive London

Saturday January 30, 9.30am to 5pm: Conference, 'Stop the right in 2010', Congress House, Great Russell Street, London WC1.

Speakers include: Ken Livingstone, Jenny Jones (Green Party), Mike Tuffrey (Liberal Democrats), Kate Hudson (CND), Diane Abbott MP, George Galloway MP, Anas Altikriti.

Sessions on 'Investment, not cuts', Trident, Afghanistan, Iraq, stopping the BNP, climate change, electoral reform, a progressive agenda for London.

Registration: £10 (£6 unwaged). Send cheques, payable to 'Progressive London', to 20 Hanson Street, London W1W 6UF. www.progressivelondon.org.uk.

Right to Work

Saturday January 30, 11.30am: Conference - 'Fight for every job'. Central Hall, Oldham Street, Manchester M1.

Organised by Right to Work: www.rightrightwork.org.uk.

Republican Socialist Convention

Saturday February 13, 12noon: Discussion on national question and general election, London South Bank University, Elephant and Castle, London. Sponsored by Scottish Socialist Party and Socialist Alliance: www.socialistalliance.org.uk.

Putting Irish unity on the agenda

Saturday February 20, 10am to 5pm: Conference, TUC Congress House, Great Russell Street, London, WC1. Plenaries, seminars and discussions. Speakers include: Gerry Adams MP, Diane Abbott MP, Ken Livingstone, Salma Yaqoob.

Registration from 9.30am: £8 (£4 unwaged) or write to London Irish Unity Conference, PO Box 65845, London, EC1P 1LS. Cheques payable to 'London Irish Unity Conference'.

Hosted by Sinn Féin: londonconference@sinn-fein.ie.

CPGB wills

Remember the CPGB and keep the struggle going. Put our party's name and address, together with the amount you wish to leave, in your will. If you need further help, do not hesitate to contact us.

SWP

Email thought crimes and the Left Platform

The SWP central committee has made its intentions regarding the opposition Left Platform crystal-clear, writes **Peter Manson**. John Rees, Lindsey German, Chris Nineham and their supporters now look set to be charged with ‘factionalism’ and expelled

In the third and last of the Socialist Workers Party’s 2009 *Pre-conference Bulletin* (also known as the *Internal Bulletin - IB* No3), which has just been published, the final contribution to this 96-page document is that of the CC itself, entitled ‘With democracy comes responsibility and accountability’.

The article attempts to justify the recent expulsions of two Left Platform comrades and the disciplining of a third by reproducing emails that allegedly incriminate them. They purport to show that a group of members have been engaged in political cooperation outside official SWP structures and outside the three-month period before conference when temporary factions are permitted.

The CC statement reads: “... it became clear to a very large number of comrades that, far from putting last year’s arguments to one side and helping implement the perspectives that the vast majority of the party had agreed to, a small group of comrades were involved in secret, and in some cases not so secret, factional activities.”

The reproduced emails all predate the current pre-conference period when temporary factions like the Reeses Left Platform are allowed - the SWP annual conference is to be held over the weekend of January 8-10 - but, says the CC, “permanent factions are not permitted in our organisation”. This “ensures that the party is not paralysed”, the membership is informed.

There is a bitter dispute about how the CC got hold of the three emails it reproduces. While the leadership claims they were leaked by a “concerned member”, disciplined Left Platform supporter James Meadway insists that an SWP leader used the password of expelled comrade Claire Solomon to hack into them. However, the CC, while denying this, dismisses it as irrelevant - the emails exist and they prove factionalism. And, since one of them was sent to comrades Rees, German and Nineham, it is pretty clear that these three factional leaders (and former leaders of the SWP itself, of course) are also in the firing line.

The email sent to Rees, German and Nineham (amongst other Left Platform members) was written in August by comrade Meadway. Addresses beginning “jwrees@”, “germanlindsey@” and “chrissineham@” (the rest has been blacked out in every case) are shown in the ‘CC’ box. The fact that a group of comrades has exchanged emails is, in itself, a disciplinary offence, it seems, since these emails provide the sole basis of the charge of factionalism against the members concerned (although no action has, of yet, been taken against comrades Rees, German and Nineham).

Comrade Meadway’s email discussed the number of visitors to the Stop the War Coalition website. As the three faction leaders are all key STWC workers, it is hardly surprising that he should copy them in. This email was also sent to Elaine Graham-Leigh, another STWC worker and Left Platform member. Meadway states that a good



Martin Smith, Lindsey German, Alex Callinicos, John Rees: same method

number of ‘visits by source’ to the STWC site come from Facebook and Twitter, and there are also a large number linked from ARSSE, the unofficial soldiers’ bulletin board. However, only 17 visits in a month came from the *Socialist Worker* website, which comrade Meadway said was “an indication of how much coverage SW is giving to Stop the War” (the Left Platform contends that the CC is deliberately downplaying the importance of the coalition).

Meadway also gave statistics for the *Counterfire* site, run by fellow Left Platform comrade Ady Cousins, who was later instructed by the CC to close it down, and commented: “Facebook, YouTube and Twitter are serving us well.” All this is supposed to show that *Counterfire* and presumably the STWC are regarded by the Reeses as factional.

Comrade Snowdon’s email was sent to Claire Solomon and copied to Left Platform supporters, including German, Meadway and Tony Dowling, who has been publicly reprimanded

by the Tyneside district of the SWP for “bureaucratic conduct” in his role as secretary of the National Shop Stewards Network in the north-east. Snowdon advises Solomon how to behave at the meeting she has been summoned to attend with CC members Hannah Dee and (the late) Chris Harman. He points out that the ‘Mutiny’ event she had organised, about which the CC was expressing paranoid suspicions, involved “various non-members” of the SWP and was not a “factional initiative”. He also advised her to “delay, delay, delay” - she would be safer once the official pre-conference period had begun. This email was considered sufficient grounds for comrade Snowdon to be expelled.

Solomon’s own ‘incriminating’ email - to the same group of comrades - merely expressed nervousness at having to face the CC - the clearest indication that her ‘crime’ lay exclusively in the sending of it. This email was the only evidence needed to secure her expulsion.

Meadway points out in a separate contribution in the same issue of the *Pre-conference Bulletin* that “Our existing rules on factions do not fit a world of instant group communication.” As he says, all you have to do is click on ‘cc’ and - hey presto - you have a faction. Indeed any two comrades who discuss SWP business and agree on a joint approach on any question can be accused of factionalising. It must be particularly difficult for activists like comrades Rees and German, who happen to be partners, to avoid mentioning ‘the party’ in their private conversations.

Excluded

IB No3 is totally dominated by the CC-LP faction fight, with both sides slugging it out in numerous contributions. Most of the others are coloured by it too. Although all LP submissions have clearly been published, the comrades complain that in other respects the CC is refusing to enter into democratic debate and has done its utmost to ensure that LP delegates elected to

conference are kept to a minimum.

A group of Left Platform comrades, including Lindsey German, have written ‘Is this what democracy looks like? (part 2) - part 1 was in *IB* No2. Here it is alleged that “District committees (often only a handful of comrades) have been instructed to draw up a ‘recommended list’ which excludes all LP members, whatever their record. So people elected virtually every year have been excluded from the list, apparently for putting their names on a piece of paper.

“... in Norwich it was argued that only eight delegates instead of the entitled nine should go in order to exclude a longstanding and active member who supports LP ... Now, of course, people are entitled to vote against LP in a contested election. But it is completely outside our tradition to refuse to allow someone to go even where there is no competition for delegates.”

What is more, a good number of SWP full-timers and national committee members (the latter being entitled to attend as observers) have been elected as delegates. This, say the LP comrades, creates a conflict of interest and is part of the CC plan to marginalise them.

The leadership denies none of this. In ‘With democracy comes responsibility and accountability’ the CC explains: “... in the run-up to conference, when a faction has been declared, it is no surprise that many comrades vote according to their views on the different perspectives outlined. It is not serious to suggest ... that comrades should automatically go to conference because they have ‘decades of experience’.”

What is more, “It is up to comrades in each district to decide who they elect to conference. They can vote to send their full entitlement or just one person if they wish. If they do not wish to send someone to conference because they do not represent the views of the district, that is comrades’ right.”

So let me get this straight. Comrades should deliberately seek to exclude from the organisation’s sovereign body dedicated, experienced activists merely because they are proposing a different perspective (and it has to be said that the real differences are actually those of nuance - although both sides have attempted to blow them up out of all proportion to cover up a split based largely on personal clashes). And it is perfectly all right to send “just one person” instead of nine, even if those excluded have something pertinent to say?

Democracy

If the SWP leadership was really concerned with democracy, it would strive to ensure that all minority views were represented at conference roughly in proportion to their influence. That way, the arguments can be thrashed out and the most appropriate decisions are more likely to be made.

But the leadership is *not* concerned with democracy. It believes that impor-

tant decisions are best left to the CC itself. After all, SWP membership is open to anyone who fills in an application form and if such people, as opposed to wise, experienced comrades like Martin Smith and Alex Callinicos, were allowed collective control over the whole organisation, inevitably huge errors would be made. But comrades like Smith and Callinicos are also capable of huge errors. The best means of trying to prevent them is precisely through democracy and the accountability of the few to the many.

As for the allegation that conference is being stacked in the CC's favour by electing full-timers, the CC has been looking through the records: "... in 1999 16 full-timers went to conference as delegates and in 2006 eight full-timers were delegates." But no member of the CC at that time thought there was anything wrong with that.

This, of course, is the problem for comrades Rees, German and Nineham. The current CC is merely carrying on the good old SWP tradition of bureaucratic control-freakery, of which Rees himself was an expert. As if they themselves would not try to exclude minorities and rivals - we in the CPGB know from our experience in the Socialist Alliance and especially Respect that minorities were frozen out as conference delegates using exactly the same methods as are now being employed against the Left Platform.

It is the same with the LP contention that, "In aggregate after aggregate there has been a concerted operation to stop every supporter of the Left Platform from getting delegated. This is justified on the extraordinary grounds that our conference is 'not a debating society' and 'not a place where we want to go over these arguments'." That too has been the argument used by the likes of Rees in the past.

And it is parroted by a naive SWPer, "Richard (Coventry)", who writes: "I don't think it's crucial whether or not any Left Platform supporters get to conference, precisely because the debate has been had at the aggregates." But that is not the experience of John from South London, who is clearly not a supporter of any SWP grouping: "I had my hand up right at the start of our aggregate and at times throughout ... but was not called during the 90-odd minutes."

However, the CC argument is that, "It is vital that we all come to conference united and every member has to do their best to implement the perspective that has been democratically agreed. That is the basis of demo-

cratic centralism. We cannot afford to have another year where a small number of comrades continue to fight last year's battles."

Note that the CC demands a united conference *from the beginning*. Not after the debates have been had. Mind you, discussion at SWP conferences does not take the form of motions being proposed, supported and opposed and then put to the vote. There are instead CC-controlled 'commissions', which channel what little debate there is along the required lines.

But even this can be jeopardised by the presence of too many awkward oppositionists - controversy and the clear articulation of rival perspectives is the last thing the leadership wants. That would only confuse the naive rookies, whose role it is to be inspired by clear, uncomplicated calls to action. And that too was how comrade Rees saw it when he was the SWP number one.

But now Left Platform comrades complain bitterly when the tables are turned. "Neil (St Albans)" - who is identified by the CC in a separate contribution as LP member Neil Faulkner - claims that "At least three articles submitted to the *ISJ* [the *International Socialism* quarterly SWP journal] by members of Left Platform have been rejected" - including a paper submitted by himself.

He goes on: "Despite this the arguments it contains have been caricatured and attacked, both in meetings and in documents ... This is a thoroughly undemocratic procedure, since ordinary comrades are in no position to judge for themselves ... The same method was employed by the Stalinists against Trotsky in the mid-20s. They refused to publish his work and then denounced him by caricaturing his arguments. It is the method of an apparatus, not that of a revolutionary party."

It is also the method of John Rees, who, now that he finds himself in a minority, has suddenly discovered that minority rights are a good idea after all. So his Left Platform writes: "If there is a disagreement with the leadership's perspective, it is not just the right, but the responsibility, of comrades to put their argument. This view was supported at the democracy commission conference ... Comrades allow comrades to develop alternative positions so that the party as a whole can decide the way forward."

"The central committee have responded to the faction not by facilitating debate, but by personalised attacks, centralising the election process of candidates to conference and

campaigning to exclude Left Platform supporters from conference."

Is this really the same John Rees who previously presided over the SWP's bureaucratic regime? The John Rees who ludicrously condemned the CC's democracy commission sop as a "House of Lords"? The John Rees who opposed factions, but now seems to imply that they are a normal healthy component of party life? The (correct) argument above surely applies to permanent, all-year-round factions, not just the three-monthly pre-conference entities that are allowed to exist by kind permission of the leadership.

Intolerance

But pro-leadership comrades have reacted with varying degrees of intolerance. So Raymond, who identifies himself as the Unite fraction convenor, writes: "Comrades in the Left Platform ... harbour a fetish for a caricature of democratic centralism, nostalgia for a bygone age of ... decisive leadership, where comrades know their place and simply obey the latest commands from the centre."

John (Home Counties) argues that "this is not a faction at all" because it is a coalition of conservatism and ultra-leftism, while Ged, Adam and Paris from Leeds refer to "John Rees and the renegades and charlatans of the Left Platform".

Eight pro-leadership comrades from Newcastle allege: "The way that the north-east supporters of John Rees have behaved over the entirety of the past year (not just in the pre-conference period)" has been to avoid debate and operate "independently of the decisions taken in the district". They have been engaged in "persistent factional activity". "The Left Platform meeting in Sunderland had the stench of those who had already burnt their bridges with the party." This is a call for their expulsion if ever there was one.

And surely that is the veiled threat contained in the CC assertion that "We cannot afford to have another year where a small number of comrades continue to fight last year's battles." But who is it who determines which battles are those of last year? It is ludicrous to pretend that once conference has taken a decision (especially a conference so lacking in genuine democratic debate as that of the SWP) it cannot be revisited. What if the original decision was wrong? What if circumstances have changed?

Then there is the implication that debate and action cannot coexist. For most of the year the job of the members, no matter how politically experienced, is to *unquestioningly* follow the leadership's instructions. In fact all decisions should be constantly revisited and open to challenge, with the sole proviso that this does not actually interfere with the successful prosecution of an action.

What the SWP needs is a totally different regime - a regime based on genuine democratic centralism.

We say:

- For the right of all comrades to come together in loose networks or disciplined factions at any time of the year.
- For the right to speak and publish openly in order to facilitate thorough debate and considered decisions.
- For the representation of contesting viewpoints in all forums, including conference, to be encouraged.
- Reinstate Claire Solomon and Alex Snowdon. Lift the disciplinary restrictions on James Meadoway.
- Defend John Rees and the Left Platform against central committee gerrymandering ●

IB No 3 can be downloaded from the CPGB's website at www.cpgb.org.uk/documents/SWP%20preconf%20bulletin%203%202009.pdf

Fighting fund

See you January 7

Hopefully we can end 2009 by once more reaching our full £1,000 fighting fund target. And we are on track to do that, thanks to some handy donations received over the last week.

Amongst them is a total of no less than £202 in regular standing orders - thanks to GD, RDC, DW, AM, SP, MKS and JD. Then there was a nice £20 handed over to one of our comrades by JG, who comes up with an occasional very welcome contribution to our fund. Plus the £7.37 (!) described as "loose change" by comrade JS - although I have to say that it is very unusual for such an odd amount to come our way via an internet credit card gift! Presumably the comrade's bank balance now ends in a nice round figure.

Not that I'm complaining. Why

would I? After all, he was the only one to use our PayPal facility - the only one out of 14,240 readers!

As for the other 14,239, you have another two weeks to make amends. And we could do with your help. Don't forget, the post will be very erratic for the next couple of weeks and we could do with a few of you to follow JS's lead. Although not necessarily giving the same amount!

Well, this is my last column of 2009. Next time you hear from me, I hope I will be able to report the successful fulfilment of our December fund. Have a good break and see you on January 7 ●

Robbie Rix

Fill in a standing order form (back page), donate via our website, or send cheques, payable to Weekly Worker



Corus ructions

On Monday December 14, a meeting of trade union activists was held in Middlesbrough to discuss how to respond to the recently announced closure of Corus's steel plant in Redcar, where 1,700 jobs are threatened, with potentially devastating effects for the area's economy and the local community.

The meeting was advertised as organised by the North East Shop Stewards Network, but there was a furious, and quite embarrassing, exchange of emails in the days running up to the meeting about whether or not those who had called it were authorised to do so in NESSN's name, and numerous accusations and counteraccusations regarding the conduct of the network's former treasurer, Socialist Party in England and Wales member Hannah Walter. NESSN regional secretary Dave Harker denounced the activists involved from the Socialist Workers Party and SPEW for their "sad sectarianism" and said that "members of these two small groups appear to think that they 'own' the network, and can act unilaterally in its name". Consequently, there has been a flurry of messages, also sent to everyone in the network, from people requesting to be removed from the email list.

The meeting was chaired by comrade Walter and attended by around 30 activists, along with Norma Stephenson, the vice-chair of the Labour Party's national executive committee, Ray Mallon, the independent, directly elected mayor of Middlesbrough, and an assistant to Redcar MP Vera Baird.

Speaking from the platform, Heather Meldrum from Community, the steel workers' union, told the meeting that the livelihoods of many more people than the 1,700 employed at the plant would be affected by the closure. She said that it was not the bosses at Corus who should be blamed, but rather the parent company, Tata Group, and the consortium that had pulled out of the plant's major contract. She said that the furnaces must not be allowed to shut down or the plant would be lost forever, but there was no indication that she had even considered the idea that workers themselves might need to ensure the furnaces were kept fired. Instead she appeared to place great faith in the government's ability to negotiate a solution and urged people to keep the issue alive through letter-writing campaigns and such like.

Keith Gibson, a leader of the Lindsey oil refinery strike and SPEW member, argued for a class perspective. He said that Lindsey workers had to struggle against the trade union bureaucracy as much as the oil company. The main obstacle to the Corus workers' campaign was New Labour, which had refused to consider nationalising the steel plant and generally failed to represent the interests of working class people. Instead, a new workers' party was needed to fight for workers' interests rather than protect the profits of big business.

RMT member Peter Pinkney, speaking in a personal capacity, also focused on the Labour Party's betrayal of ordinary working people, pointing to the government's failure to keep its promises to renationalise the railways or repeal anti-trade union laws.

Ray Mallon criticised the lacklustre response of local Labour MPs, suggesting that most were too fearful of business secretary Peter Mandelson to make any waves. He too called for a campaign to keep the plant open. As is his way, however, much of his speech appeared to be about himself, fuelling suspicions that he intends to launch a campaign as an independent in next year's general election. Mallon denied that later on in the meeting, but he has previously stated his interest in becoming an MP. There was one particularly excruciating moment when, referring to comrade Pinkney, Mallon - a former police chief - said that he had "never met a militant before", but "wouldn't mind voting for someone like you" if Pinkney stood as his successor for mayor.

Contributors from the floor raised a variety of issues, although nearly every member of SPEW who spoke seemed determined to use the phrase 'new workers' party' as many times as possible. Disturbingly, another representative from the steel workers' union tried to play down the political dimension and, apparently resigned to the worst possible outcome, called for more resources to be put into providing mental health support to those affected by the Corus plant's closure.

Apart from three Community union representatives, only one worker from the plant attended the meeting. A member of Unite, he criticised the trade union leaders for keeping the membership in the dark and holding negotiations behind closed doors.

At one point Norma Stephenson, vice-chair of Labour's NEC, and her Labour Party colleagues threatened to walk out of the meeting due to the attacks being made on the government and local MPs, who, they argued, were doing all they could to save the plant.

The SWP's Yunus Bakhsh made a forceful intervention. He said that talk of a new workers' party was "jacket-hat" unless the workers at Corus got organised to resist the closure plans. We need to look at the issues involved in this particular dispute and what could be done to support the workers there, he said, pointing to the workplace occupations at Visteon and Vestas as examples of what could be achieved by militant action.

Comrade Bakhsh, who is a firm supporter of the SWP central committee in its faction fight against John Rees's Left Platform, made no mention of the Tyneside district SWP's public condemnation of Left Platform supporter Tony Dowling for his "bureaucratic conduct" as NESSN secretary. Bakhsh urged people to attend a 'Stop the jobs massacre' meeting being organised under the auspices of the SWP-led Right to Work campaign on Monday December 21 in Redcar.

Since then, however, Dave Harker has emailed network members denouncing both the SWP and SPEW for using NESSN's name in connection with the Redcar event, although the flyer distributed at the Middlesbrough meeting made no reference to NESSN ●

Steve Cooke

COPENHAGEN

There is no Planet B

As the Copenhagen climate conference draws to a close, the talks were predictably deadlocked. Ban Ki-Moon, the United Nations general secretary, gloomily told reporters that "time is running out", with "potentially catastrophic consequences". The UK climate secretary, Ed Miliband, has admitted that the talks "could still fail" - as has his boss, Gordon Brown, who fears that "failure is a possibility".

The prospects of any meaningful deal at Copenhagen seemed even less likely after the sudden and totally unexpected resignation of the conference's president, Connie Hedegaard of Denmark, on the afternoon of December 16. She was unceremoniously replaced by the Danish prime minister, Lars Loekke Rasmussen - who on attending his very first plenary session was shouted down by angry and bewildered delegates.

So in the time remaining until December 18, when the conference officially ends, the various world leaders and delegates congregated in Denmark will presumably go without sleep (the usual stupid and macho ordeal of all such grand talks) in order to seal some sort of 'accord'. But an accord aimed at doing what exactly, and when?

After all, Barack Obama has already openly stated that no *binding* agreements or deals will be made at Copenhagen - this will not be Kyoto 2, which itself was, of course, grossly inadequate (unsigned as it was by the US). Indeed, as revealed last week in leaked documents, an inner circle - the so-called 'circle of commitment' of the core developed nations like the US and UK - have been conducting their own private 'members only' conference as part of a plan to dump the aims and targets of the Kyoto Protocol altogether, by trying to force the developing countries to concur to specific emission cuts and measures that were not part of the original UN agreement. Naturally, the existence of this conference within a conference - the rich men's exclusive club - has been a continual source of friction throughout the Copenhagen talks.

In fact, so great was the suspicion amongst the representatives of the developing countries that the rich countries were essentially ganging up on them - carving up Copenhagen to suit their own narrow designs - that on December 14 they staged a five-hour walkout. They only returned when their key demand, that separate talks should be held on the Kyoto Protocol, was granted - with Hedegaard trying to reassure them that the developing countries were not trying to kill off Kyoto, whatever the leaked (and undisputed) documents might say. This bloc of the 'official' least developed countries (LDCs) is adamant that the rich countries must commit themselves to the emission cuts as outlined by Kyoto - that is to say, they advocate the "twin-track" approach whereby the signed-up countries keep to their existing Kyoto targets, with the US and the major developing nations adding their own carbon pledges under a new 'post-Kyoto' deal.

After the slight drama of the Monday walk-out, Tuesday December 15 saw the beginning of the 'high-level' phase of the talks - with the arrival of the big boys and girls like Gordon Brown, Nicolas Sarkozy, Ban Ki-Moon, a team of top US negotiators and so on. Obama himself is due to make his big, Superman-like entrance on Friday, and, of course, this will be his second trip to Scandinavia in re-



World leaders: but capitalism cannot deliver

cent weeks - having nipped off to Oslo to fetch his Nobel Peace Prize (which had a distinctly surreal element to it, seeing how Obama is a self-confessed "war president" who has just escalated the US military presence in Afghanistan).

To date, the key unresolved issues remain essentially the same: the size of the emissions cuts or targets to be made by the developed countries; the method of raising and allocating climate finances, and perhaps most fundamentally - and contentiously - of all, the question of whether any (non-mandatory) deal cobbled together at Copenhagen should seek to prevent global temperatures rising by any more than 2°C or, alternatively, 1.5°C. Unsurprisingly, the rich countries are quite happy to settle for the less ambitious target of 2°C - a figure which the representatives of the developing countries, quite understandably, feel is more the product of selfish self-interest than any genuine concern as to the technological/scientific or political-economic plausibility (or viability) of such a target.

Hence Ban Ki-Moon - who has frequently been accused of being an agent or apologist for the rich countries - came under heavy fire from many of the developing countries for asserting in a BBC interview that any Copenhagen deal must "put us on the path of limiting global temperature rise within 2°C". Loud protest ensued from the developing countries that consider themselves especially vulnerable to climate change, such as obviously small island states, and who therefore want a limit of 1.5°C. Expressing this generalised frustration, the Lesotho delegate, Bruno Sekoli - who chairs the LDC group - starkly declared: "It is simply a true fact: if temperatures get to 2°C, that spells disaster and almost doom to our countries."

The debate around funding has also become acrimonious, to put it

mildly. Thus the developing countries have demanded that a majority, if not all, of any future monies they might receive for clean technology and energy - and to cope with the rising sea levels and increasingly extreme temperatures - should come from public funds of various sorts. Billions of dollars of it. Furthermore, and with eminent logic, the African bloc at Copenhagen has steadily maintained that, since it is the rich countries that are overwhelmingly responsible for the current climate conditions - and crisis - then it should be they who effectively pay for the damage that is wreaking disproportionate ecological and environmental devastation on their continent.

On the other hand, though Ed Miliband (who has co-chaired the talks on finance) has conceded the need for "significantly scaled-up public funding", the developed countries have been insistent that a substantial share - perhaps the majority - should come from levies on the prospective global carbon market. In other words, leave it to market forces - mostly. If you can get away with it.

Keen to dampen down the growing passions and tensions over the finance question, Brown has taken a leading role in these negotiations - hoping to broker a financial settlement/package that will please, or at least appease, the LDCs. To this end Brown has held intensive talks with Meles Zenawi, the Ethiopian prime minister and representative of the African group of states, both in Copenhagen and in London. Zenawi has claimed, maybe more in hope than expectation, that there was "near total understanding" within the European Union for the African/LDC position, and is about to put forward proposals at Copenhagen that in the words of Brown provide a "framework within which developed and developing countries can work together".

In turn, Britain and other EU gov-

ernmental leaders have been working to increase the finance on offer. So far, the most likely looking deal is a plan from Norway and Mexico that envisages drawing on a mix of private and government funds of up to \$40 billion (£25 billion) a year to help developing countries, and would go 'live' from 2013. If implemented, this would be considerably more ambitious than the short-term fund of \$10 billion a year currently lying on the Copenhagen table and would be a step towards the \$100 billion a year by 2020 as proposed by Brown and the EU. In the view of Camilla Froyn, a Norwegian ministry of finance official, it is "absolutely necessary" to get the funding above the original \$10 billion a year target - way above, as the developing countries "will not sign on to anything if we do not have a scaled-up plan for climate funding". More simply still, "financing is the key for everything" - as Juan Rafael Elvira, Mexico's environment secretary, put it.

However, it is more than possible that Zenawi - and the proposed finance deal as a whole - could face a backlash from some or many of the developing countries believing that it is a compromise too far. Primarily, they argue, on the grounds that all but the poorest LDCs would be *obliged* to contribute monies to the putative climate fund and due to a perfectly valid fear that the carbon market is far too volatile - and inherently unstable - to act as a steady or reliable source of funds. So India, China and Brazil have already ruled out mandatory contributions to the climate fund and numerous representatives from the poor countries - most notably South Africa - have made clear their anger about the pressure being piled upon them to sign up to a deal, and agenda, masterminded and dictated by the rich countries. In the words of one anonymous source, "No-one wants to be the country to be accused of collapsing the

talks" - but, having said that, "we fear that a political statement that is contrary to our interests may be imposed without real consultation" (*The Guardian* December 16).

Inevitably, Copenhagen saw the ongoing face-off between the US and China about mandatory target-setting - and 'carbon imperialism' in general. The US continues to insist that any 'post-Copenhagen' commitments should be legally binding, while China is equally insistent that any targets should be voluntary, as they currently are under the Kyoto Protocol. As made quite clear by a Chinese foreign ministry spokesman, the US should "shoulder its historic responsibilities and obligations suitable to its national development level" - and therefore to *demand* that a developing country like China should reduce its own carbon output is grossly unreasonable, if not a virtual act of aggression.

As is to be expected, China is also virulently opposed to the notion that emission curbs and targets should be subject to a regime of international verification - something that many members of the US Senate, in a bit of old-fashioned cold war-type politics, seem to regard as absolutely essential if they are to sign up to carbon capping and binding targets.

But, of course, for all its self-righteous rhetoric aimed at the Chinese and others, the US is *historically* the number one culprit when it comes to greenhouse gases - still pumping out an estimated 30% of all the CO₂ in the earth's atmosphere. In that sense, the US lies at the heart of the climate change problem. However, the signs are not good - indeed, the rather grim reality is that the US shows no genuine commitment to kicking its gas-guzzling addiction and thus will continue to pollute and despoil the planet on an ever increasing scale: aided and abetted, of course, by the likes of China which economically is virtually a US semi-colony. Yes, Obama's spokesman, Robert Gibbs, might have said "We can get an operational agreement that makes sense in Copenhagen" - but do not get too excited. The American negotiator at the conference, Todd Stern, has flatly declared that he did not expect the US to increase its current offer of cutting emissions by about 3% from 1990 levels by 2020 - absolute peanuts compared to the (between) 25%-45% reduction *needed* from all the developed countries if we are to avert possible ecological catastrophe.

Outside the Bella Centre in Copenhagen many of the demonstrators have been holding banners proclaiming - "There is no Planet B". Communists thoroughly share this exact sentiment. Capitalism, as a *destructive* and irrational mode of reproduction, can only bring environmental and ecological disaster to the planet: by definition, its upholders and supporters are totally incapable of 'saving the planet' - regardless of subjective good intentions (or not). Retarded technological fantasies aside, there are no other planets to act as a bolt-hole when things get too sticky - or hot - on this one.

So we have to defend and preserve the miracle of life that is Earth. Only a communist world can do this, not the assembled grandees and bureaucrats at Copenhagen or the UN building in New York. Communism alone offers the possibility that humanity can start to reverse the centuries of ecology and environmental vandalism caused by the existence of class society. ●

Eddie Ford

SUPPLEMENT

Origins of religion and the human revolution

Jack Conrad gives his assessment of some of the main theories and asks what apes can teach us

Human beings have been the product of essentially the same genetic toolkit since the first pre-modern *Homo sapiens* emerged in Africa around 500,000 years ago. Our own sub-species, modern *Homo sapiens*, also arose in Africa - some 200,000 years ago. In all likelihood our ability to acquire and transmit abstract ideas, including religious ideas, results from the rapid growth of brain size, not least in the frontal cortex, which is associated with pre-modern *Homo sapiens*, and which makes us capable of symbolic thought, furious creativity and "extraordinary" feats of deception.¹

Some geneticists go further. Much further. They claim to have located religious belief in our genes and the biological mechanisms of heredity. Dean Hamer, director of the gene structure and regulation unit of the US National Cancer Institute, stunningly revealed in his book, *The god gene* (2004), how he had finally cracked the age-old enigma of religion. At least that is what his canny publicity machine declared.

Vesicular Monoamine Transporter 2 (VMAT2) was confidently named the 'god gene' ... for pretty tenuous reasons. The VMAT2 protein is responsible for transmitting dopamines from one part of the brain to another and this induces feelings of pleasure, happiness and general harmony with the cosmos. Dopamines are released during trances and other such ecstatic religious experiences (and by psychotropic and hallucinogenic drugs).

There are two versions of VMAT2 and they "differ only in a single position".² People with one version apparently tend to score a little higher when it comes to what Hamer calls "self-transcendence". But it hardly follows that belief in god is VMAT2-determined.

Doubleday, Hamer's publisher, seems to have chosen the title of his book and with the same provocative certainty asserted in the subtitle that faith was "hardwired into our brains". Good marketing, doubtless. But, frankly, both claims have as much scientific validity as the existence of 'gay', 'criminal' and 'xenophobia' genes. Not surprisingly, arguments used to back up such wafer-thin propositions remain unconvincing.

Hamer's research conclusions mainly wrest on psychological questionnaires received from hundreds of siblings originally collected for a study on cigarette smoking. When it came to VMAT2 and "self-transcendence", there was less than a 1% variation. Statistically inconclusive to the point of being irrelevant. There is, it would appear, no credible evidence of a direct, one-to-one correspondence between any of the estimated 20,000-25,000 genes inherited from one's parents and "one's height, weight, metabolic rate, sickness, health, or any other non-trivial organic characteristic".³

Hamer's book was squarely aimed at a mass market and significantly he chose not to submit his findings to an authoritative, peer-reviewed academic journal before publishing. Nevertheless, under heavy fire from a wide variety of scientific critics and researchers, Hamer backtracked considerably. His book, let us note, actually made far more modest claims about VMAT2 than the publicity blurb promised. Despite that, showing how its editors rate the credibility of their readers, and greatly enhancing Hamer's sales figures, *Time* magazine ran with the startling "god gene" news on the front page of its US edition.⁴ Not that this was connected in any way with the deal struck by Doubleday and Time Warner in 2000 which merged their two book clubs under a joint venture called Bookspan. A partnership which lasted until 2007, when Bertelsmann, the German owner of Doubleday, took over sole running.

Neo-Darwinism

The usual approach from members of the neo-Darwinist school is to explain religion - and much else besides - by extrapolating from the ways they imagine our ancestors were evolved to behave

in their 'garden of Eden' on the African savannah hundreds of thousands of years ago.⁶

Too often this simply means naturalising today's common sense by projecting it back onto the distant past. Religion is considered innate, like war, private property, sexual inequality, social hierarchies and markets in goods, labour and services: an unmistakable ideological echo of Thomas Hobbes (1588-1679), the philosopher of rising bourgeois society. In a world of finite resources, he confidently pronounced, the natural condition of humanity is the competitive striving for individual wealth and self-interest through lawful trade - something that relies on peace and an all-powerful state to enforce it. Without that, what follows is war, "and such a war, as is every man, against every man", Hobbes bleakly warned in *Leviathan*.⁷ I am equally reminded of Edmund Burke (1729-97), the apostle of modern conservatism. "We know, and - what is better - we feel inwardly, that religion is the basis of civil society ... we know, and it is our pride to know, that man is by constitution a religious animal," he bumptiously asserted.⁸

Not that neo-Darwinists universally fawn before the market, advocate the strong state or extol the civic virtues of religion. A good number are militant atheists and would consider themselves to be on the left. More to the point, when it comes to explaining religion, while there is money-making charlatany, vulgar materialism and sheer nonsense in spades, there is honest scholarship, worthwhile theorisation and genuine insight too. Wheat can be separated from chaff.

There are three main, often bitterly opposed, scientific schools. Religion as individually adaptive; religion as individually non-adaptive; and religion as benefiting the group. Not that a synthesis is impossible to achieve. After all, with the origins of religion, I am convinced that we are also dealing with the transition from nature to culture. A qualitative leap where we would expect laws to be superseded and yet continued.

Let us begin with religion as being individually adaptive.

Richard Klein and Blake Edgar reckon that a single, "fortuitous" genetic mutation occurred around 50,000 years ago - ie, in the Upper Palaeolithic/Late Stone Age - and that this completed the modern brain.⁹ A "revolution" akin to the mental changes wrought by the mysterious crystal monolith on Moon-Watcher and other apemen in the opening chapter of Arthur C Clarke's *2001: a space odyssey*. Klein and Edgar focus not on VMAT2, but Forkhead box protein P2 - a gene associated with vocalisation in extant human beings, apes, mice and song birds. A tiny mutation in FOXP2 - there is a two amino acid difference between humans and chimps - triggered, it is claimed, the capacity for language, symbolic culture and religion, along with the ability to fashion complex tools, execute sophisticated cave paintings and mount large-scale hunting expeditions. A remarkably advantageous package which rapidly spread the altered FOXP2 gene throughout the population and allowed humans to increase in leaps and bounds.

Rather foolishly Steven Pinker, the experimental psychologist and popular science writer, hitched his reputation to this 'discovery'. However, what the Klein-Edgar 50,000 date meant for modern *Homo sapiens* who left Africa and possibly managed to reach Australia some 60,000 years ago is left unconsidered or brushed aside. Ditto the wacky, sci-fi idea that all scientists need do is introduce the human version of FOXP2 into a chimp and that this would produce speech. A far bigger problem exists for the Klein-Edgar theory, though. As it turns out, our version of FOXP2 first appeared not 50,000, but more like 1.8 million, years ago and with *Homo habilis* or *ergaster*.¹⁰

More soundly, surely, Paul Bloom contends

that children are "psychologically primed for religion" because it is advantageous in evolutionary terms to be gullible when listening to the stories (instructions) handed down to them by their parents: 'Don't stray into that forest because otherwise the jony wonjy who lives there will gobble you up'. Fear of imagined spirits keeps children obedient, out of trouble and alive.

In a similar vein, James McClenon argues that those possessing extra "suggestibility" had an evolutionary edge over the less suggestible. Eg, the risks of giving birth would be lessened if expectant mothers "accepted the efficacy" of the shaman's potions, spells and spirit messages.¹¹ Mortality and morbidity rates were thereby significantly reduced. In other words, religion adds to reproductive success - and therefore the *propensity* towards religion is passed on in our genes.

Scott Atran plausibly maintains that humans were "naturally selected" for their ability to respond quickly and emotionally to the array of dangers they faced: "The evolutionary imperative to rapidly detect and react to rapacious agents encourages the emergence of malevolent deities in every culture, just as the countervailing imperative attached to caregivers favours the apparition of benevolent deities."¹² Religion is seen by Atran as a beneficial by-product of biological development - what Stephen Jay Gould famously called a spandrel in an audacious borrowing from architectural terminology - a morphological, cognitive or behavioural contingent that acquires a rationale, momentum and consequences of its own.

Then there are those who consider religion maladaptive. Courting notoriety, as ever, Richard Dawkins goadingly likens religion to a dangerous virus. Smallpox.¹³ He also explains religion as a 'meme' - ideas are supposedly passed on in discrete parcels. Jokes, theories, rumours, religious doctrines, etc. Memes for him are the "new replicators".¹⁴ Daniel C Dennett pugnaciously champions the exact same approach. Prepared to accept the role of folk religion as embodying practical knowledge, his main contention is that organised religion depends on "secrecy, deception and systemic invulnerability to disconfirmation".¹⁵

While harbouring a certain Pavlovian sympathy for the belligerent atheism of Dawkins and Dennett - doubtless due to a formative Church of England education - politically I recoil from their elitism. Eg, Dennett breezily names atheists "brights", with the inescapable implication that believers are dull, uneducated and in urgent need of an emergency course of corrective scientific instruction by an enlightened educator such as himself. More, one has to ask, if it is mal-adaptive, why does religion appear throughout recorded history and in every culture, and why today are the ranks of devotees counted in their billions? The ubiquity of maladaptation and the prodigious numbers of the maladapted fails to add up in Darwinian terms.

Pascal Boyer does not necessarily accept that religion is maladaptive, but likewise explains religion through memes. Evolution gives us mental tools which serve a real purpose. However, these tools have been hijacked. Religion brilliantly connects with the brain's inference system, which makes "recall and communication very easy", triggers our mental programmes, connects with "our social mind" and even directs our "behaviour".¹⁶ And, as such, religion spreads from one mind to another.

Other scientists, particularly those with a training in anthropology, take the human group as their starting point when dealing with religion. Ultra-Darwinists feel obliged to attack this as heresy. According to them, the gene and the gene alone is the unit of selection. David Sloan Wilson disagrees. He is one of those who advocate a *multilevel* theory of selection: clade,

species, deme, group, organism and gene.

Equipped with a religious system of bonding, Wilson says, a group, can achieve miracles compared with one riven by chronic conflicts and exploited by freeloaders. Internal cohesion is markedly enhanced. Religious systems are passed down to succeeding generations not through genes, of course: rather stories told and retold around the campfire, adult example, childhood imitation, teenage initiation, collective dances and songs, and the thoroughly internalised habits, rhythms and tasks of daily life.¹⁷

Richard Sosis sees religion as a *costly* signalling system.¹⁸ In its own way a phenomenon not unlike the fitness-displaying peacock's tail or the gaudy constructions painstakingly put together by male bowerbirds. Individuals display their commitment to their fellows by being prepared to profess beliefs that are glaringly counterintuitive. The more opposed to everyday reality, the more effective. As is morally required, they also willingly undergo initiation - which can amount to torture - in order to become full insiders. Thereafter, as adults, they regularly give themselves over bodily to the collective. All in the name of the fantastic. A system of incentive and disincentive. Eg, on the one hand, only full insiders are considered acceptable when it comes to marriage, and, on the other hand, would-be freeloaders find cheating hard to pull off.

Signals demanded by the group are *very* real. Not to submit to the trials of initiation, not to join in drug-assisted, three- or four-day-long communing with ancestral spirits, not to partake in gruelling farces, not to pierce, scar or tattoo the body is to invite teasing, withering contempt, ostracism or worse. Such signals separate insiders from outsiders and therefore help reproduce social cohesion.

Robin Dunbar comes from a similar direction. Once again the crucial determinate is the group. Larger groups of hominids favoured larger brains to cope with the multiplying interactions and constantly shifting political alliances. Dunbar constructs an intriguing theory of higher-order intentionality - states of mind such as believing, hoping and intending, and recognising this in others (and *their* recognition of it in others, and so on to the fifth or sixth degree). In step with this expanding, higher-order intentionality, he thinks we ultimately arrive at language, culture and religion. Religion, in particular, enhances group cohesion and guards against freeloading. Dunbar argues that the decisive change ought to be dated back to pre-modern *Homo sapiens*. They abandoned the time-costly social grooming of other great apes and took the road towards culture. Around 500,000 years ago there was certainly a big increase in brain size. From an average of 900cc to a near modern 1,300cc.

Apes

Let us examine matters from another angle. We shall move from abstract, sometimes highly speculative, models, and instead turn to gorillas, chimpanzees and bonobos. The mental capabilities of our ancestors can surely be gleaned from scientific studies of our nearest living relatives.

Hominids are thought to have diverged from what are now gorillas, chimpanzees and bonobos some five-eight million years ago (it should be emphasised that all four lineages continued to evolve, faster or slower, till the present). However, biologically this divergence is quite recent. We still have some 98% of our DNA in common.

Fascinatingly - though, with a moment's due consideration, not too surprisingly - people find it possible to teach captive gorillas, chimpanzees and bonobos to communicate using computer keyboards, postcard-sized pictures, plastic shapes or sign language. Other great apes lack

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the physical apparatus that enables us humans to speak the way we do. Their vocal cords are located higher in the throat and therefore cannot modulate sounds to the degree we humans can. Possibly the arrangement of the inner ear might also prevent them from hearing the full range of human speech. But obviously there is far more to language than physiology.

Humans regularly, almost effortlessly, deploy thousands and thousands of unique words simply by phonetically piecing together available vowel and consonant sound units (in English there are just 44 of them). A "digital system" and one which infant children instinctively soak up, master with alacrity and when necessary superbly modify. Furthermore, human speech is tokenistic because it has been decoupled from body language. True, we smile, frown, cry, laugh and sigh. Very important for inter-personal relationships. However, when it comes to communicating on an everyday level, getting over routine information, technical data, news items and in general participating in the socio-economic order, the main burden is carried by speech (and its spectacular augmentations - writing and print).

Vocalisation amongst gorillas, chimpanzees and bonobos is typically spontaneous, energetically demanding and closely connected with display and emotion. An "acoustic system".¹⁹ Because they have been studied in extraordinary detail chimps can be used for purposes of illustration (Jane Goodall's books, above all *The chimpanzees of Gombe*, remain of unequalled importance).

Dominant males emit 'copulation screams' during or after mating. Often preceded by shaking nearby branches and foot-stamping. The 'pant-hoot' is the most commonly heard call and conveys food enjoyment, social excitement and sociability feelings.²⁰ There is extensive body grooming, especially of those at the top of the hierarchy, close allies or potential sexual partners. Frequently accompanied by lip-smacking or tooth-clacking. Then there are the graded 'pant grunts' and 'pant screams' which submissive chimps direct towards those at the top of the pecking order in the hope of warding off hostile behaviour or eliciting friendship. Simultaneously 'respect' is shown by grovellingly presenting rear ends. In addition there are the excited 'short barks' made during hunts and the 'tonal bark' warning let out when sighting a large snake. Young chimps 'whimper' when nervous or separated from mothers. To reassure, mothers touch and embrace their offspring. Males collectively warn off other chimpanzees from the group's territory with 'turf screams'. At the edge of their home territory, or when raiding another group's territory, 'war parties' will proceed silently. Male chimps have learnt to turn off aggression vocalisations because of well founded fears of detection. However, chimps cannot turn signals on without actually experiencing some underlying emotion.

Nevertheless, though restricted to some 15 distinct vocalisations and a similarly narrow range of facial gestures and body signals, chimps can problem-solve, learn to use crude tools, grasp symbols and have genuine, though rather trite, conversations with human trainers (however, and it needs to be stressed, rarely, if ever, with each other).

The Chimpanzee and Human Communication Institute at Washington University has been working with a small collection of cross-fostered, carefully humanised chimps since 1980. Individuals such as Tatu, Washoe, Moja, Pili and Dar were raised along the lines of deaf children and they managed to learn a quite impressive number of reliably observed signs - it is said around 150 of them in total. Ranging from what might conceivably be expected - colours, personal names, foods and smells - they also include 'please', 'hurt' and 'sorry'. The chimps communicate with their handlers at a level analogous to young children. Other such attempts, experiments and projects have been organised with generally positive results.

In the wild, in their natural environment, gorillas, chimpanzees and bonobos do not, of course, have benign teachers of American Sign Language available to them. Though, as we have seen, they do have an innate mental capacity for language - albeit embryonic - something blocks, discourages and diverts them from going in that direction through their own volition. So, instead of "looking for intimations" of human society amongst gorillas, chimpanzees and bonobos, we must "look for its negation", because human society emerged out of the "consistent negation" of what existed previously.²¹

Their brains are considerably smaller than

humans - 400-500cc compared with 1,400cc on average. It hardly follows, however, that gorillas, chimpanzees and bonobos should be dismissed as inherently stupid. What they need for reproductive success, what they are expert in, what they are driven by is defending territory, securing food, gaining mates, building alliances, avoiding dangers and protecting offspring ... and that most definitely necessitates a "highly developed" ability to deal with the Machiavellian politics of their own group.²² Crucially the politics of sex. In short, a part-instinctive, partly learnt combination of intimidating physical force, deception, friendship, supplication, appeasement, kinship, etc.

Gorillas are organised into female troops, or harems, along with infants and perhaps a few tolerated beta males, jealously guarded, directed and ruled over by a single silverback male; chimpanzees into much larger, mixed-sex groups, with polygamous mating patterns under a constantly shifting hierarchy of dominant males; bonobos are matriarchal, with male status stemming from their mothers and internal conflict attenuated or deflected by promiscuous male-female and most crucially female-female sexual intercourse. Female pair bonding produces a powerful double act which can face down individualised males.

Despite those marked differences, males constitute the leisured sex. More, with the exception of bonobos, males aggressively establish their rights over fertile females and that regularly produces chaos in the group. However, once the female is no longer in estrus, the philandering male will instantly move off in search of new conquests. He will certainly not supply food for pregnant or nursing females. Nor will he provide for his offspring either. To simplify somewhat, sperm is what the male invests in the "propagation of the species."²³ Females get pregnant, carry the growing foetus, give birth, breast-feed and care for the young till they are fully independent. In energy terms immensely costly. Females therefore constitute the productive sex.

Accumulated evidence clearly shows that the social organisation of the great apes is not an automatic product of genetic determination. Environmental factors play a big role - as they do with even the simplest organism. For instance, the Congo river geographically divides what evolved to become chimps and bonobos a million years ago - with a greater abundance of food being obtainable to the south of the river's course compared with the north. There is also an absence of gorillas in the south. Evidently these two, surely related, factors had a profound effect, allowing a far more relaxed relationship between males and females in the south.

There is also well observed self-construction through sexual politics. That can certainly be said for bonobos. As a result females lead a far less stressed existence. Even with gorillas and chimpanzees, however, the explosive power struggles between alpha males is far from the be-all and end-all. Parties of females briefly form and align themselves with related, aspirant and dissatisfied males. Bullying, faltering or otherwise unacceptable dominant males can thereby be brought to heel, overthrown or driven away.

Despite sympathetically documenting - celebrating - such counter-dominant behaviour, Christopher Boehm, the evolutionary anthropologist, concludes that gorillas, chimpanzees and bonobos are "notably hierarchical".²⁴ Not unreasonably, projecting back, he makes the same claim about the "common ancestor"²⁵ of the four African-based great apes (and that, of course, includes hominids).

The strong amongst the common ancestors - especially alpha males, but including high-status females - would harass, abuse and cower the weak. Moreover, male competition over food, social standing and fertile females would constantly tip over into violence and thereby disrupt, cut short or dissolve cooperation. That is certainly the case with gorillas and chimpanzees. Fieldwork leaves no doubt about it.

Boehm tellingly comments that, when it comes to history - ie, since the invention and adoption of writing - human societies have been characterised by hierarchical systems that are by "mammalian standards" staggering in their "degrees of despotism". Think Egyptian pharaohs, Roman emperors, feudal popes, Muslim caliphs, Inca god-kings, fascist dictators, Stalinist bureaucrats and billionaire capitalists. And yet, and yet ... Surviving hunter-gatherer societies show diametrically opposite

features. There is what Marxists call primitive communism. Eg, African Bushmen, the San. Though global capitalism surrounds and pushes in on them from every side, though squeezed into ecologically marginal areas - where food, fuel and fresh water are hellishly scarce and life is as a consequence extraordinarily difficult - a fierce egalitarianism rules. Would-be despots are given short shrift. Humorous put downs, walk-outs, constantly repeated levelling campaigns and if need be collective force to counter individual force. Those whom we should no longer call the weak continuously combine together to subordinate the strong to the group. Boehm calls the result "anti-hierarchy".²⁶

Everything tells us that the militant egalitarianism of the San and other such social fossils was once the universal human condition. And not just for some brief moment of time. But for many tens of thousands of years ... and under far better ecological conditions. Anthropologists, ethnographers, palaeontologists and other social scientists - or at least the fair-minded amongst them - increasingly share that opinion.

So we are presented with an inescapable conclusion. Put what we know about people like the San on the one side of the equation. On the other side *Homo habilis* and *Homo ergaster* and contemporary gorillas, chimpanzees, bonobos. What follows? There must have been a breakdown, an overturn of the old hierarchy, a point of transition, a reorganisation that made us anti-hierarchical. What went before became something else. Boehm insists that egalitarianism had to be established in the first place through a revolution. The alpha male system was reversed. Subordinates, he reasons, rebelled against their subordination. And doubtless they had to do so in group after group and again and again till they were finally victorious. And from then on egalitarianism was maintained, or regularly re-established, through various culturally embedded mechanisms whereby the "weak combine forces to actively dominate the strong".²⁷

Disappointingly, Boehm collapses into a technological determinism by way of explanation. Relying on teeth, kicks and fists is always going to be uncertain. Quite likely the weak would miserably fail against the strong and be humiliatingly seen off: that or they would suffer severe injuries on the road to a Pyrrhic victory. Even with overwhelming numbers it would take some 15-20 agonising, and hugely risky, minutes to finish off the group tyrant. But a well aimed spear or axe - say, while your enemy slept or was otherwise unsuspecting - is an entirely different matter. Palaeolithic weapons shifted the balance of power against the strong. Or so Boehm contends.

Harman

Again, another angle. In *A people's history of the world* (1999), Chris Harman, editor of the Socialist Workers Party's journal, *International Socialism*, till a tragically early death in November 2009, devotes his opening chapter to what he obviously considers to be the pivotal event in his epic account: the Neolithic 'revolution' which first happened in the Middle East, in the fertile crescent, some 10,000 years ago.

The quote marks are Harman's and he inserts them for good reason. The Neolithic revolution - weaving cloth, breeding cattle and sheep, cultivation of crops and a sedentary lifestyle - was bound up with a social counterrevolution. Technical progress contributed to the surplus product needed for the construction of gigantic monuments, elaborate fortifications, sumptuous burials for chiefs, professional religion and institutionalised warfare, but all this coincided with widespread regression, suffering and oppression. The health and fitness of the population in general deteriorated. Human remains show signs of stunted growth, tooth decay and rickets. There was also the historic defeat of the female sex, as discussed by Engels in his *Origin of the family, private property and the state* (1884) and what we have seen Christopher Boehm call staggering "degrees of despotism".

Not surprisingly then, the "big changes in people's lives" brought about by the Neolithic and the first civilisations, are contrasted with primitive communism - a subject briefly treated within an 18-page prologue to Harman's main text.²⁸ To some considerable effect, he shows that capitalism and its warped values are a very recent phenomenon. Primitive communism is depicted as our *natural condition*. After all, as a mode of production, it spans at least 90% of human existence. During these many millennia

there were, Harman says, no rulers, no bosses, no rich, no poor. People habitually cooperated, food was shared on the basis of reciprocity and there was very little, if anything, of what could be called warfare. So no "killer imperative".²⁹ Humans were not Cain's children.

Nor was this egalitarianism the result of endemic scarcity, intellectual inferiority or wrenching dispossession by foreign invaders. In 1966 the American anthropologist, Marshall Sahlins, rebranded primitive communism the "original affluent society".³⁰ Sahlins was, to his everlasting credit, responsible for bringing about a mind-changing paradigm shift. Old assumptions, including those held by Marxists, about a primitive communism of hardship, ignorance and so-called savages constantly being on the brink of starvation were overthrown. He collected, arranged and presented overwhelming counter-evidence.

Organised into small, flexible, loose, roving groups, hunter-gatherers have a lifestyle that is in many ways enviable. Necessary labour time is minimal. Say 20 hours a week. Admittedly, so too are material needs. And yet Sahlins showed that even today's hard-pressed hunter-gatherers consume a marvellously varied, highly nutritious and well balanced diet. Above all, they have the individual challenges, sexual, kinship and friendship relationships and egalitarian disciplines that, when fused together, help make us human.

Hunter-gathering involves a broad division of labour between the sexes. Men do high-prestige, but sometimes dangerous, long-range tracking and killing of game animals (and the collection of honey). Meanwhile, women - because of their role in giving birth, breastfeeding and child-rearing - are mainly responsible for the short-range gathering of staples. Nevertheless, male supremacy is absent. Both men and women take part in making key decisions. On balance, however, women are probably the more influential sex, constituting as they do the functional and moral centre of the matrilineal family and therefore the group's base encampments. Additionally there is collective child-rearing, cooking of food and special women's knowledge. A multi-layered combination engendering a particularly strong female bonding.

Logically, if there was a Neolithic counterrevolutionary revolution, there must have been a revolution. And, of course, it is not just a matter of logic. A whole range of distinguished anthropologists, geneticists, archaeologists, palaeontologists, etc embrace the idea of the human revolution, according to their own academic speciality and social outlook. See, for example, the weighty volume edited by Paul Mellars, Katie Boyle, Ofer Bar-Yosef and Chris Stringer - *Rethinking the human revolution: new behavioural and biological perspectives on the origin and dispersal of modern humans* (2007). It provides a broad overview of human origins research and with perhaps only a single exception, its dozens of contributors are agreed: judged according to the relevant timescale, the appearance of human culture was a revolutionary event, not a gradualistic process.

So there is most definitely a missing chapter in Harman's account. His first chapter ought really to be his second. After all, the primitive communism that still hangs on in the 21st century, albeit by its fingernails - especially given what we know about gorillas, chimpanzees and bonobos and what we think we know about our own immediate ancestors - must have had a beginning. A passing away of the old and a coming into being of something that had never been seen before: humans with language, symbolic culture and religion.

Naively - neither anthropology nor biology was his field - Harman regurgitated a stale account of increasing "cooperation" over two million years and how this slowly led to bigger brains, language, fashioning better and better tools and eventually the "ability to conceptualise about things which are not immediately present".³¹ Of course, many animals are cooperative: bees, termites, ants and wasps are what sociobiologist Edward Wilson calls 'eusocial'. Added to which, they construct elaborate nests and possess displaced reference communication systems. So cooperation alone cannot provide an adequate explanation of what made pre-humans human. Nor can expanding brain size. After all, insect brains are tiny and there are relatively big-brained animals that are subsocial or semisocial. Eg, polar bears, rhinos, jaguars and leopards.

The fact of the matter is that Harman ignores,

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avoids, in effect denies the revolution that must surely have triggered what Engels called the "transition from ape to man". Instead Harman echoes the conventional, prosaic and thoroughly bourgeois theory of slow, cumulative, evolutionary change and ever advancing tools. Not something one would expect from a writer who established an enviable reputation for himself as a Marxist thinker.

Needless to say, there is slow, cumulative, evolutionary change. And that can include gradual increases in levels of cooperation and improved tool-making techniques. But, following in the footsteps of Hegel, orthodox Marxism has always emphasised that things develop through the struggle of opposites and mounting internal contradictions. Contradictions which at a certain stage reach the tipping point where an explosion, break or leap of some kind happens and qualitative change is suddenly released. Contradictions are resolved.

That is no longer a matter of philosophical argument, but hard, empirical science, which is backed up by rigorous mathematics. Hence phase transition, punctuated equilibrium, critical point, discontinuity, catastrophe theory, bifurcation theory and the like. All widely known about, not least through countless popular science books. Harman's attitude towards the human revolution therefore constitutes what lawyers call a significant silence.

The anthropologist and political activist, Chris Knight, has written a book called *Blood relations: menstruation and the origins of culture* (1991). In this or that respect it is outdated, faulty and incomplete - eg, subsequent to publication there have been further archaeological discoveries which push Knight's dating of the human revolution considerably back and away from Europe to southern Africa. Nevertheless, *Blood relations* is a bold, panoramic and, in my opinion, easily the most persuasive account of the human revolution. A second, revised, edition is more than overdue. That or a re-issue with an extensive preface. Like any great work there are gaps and unfinished lines of thought - doubtless they will stimulate scholars in the years to come. However, Knight has made the decisive breakthrough which anyone who wants to be taken seriously must develop ... or decisively disprove.

Building on the twin pillars of Lewis Henry Morgan and Frederick Engels, and owing an acknowledged debt to Robert Briffault (1876-1948), *Blood relations* synthesises many diverse ideas: Marxism, Darwinism, the encyclopaedic structuralism of Claude Lévi-Strauss, classic colonial anthropology, especially research into African and Australian social fossils, human origins studies and the insights of evolutionary biologists and evolutionary psychologists, including some of those mentioned above.

I do not buy into the sociobiology that Knight celebrates as the acme of scientific achievement.³² Specifically the proposition that animals are 'gene machines', mere carriers or servants of their genes (a proposition popularised, of course, by Richard Dawkins with his 1976 book *The selfish gene*). Only a fool would deny the crucial, foundational, role of genes when it comes to evolution. That goes without saying. But there is "hierarchical selection" at the level of organism, deme, species and clade too;³³ and other determining factors, such as random genetic drift, environment, structural constraints, contingency and interaction.³⁴ However, that quibble does not detract from my admiration of Knight's book.

A short aside. Furiously rejecting Knight's innovative application of Marxist theory, and definitely behaving as if some holy creed had been scandalously violated - and not just because of Knight's praise for sociobiology - Harman decided that before the "rise of agriculture 10,000 to 5,000 years ago", change was essentially "cumulative" and reliant on new tools.³⁵ Social labour is equated with tool-making by Harman. A technological, not a social determinism. His own staging of history was enshrined as mandatory doctrine - for any of the SWP's 'red professors' to openly disagree in the 1990s was to risk or actually incur expulsion. A Lysenko-type moment.

Having silenced, driven away or purged its feminists, who were organised around the journal *Women's Voice* a decade before, the SWP's leadership did not take kindly to Knight's *Blood relations*. Determined to draw an uncrossable political line against their feminist opponents, Chris Harman, Tony Cliff and Lindsey German stubbornly maintained that

there was in effect nothing specific about women's oppression. There was only class. In her article, 'Theories of patriarchy', German insisted that men do not "benefit from women's work in the family (rather the capitalist system as a whole benefits)" and it is not true to claim that "men and capital are conspiring to stop women having access to economic production."³⁶ Doubtless such desperate constructions explain why Harman felt he had to flippantly write off "absurdities" like "class conflict ... between the genders".³⁷

In his *Origin* Engels does, of course, compare the situation of women within the Victorian family to that of the proletariat and men to the bourgeoisie. He also stresses the importance of the biological production and reproduction of the species and the necessity of our ancestors overcoming male jealousy. Not that anyone should treat either Marx or Engels as biblical authorities.

Nonetheless, for the narrowest factional reasons the SWP machine was determined to bury the authentic Marxist tradition. The decision to close *Women's Voice* in 1981 had been bitterly disputed and internal debate spilled over into the public realm. Something confessional sects instinctively loathe and seek to avoid under normal circumstances. So when in 1991 the SWP's headquarters heard news that Knight's book was being warmly received in core branches, greeted as an exciting vindication of Engels and his *Origin*, alarm bells rang. Harman rushed to the library and quickly returned a self-esteeming 'expert' in anthropology.

As noted above, what he filled his head with was the standard evolutionary and technological prejudices of academia and wider bourgeois society. Though pitifully ill-equipped intellectually, politically he considered himself duty-bound to emulate Joseph Stalin and act as judge and jury over what is a scientific question.³⁸ With a chilling arrogance Knight's book was dismissed as "menstrual moonshine".³⁹ It also has to said that Harman cynically played on the unease and embarrassment caused on the economic left by any frank, open, scientific discussion of menstruation, conflictive sexual relations and the formative vanguard role of females. However, he successfully achieved his objective. Discussion of Knight's book came to a shuddering halt inside the SWP. All that remained was blustering, sneering, babbling, sniggering, doctrinaire irrationality and in the end a complete inability to say anything at all about the human revolution.

As would be expected, since 1991 Knight's ideas have expanded somewhat because of criticism, further study and collaboration with others. Nonetheless, his basic thesis remains. The human revolution was a communist, counter-dominance revolution, and, he maintains, was led by females. For the productive sex the key Darwinian question was how to obtain the extra energy inputs they urgently needed by getting males to engage in labour and supplying them and their offspring. Concretely getting the physically fit, active, adult males, as a collective, to engage in long-range hunting and then handing over the kill to them. At an elemental level that involved sex for meat. An exchange which nowadays might conjure up tawdry images of prostitution. In fact, it was the exact opposite. Females had to seize control of sexual access and then redistribute and manage it through a system of group marriage. And to achieve that outcome the alpha male system had to be overthrown.

Incidentally, group marriage involves males in one clan regarding the females in another clan as potential sexual partners. Not orgiastic gang bangs. Groups are married, with individual entry into the system coming through initiation. Hence the males of one clan call the females of another clan wives. Females too have many husbands. But who you actually have sex with is decided by mutual attraction, courtship and negotiation with parents.

Via group marriage the majority of males previously occupying lower positions in the hierarchy got regular sexual partners for the first time and the group got regular supplies of meat. A massive protean boost for the group and therefore a win-win situation. Groping towards that end, females, "allied to their male kin," had to go beyond Darwinism and invent culture.⁴⁰ Sexual pleasure, given or promised, thereby played a revolutionary role in transforming males from the leisured sex into the second productive sex.

Inspired by the great political and industrial struggles of the late 1960s and early 70s, drawing

on world myths and the ritual practices of Africa's living fossils, constructing a convincing account of crisis-riven pre-human hominids, Knight introduces a trade union analogy. The picket line. Forming a protective, bodily fence around, or alongside, the fertile, menstruating, young female in the camp - the target of monopolising alpha male lust - other females put on a half-threatening, half-playful display.⁴¹ Here, with the dancing, assertive, charging, laughing, confident picket line, was the event - the reality-transforming moment, the revolution - that overthrew the crisis-wracked, old system.

Females in the group symbolically synchronised their fertility and simultaneously exhibited themselves as something else. Wrong sex, wrong species, wrong time. They pretended to be male. They pretended to be another species. They pretended to be menstruating ... but forcibly insisted that they were unavailable and that their collective sex strike had to be respected by all. Displaying artificial penises, raising arms as horns and painting themselves with red, blood-like ochre. Menstrual blood, even in substitute form, was powerful, magical and sacred. The source of life.⁴²

The picket line ritual was repeated, imposed, every month and integrated with the moon and its phases. There being, of course, an unmistakable relationship, a correlation, between the female monthly cycle and that of the moon. Indeed the whole revolutionary order adopted a two-weekly lunar rhythm. With the full moon men were temporarily separated off from their wives and sent hunting for big-game animals. What Knight calls blood relations. The productive phase. A bright moon provides the best hunting conditions for humans. Partying, cooking, the coming together of the sexes, are linked to the dark moon. The phase of sex and consumption.

In effect this was the beginning of religion, or a human cosmology, which can still be found in the stories, practices, taboos, dances ... and cosmetics of social fossils in modern times. Camilla Power, a colleague and co-thinker of Knight, brilliantly draws a line of continuity between red ochre - what she calls the first cosmetics - and today's beauty - ie, sex - industry.⁴³ That aside, she predicts that, where archaeologists uncover mined red ochre, this announces the existence of the monthly counter-dominance cycle. The earliest such red ochre is now dated at around 300,000 years ago. In other words we are talking about pre-modern *Homo sapiens*. Hence one can safely say that with modern *Homo sapiens* counter-dominance is an integral part of what Marx called our "species-being". Humans are a revolutionary species.

Certainly the idea that the first appearance of "religious ideologies" happened between 60,000 and 30,000 years ago no longer appears credible. Such claims linked religion to widely recognised religious objects.⁴⁴ Religion, however, does not necessarily rely on altars, statues, carvings and relics to be religion. The painted, dancing human body is both a religious subject and object.

As already mentioned, the background to Knight's account of the human revolution lies in the increasingly fraught situation faced by the immediate ancestors of our species. We are probably talking about *Homo heidelbergensis*. In Knight's model the contradiction between exploitative males and productive females sees a growing disparity between potentiality and actuality. There was the long established making of stone hand axes, scrapers and the like. But male rivalry, selfish individualism and outbursts of terrifying competitive violence makes extended cooperation impossible. Hence no language, no egalitarianism, no religion, because all such phenomena flow from, and rely upon, a definite level of social solidarity and trust.

Take language: to work as a means of communication - for that is surely what it is - the collective must be prepared to go along with what is symbolic, tokenistic or purely fictional. Unlike the limited, but honest body language and sound signalling of other great apes, including, one presumes, *Homo heidelbergensis*, the unlimited universe of words have in and of themselves no essentially honest meaning.

Words are arbitrary. Made from syllables effortlessly spun together in the head and let out through vocal cords as modulated air. As they tumble out, words have to be interpreted, weighed and judged: reliable or suspicious, biased or generous, muddled or clear, tedious or inspiring. But, strung together, words communicate in astonishing abundance.

Before the human revolution chronic internal conflict and individual mistrust prevented such

embryonic abilities reaching critical take-off point. There are instances of symbolic or counter-reality signalling. Eg, the young engage in play. Mock fights between immature chimps normally result in not the slightest nick. There is an unwritten agreement on both sides not to hurt. A co-conspiracy. Each side hold back. They pretend. But, come adulthood, and with it sexual rivalry, play between adult males ceases. Turns into its opposite. Becomes ferociously real. Competition therefore stands in "antagonistic" contradiction to cooperation. A profound observation made by Engels.⁴⁵

Hominids began as a barely detectable evolutionary twig which diverged from what was itself a minor branch of evolution: the first, incredibly rare and fragmentary hominid fossils date from six-seven million years ago. The entire clade occupied a marginal, often very fraught, ecological niche. Searching out fruits, grains, roots, eggs, nuts and insects; catching the occasional lizard, fish, small mammal and bird; scavenging from the kills of those higher up the food chain ... and yet also being a source of prey. Part of the "right dribble" towards complexity - the mass of life being banked up on the left wall of minimal complexity, which is dominated by microbes⁴⁶ - in terms of biomass hominids were pretty unsuccessful. Numbers are estimated to have swung between 100,000 and 10,000 - depending on fickle conditions. Low points clearly indicated that they constituted what nowadays would be designated an endangered species.

Apart from the earliest examples, hominids walked upright. Not on all fours. Thereby they fortuitously freed hands for other uses. Stone tools begin to appear in the archaeological record some 2.5 million years ago and even the crudest flint axe puts the best efforts of chimps to shame. There must also have been other tools, such as digging sticks, carrying slings, cups and baskets of one kind or another, which do not survive in the record.

About 1.8 million years ago various hominids managed to find their way out of Africa and into Eurasia. They rapidly spread along coastal and river routes. By around 750,000 years ago there is clear evidence of the use of fire. That meant cooked meat, light, warmth and safety ... and the deliberate burning of bush and forest cover. Yet, despite such unprecedented achievements, hominid species went extinct one after the other. Technical prowess should not be equated with biological success. *Homo habilis*, *Homo erectus*, *Homo ergaster*, *Homo neanderthalis*, etc, etc all winked out of existence. *Homo sapiens* are the sole survivors of the hominid family. And it has to be said that there is no reason to suppose that we would not have gone the same way too. If, that is, it had not been for the human revolution, which put our ancestors on the road to where we now dominate the planet and carry our unprecedent responsibilities for its future.

Knight well-foundedly reasons that bigger brains and extended childhood must have put a huge additional burden on females (even with the help of their sisters and mothers).⁴⁷ *Homo heidelbergensis* brain size ranged from 1,000 to 1,400cc. Then there were the physical strains associated with the long months of pregnancy and the need to secure increased nutrition, especially when breast-feeding. Modern females require about 300 extra calories each day during the final six months of pregnancy. This raises the total to about 1,900-2,500 calories daily. Projected back, that roughly amounts to a calorific input amounting to an additional 15% - a statistic which in pre-historic times could well separate life from death.

The agony, trauma and dangers of delivering babies with enlarged skulls through upended birth canals is well known. Death of child and/or mother was a sadly frequent event until modern times. And even after the trials of pregnancy and giving birth, the infant must be breast-fed and carried on hip or back up to the time when they have properly learnt to walk. Not that juveniles are fully independent. They have to be cared and provided for till they are aged perhaps 13 or 14. And there is every chance of another pregnancy and having to simultaneously cope with two or three children with various degrees of dependence. Meanwhile there are the disruptive, exhausting and highly risky, seasonal group treks to the next encampment. There must have been a particular death toll among young children and nursing mothers.

And remember, in Knight's model all of this was without any substantial input from males. The philanderer supplies sperm. Little more. Indeed rivalry meant males hobbled their own

SUPPLEMENT

potentiality. A dominant male would be more than reluctant to leave a fertile female in order to embark on a long-distance hunt with other males.

Unlike with chimps, bonobos and gorillas, his only clue that a female is soon to be fertile is that she menstruates. No outward swelling or coloration telling him the right time to mate. Hominid females concealed their fertility and that probably gained them extra male attention and, albeit temporarily, extra supplies. The result, however, was that the dominant male was in all likelihood less mobile than he might otherwise be. He could not possibly trust those males who remained in the camp: juveniles, the temporarily or permanently injured and elders. Instead he would seek an *extended* sexual monopoly. Alpha males therefore aggressively compete, fend off rivals and stand guard over fertile females for some considerable time. Cooperation - including over the supply of food through collective effort, crucially meat - was correspondingly impoverished.

Bigger brains and an extended childhood are massively costly in energy terms, but doubtless conferred certain evolutionary advantages. Almost certainly enhancing female cooperation. But male jealousy, aggression and selfishness constantly cut short, prevented or sabotaged cultural developments, such as language. More than that, male competition, and gross over-exploitation of females, pointed to species extinction.

Picket line

Of course, the 'wrong sex, wrong species, wrong time' ritual was transparently false at one level. But the ritual invited, demanded, that the whole group go along with the deception. Males were meant to play along with the scrambled signals, the lie, and feign confusion. Eg, females are male, are animals and all of them are fertile. And instead of courting, targeting, singling out the genuinely fertile female in the camp, males had to respect their picket line.

Those tempted not to go along with the rules of the game faced not only a united picket line of females. They faced the majority of males too. The other males had a real interest in supporting the picket line, not least because of the system of group marriage associated with the revolutionary order. Alpha males therefore faced impossible odds and would have agreed in the end to respect the picket line. The leap into symbolic culture thereby created anti-hierarchy by subordinating and integrating the alpha male into the collective. New patterns of the family, new ways of thinking, new forms of communication and a new mode of production followed. Indeed, I think we can say that the human revolution must have been associated with speciesisation.

Male jealousy met a stronger force in collective interest. Now males had to deliver meat if they were to gain access to females. They were expected to show their worth as husbands by success in hunting. Hence alpha males no longer stayed put in the camp in order to monopolise fertile females. Males could at last fully cooperate with each other in this, fundamentally because of the socially constructed level of trust released through the monthly female picket line and sex strike.

Husbands were obliged by custom to bring the raw meat to their wives and through them it was distributed to children, parents and other relatives. Women did the cooking. There was, it should be pointed out, a taboo against males consuming their own kills.

Always contested, doubtless sometimes losing momentum, occasionally thrown back, but out of necessity always driven on and on, the results of the human revolution were spectacular for the species. Inputs of protein shot up. Population numbers soared. Life expectancy increased. So did areas of habitation. Maybe 80,000 years ago there was the second 'out of Africa' movement into Asia, from which all modern non-Africans are descended. Above all, however, through the revolutionary order established by females there was the beginning of language. Knowledge thereby passes down from generation to generation and steadily accumulates. Inevitably, not least to make it memorable, this is given the form of religious rituals and stories. Religion is thus both an unwritten rule book governing social relations and an invaluable ally in productive activity.

Amongst primitive communist peoples, religion is a magico-symbolic system for the *relevant*, but unavoidably distorted, understanding of, and interaction with, nature. Religion is therefore a thoroughly practical matter. It must have seemed possible to control,

or influence, real things through ritual and the recurring pattern of collective religious activity. The fantastic stories - told and retold - and the constantly recurring warp and weave of ceremony find their validation in the real world. Humanity attempts to find itself by projecting itself onto outer-reality: anthropomorphism.

Religion was also the handmaiden of science. Nature is *usefully* imagined as full of spirits and open to human persuasion. Rain, the seasons, the return of migrating herds of wild animals, female fertility are assured by performing certain fixed rituals. By slotting these rituals into the dimly observed pattern of nature, the wish duly becomes part of a chain which leads to fulfilment. Eg, do your rain dance just prior to the rainy season, pray before daybreak for the sun to rise. Projecting itself as the cause, humanity feels its way into nature and comes to know its own immediate environment. Religion and religious practices thereby draw ever closer together with nature. This eventually gives rise to calendars, astronomy and mathematical calculation - Alexander Marshack finds evidence of lunar observations in rock paintings and engravings on mammoth ivory from between 30,000 and 35,000 years ago.⁴⁸

The great mother and other lesser ancestors are said to remain alive in the nether world and can choose to intervene in this one - therefore they have to be kept happy and can be appealed to for help and advice. The immortality of the dead is once again fantastic reality. The living owe what they have in terms of productive activity and knowledge of themselves and the outside world to the "transmitted culture" from past generations.⁴⁹ This reality of culture and its importance is clothed in stories, dreams and ceremonies, and explained as the work of constantly recalled ghosts. These ghosts combine various aspects of nature with human characteristics.⁵⁰ The ancestor ghosts behave benevolently or malevolently, not just because hope and fear are closely related cognitively in the human brain, but because life itself is full of unpredictability. Welcome moments of good luck happen. So does shit.

Under primitive communism religion embodies the unity and authority of the collective. The individual personality, in terms of potential, is still cribbed, cramped and crouched. What matters is the cohesion of the group, the clan or the tribe, not the fullest development of each individual. Nevertheless, as emphasised by Scott Atran, there is a reciprocal relationship between the collective and the vital physiological and psychological needs of the individual.⁵¹

Things changed with the decomposition of primitive communism, the defeat of the female sex and the separation of mental from manual labour. Religion becomes the consciousness of a humanity that has lost itself. The emergence of the class societies - eg, the temple city, the warrior kingdom which raids neighbours and enslaves war captives, the tributary state - went hand in hand with internal oppression and an exploitative system of religion. Religion is no longer indistinguishable from the collective: there arises a professional caste of priests whose prime function is to sanctify (or mystify) and thereby help to sustain and reproduce social stratification and social privilege.

In so-called Asiatic social formations the king or emperor is deemed responsible for continued prosperity and the functioning of society. At first perhaps these people played a useful role in coordinating production and ensuring the repair of irrigation systems. However, that function progressively passes to bureaucrats. As it does, religion becomes ever more elaborate, so that it can act as a counterbalance against the masses, who are expected to survive on the barest minimum of subsistence levels. Because of his unique relationship to the gods, the monarch is supposed to guarantee the daily return of the life-giving sun and the seasonal rains or river floodwaters.

Religion demands that the people worship their parasitic rulers as if they were the producers of social wealth - everything is said to belong to them, because everything comes from them. Religion thereby becomes the inverted consciousness of this world, because human society itself has been inverted.

The priests of the ancient world were responsible for the growth of some real knowledge. For example, by the 7th century BC, Babylonian priests could trace the course of the sun through 12 constellations of the zodiac and distinguish five planets from the fixed stars.⁵² They were also able to predict solar and lunar eclipses. Yet, this ran alongside the elaboration

of entirely illusory ideas. Eg, the search for mystical inner knowledge and the tendency to spiral off into extreme subjectivity, which, when pursued to its logical conclusion, arrives at solipsism. Objective reality is dissolved (if only in the mind) by the pure, white light of blinding self-obsession.

As 'instinctive dualists', human beings are prone to performing such flattering tricks on themselves - but especially those classes which have lost their functions, desperate religious sects and defeated political parties. Nonetheless, as Engels emphatically states in his *Ludwig Feuerbach*, "our consciousness and thinking, however supersensuous they may seem, are the product of a material, bodily organ, the brain".⁵³

Needless to say, most modern neurological scientists agree. Though involving constant interaction with objective reality, including, of course, other human beings, consciousness relies on the sense organs of *discrete* individuals. Their culturally shaped, informed and filtered picture of the outside world - no matter how far society advances technologically - can nonetheless be warped or even completely turned inside out.

Matter exists as a unity. However, there is no automatic correspondence between consciousness, a property of matter, and the objective world of matter. People can convince themselves - through arrogance, ignorance or even in an attempt to escape intolerable conditions - that they, and crucially what they think, are the centre of the universe. Even the only thing in the universe - a revolt against an intolerable status quo. "The mind is its own place, and in itself can make a heaven of hell, a hell of heaven," writes John Milton in 'Paradise lost'.⁵⁴ Of course, through trial and error people can also learn to think appropriately and therefore accurately, so as to distinguish reality from illusion ... and being fundamentally interested in and bound up with *practice*, that is what the vast majority try to achieve.

It may confound some would-be Marxists - those who take their cue from bourgeois anthropology rather than Marx's method - but the crystallisation of class relations did not witness a rapid acceleration in the growth of the productive forces. On the contrary, as argued by archaeologist Gordon V Childe back in the 1930s, the appearance of a ruling class saw a marked "slowdown in the rates of technological progress".⁵⁵ Primitive communism was a truly creative epoch for humanity - brewing, music, dance, mythic story-telling, boats, complex hunting tools and strategies, domestication of dogs for hunting, transport, etc. Crucially human solidarity.

With the Neolithic counterrevolutionary revolution, the moon religion and its leisurely monthly rhythm is replaced by the demanding, 24-hour religion of the sun (Stonehenge, circa 2,800 BC, being a counterrevolutionary cosmological instrument, functioning as it does to demonstrate to onlookers the subordination of the moon to the sun). Whereas primitive communism hunts and gathers for a couple of weeks and then dances and feasts, Neolithic society labours from dawn to dusk.

This produces a surplus product that allows for the emergence of the first civilisations, but these societies were riven by crippling internal contradictions and that meant extreme fragility. There is human sacrifice, including the sacrifice of children. A sure sign of social stress. Dramatic territorial expansion by this or that dynastic state formation was just as often followed by an equally rapid collapse. The mass of the population is meanwhile reduced to endless toil and a condition of serfdom or slavery. Society no longer protects against exploiters, external and internal. Under conditions of underdeveloped productive forces it should be emphasised that the existence of the state remains an absolute necessity. Armed bodies of men were needed for internal cohesion and protection from outsiders - invaders thought it their right to loot and rape, sometimes they would even massacre everyone in sight.

But the state can become opposed to society, become parasitic, become a blood-sucking monster in its own right. Hence, drained, confused, pulverised, the common people look for solutions in an alternative power, which, in proportion to their weakness in this world, tends to the superhuman and otherworldly. Ordinary human action does not seem enough to rescue them. Altered gods arise, flourish and grow in terms of popular expectations.

Clearly the gods never made humanity. Rather humanity made the gods ... and made them in their own image. And as society comes to be

cleaved into classes - oppressed and oppressor, slave and master, serf and lord - these antagonisms *in all their complexity* find their constantly evolving expression in the heavens (albeit a necessarily lagging and therefore a conservative one). The struggle of one religion against another is therefore also the struggle of one class against another. Besides being an ideology of social control made from above, religion serves as an ideology of comfort, consolation, resistance and even revolution made from below. In the highly contested collective imagination - or imaginations - the uncontrollable forces of society itself are projected into the skies by those who suffer and strive in this world. Everything from social decay, the unequal relationship between men and women, the structure of the state and the despair of the masses find their fantastic reflection ●

Notes

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COPENHAGEN



Demonstrators: kettled

Public-spirited marching and the anti-system threat

James Turley looks at the mixed messages from the media about the Copenhagen demonstrations

As is the norm for any major gathering of world leaders, the COP-15 talks in Copenhagen over the global warming crisis have been accompanied by a whole series of protests.

First, there were the protests outside Denmark, which saw thousands marching at events like the 'blue wave' demonstrations in London and Glasgow on December 5. Around 50,000 people turned out in London, with hardened climate and left activists accompanied by the likes of the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds. In the Danish capital itself, meanwhile, a great many have gathered to protest at the timidity of the proposals on offer, and urge more concerted action. Activists from a great many countries turned up to demonstrate; *Democracy Now*, the widely-syndicated left-liberal daily news broadcast, upped sticks from the States to Copenhagen for the week, raking every bit of muck it could find.

The largest protest, which saw at least 50,000 on the streets, was for the most part a rather civil affair. The tone was set by environmental lobby group Greenpeace, with prescient slogans like "There is no Planet B". Yet there were some clashes between the authorities and demonstrators and it is these which have somewhat dominated media coverage.

An interesting article, appearing on the blog of the *Detroit Free Press*, traces the changing media response to the Copenhagen protests, in the form of a worldwide media itinerary (www.freep.com, December 14). The Australian press, the first to get put out thanks to the vicissitudes of time zones, reports largely sympathetically on its own country's 'walk against warming' in Melbourne; by the time the sun rises in Britain, the BBC reports large-scale peaceful protests

around the world. It was around this time that (relatively minor) clashes between demonstrators and the police culminated in the 'kettling' of about 1,000 protestors.

The *DFP* article traces the change in tone to the American media: "What began with 'Protesters call for bold pact on warming' in the *Boston Globe* soon became '600 detained at climate rally urging bold pact,' in *The Huffington Post* and ABC News. And by the time the sun had set in Copenhagen, the headlines transitioned solely to the number of arrests - 'Nearly 1,000 held after Copenhagen climate rally' in Reuters and 'Nearly 1,000 arrested in Copenhagen' in RFI."

The truth is, as we have noted, that the protests thus far have been remarkably genteel - of those 1,000 'detainees', only a dozen were charged, apparently anarchist youth connected to a prominent squat recently closed down by the authorities. For a protest of international dimensions, this is fairly remarkable - one is reminded of the February 15 2003 demonstration in London, in which over 1.5 million people marched, with the streets entirely clogged up (no need for or point to 'kettling' on that one), and remarkably little aggro.

For the *DFP*, the principal 'disproportionality' is in the media response - why are they concentrating on minor clashes with the police when there is a massive outpouring of civic activism which is in danger of being ignored by our leaders as they cook up their dodgy deals? In the first instance, however, we should note that this ludicrous detention is a serious story. In their clamour for the sensational, the US media hit upon a central point: *kettling is arrest*. Whether you are hemmed in on the ice-cold cobbled streets of Copenhagen or a frosty jail cell down-

town, your movements are being entirely restricted; whether the cordon is made up of police officers or barbed wire, a thousand people rounded up is a thousand people rounded up. And in this context, the mass arrest of all these people - without a sniff of a warrant, 'probable cause' or 'due process' - is a serious and troubling thing.

The second thing worth noting is that the pattern of reportage is almost the exact reverse of this year's infamous G20 protests in London. Remember how the version of Ian Tomlinson's death changed - at first, he apparently died of a sudden heart attack; then, as more details leaked out and phone video footage of the man being knocked violently to the ground by police came to light, it was argued that he was drunk and abusive towards the cops. It was only days and even weeks later, after a second coroner's inquiry, that the truth was finally conceded - police tactics had caused the death of a man beyond innocent, who was not even involved in the protests. This time, the media are on it right away.

Liberal climate activists may find the swallowing up of their core message in this coverage troubling. However, the truth is - though the unfortunate activists charged by police horses at the G20 protests may not see it that way - that climate change is a 'special case' for the ruling class. Though global warming scepticism retains a small core of support, the capitalist class has partly internalised the notion that 'something must be done' about catastrophic climate change; it is an issue that needs to be addressed. Even oil companies like Shell now aggressively market their 'greener' products, whereas before they (like tobacco companies, as studies piled up demonstrating the

demon weed's deleterious effect on human health) simply dodged the question, while covertly funding confusionist pseudo-science.

The whole logic of the capitalist system, however, is opposed to any serious measure to limit environmental harm. Capital is value in motion - it succeeds in reproducing itself ultimately only by expanding. So-called capitalist solutions are no solutions at all - emissions trading is obviously a scam, and *can only be a scam*, since if carbon credits are strictly and permanently limited carbon markets are not markets, as no expansion is possible. Capitalism, then, is not seriously interested in saving the world, even if individual capitalist politicians, and even entire wings of bourgeois politics, are sincere in their efforts. Individual will means nothing - the system imposes absolute limits on what can be done. We get these talking shops - Kyoto and now Copenhagen - and every sell-out, lowest-common-denominator lash-up agreement that comes out of them is touted by our leaders as a serious step forward. What else, after all, can they offer us?

So, when dealing with environmental protests, bourgeois politics is in a bit of a jam. It has taken on board, at least officially, the arguments of the most 'bourgeois' climate activists, and so must praise the public-spiritedness of those taking to the streets - but it is unable to produce any results, so, on the other hand, proper distance from demonstrators must be retained. The inevitable result is a bourgeoisified 'green' politics that even a David Cameron can sign up to.

In truth, the 'official' green movement - NGOs and so on - make it easy for the ruling class to play them. NGOs carry something of the charity mindset, and expect individual sacrifices from benevolent souls to add up

to a solution. We hear no end of admonitions from Greenpeace, Friends of the Earth and recently prominent eco-tuff outfit Plane Crazy to fly less, eat less, turn our TVs off standby in order to do our bit for the planet. In this situation, the capitalists and the state can each set themselves up as 'facilitators', to help people live 'greener' lives on the individual, atomised level. In practice, this enables the capitalists to reap endless profits from 'carbon trading' and other snake-oil, and the parties of the state to cultivate a right-on image, while pushing through attacks on living conditions and political rights for the masses. Meanwhile, a million power plants belch smoke and the planet simmers.

In contrast to the petty bourgeois character of such positions, Marxism tackles climate change as what it is - a profoundly *social* problem, which depends on social relations, and requires concerted political action to solve. The fact that most of the 'do your bit' habits urged upon us have *not* seriously taken hold demands an explanation that mainstream greenism cannot give. Why is society profoundly disinclined to reform itself, even when its very existence is threatened by ecological catastrophe? Simply because the immense wealth and power of our rulers depends on a productive apparatus condemned to blindly expand until it breaks down completely; and the dispossession and disenfranchisement faced by most of the rest of humanity pose the question of *class* organisation as a precondition for serious and lasting progressive change, no matter how modest. It is the transformation of these social relations which will allow civilization to survive - and thrive at a level far beyond that of a decaying capitalism ●

TURKEY

Common struggle required

The year is coming to an end amid great uncertainty, reports Esen Uslu

There were high hopes that 2009 would see a further easing of the straitjacket known as the 'constitution, law and institutions' imposed on Turkish society by the fascist military junta following the 1980 coup. The process of harmonisation with European Union legislation created expectations of gradual liberalisation.

Throughout 2009, however, the political Islam-based government of the AKP (Justice and Development Party) has been engaged in a power struggle with the military and civilian bureaucrats who hold sway over the regime and intervene in every aspect of social life. Sections of the military, with their anti-American, pseudo-nationalist rhetoric and illusions of a new world order centred on 'the east' and the Turkic republics of central Asia, have continued to harbour hopes of a return to the glory days of 1980. Especially in 2004-05 there was very threatening junta activity behind the scenes and this has resulted in the 'Ergenekon trials', where a few generals, a spate of lesser officers, members of the media and some hired thugs have been put on trial with the tacit approval of the high command of the Turkish armed forces.

Against this background of trying to establish its liberal credentials, the government has made moves on several fronts.

- The so-called 'Alevi overture', which is supposed to resolve the grievances of the Alevi religious minority, has involved meeting Alevi organisations, religious leaders, intellectuals and politicians in order to gather information on the denial of Alevi rights (as if the AKP had never previously heard of them) and draw up proposals to resolve them. The AKP has also held monthly meetings over the last year to gather the opinion of the clerical establishment of official Sunni Islam, theologians, religious foundations, members of media, etc.

The talking shop nature of the overture soon became apparent, even to the diehard supporters of the government. Not a single practical step to meet the demands of the Alevis has been taken. Not even the order of the European Court of Human Rights condemning the compulsory religious teaching of official Sunni Islam to each and every student in the primary state education system has been complied with.

However, the open-ended talks managed to create sufficient discord among Alevi organisations of various political opinions to throw the joint struggle over previously agreed demands off balance. The leadership of the democratic associations vacillated between the idea of forming an independent political party and taking part in the liberal left party established by the independent member of grand national assembly, Ufuk Uras, with the participation of various lesser social democratic parties, trade unionists and former members of numerous left organisations.

In November the Alevi community took to the streets of Istanbul in answer to the call of the Alevi-Bektashi Federation to voice its basic demands once more. However, the prevailing discord rendered the demonstration less effective and added to the impression that the Alevi fight is not in touch with the other democratic struggles going on within Turkey, especially that of the Kurdish freedom movement.

- The government, determined to remove obstacles to the free flow of Turk-

ish capital and come in line with the foreign policies of the EU and USA, has reformulated its foreign policies. The new catchphrase is 'zero problems with our neighbours'.

The first stage involved the mutual removal of visa requirements with Syria, Jordan, Libya and Albania. The new policy also involved better relations with sub-Saharan Africa, with particular attention paid to oil-rich Sudan.

Another important component was the attempt to reach a tentative initial understanding on establishing direct diplomatic representation with Armenia, plus the opening of rail and road crossings that have been closed since the Armenian war with Azerbaijan and the ongoing occupation of some parts of Azeri territory.

However, like a cat walking on a hot tin roof, the government faces growing Turkish nationalist discontent, backed up by powerful forces within the military-civilian bureaucracy, and whenever it makes a foray it must be prepared to beat a hasty retreat to protect itself from powerful blows from the opposition. In the case of the Armenian overture the retreat only served to confirm the worst fears of the Armenian side.

A memorandum of understanding was signed after considerable US pressure to smooth over the last-minute hitches and glitches. However, to go beyond the first tentative steps will require a far more determined approach, otherwise the 'Armenian overture' will come to an end for the foreseeable future.

- Turkey has been looking over its shoulder to developments in Iraqi Kurdistan, especially concerning the future of the oil-rich Kirkuk region. As a post-occupation settlement draws near, Iraqi Arabs and Kurds have been moving towards a deal, albeit not one the Kurds have strived for. Nevertheless, in order to win its share of the post-war oil extraction deals as well as reconstruction projects, Turkey must improve its relations with the Iraqi Kurdish administration, as well as with the central Iraqi government.

That gave impetus to the Kurdish overture, and initially it involved nothing more than improving relations with the Iraqi Kurdish administration. Soon the scale of the approach to Iraq became apparent, however. Turkey not only established official contacts with the Iraqis and Kurds, but there have been joint Turkey-Iraq cabinet meetings. And those efforts culminated in the signing in mid-October of a total of 48 agreements, memoranda of understanding and protocols, on issues ranging from river-water management and cooperation on energy projects to various trade arrangements. Turkey is to open new consulates in Basra and Mosul, as well as in Erbil, one of the major cities of Iraqi Kurdistan. The deal is referred to as a 'strategic cooperation agreement' oriented to 'integrate both countries' and has the approval and participation of the Kurdish administration.

- One of the 'side benefits' was to persuade the Kurds to put pressure on the PKK (Kurdistan Worker's Party) to end their cross-border raids into Turkey, and seek a peaceful solution to the eternal 'Kurdish problem'. The government was prepared to make certain concessions, compared to the ruthless attitude that has been adopted by the security apparatus.

The first move was to appoint the minister for interior affairs as coordina-

tor of the process and he attempted to seek opinion from other political parties without putting forward any concrete proposals on the part of the government. The nationalist opposition saw through the deception, and started to play the 'I'll show you my hand if you show me yours' game itself.

Eventually the government put forward its six-point plan for the initial stage of the process. Providing that the guerrillas agreed to forgo their arms, the 'remorse clause' of the Turkish penal code would be applied to those guerrillas who "did not take part in any atrocities" and they would not be prosecuted on their return to Turkey.

The government further promised to end the isolation of Abdullah Ocalan, the imprisoned leader of the PKK, by revamping existing facilities on the prison island of Imrali, where he is held and by transferring a small number of hand-picked prisoners to join him. Also the government proposes to restore the citizenship of expelled Kurds living abroad, including those who are in UN-administered refugee camps in Iraq, which are effectively under the control of guerrillas. The security forces will be more (!) compassionate in their dealings with the local population in Kurdistan. Finally legal barriers against the wider use of the Kurdish language will be removed and Kurdish place names restored.

These meagre concessions in exchange for terminating the armed struggle will be acceptable to the guerrillas only if they are regarded as (inadequate) preliminary steps towards a settlement that fully recognises Kurdish national rights. Meanwhile the nationalist opposition whipped up a campaign that bordered on direct incitement to violence against Kurds.

Security forces waded in by killing a young Kurdish girl with a stray rocket or mortar round, and then botching the attempted cover-up. The government pressed on with token gestures such as the prosecution of more members of the army and gendarmerie for crimes (such as summary executions, kidnapping and unlawful confiscations) that have remained unsolved since the 90s.

Ocalan's initiative

The government seemed to be playing for time, but Abdullah Ocalan used the truce declared by the guerrillas over the summer to draw up a 'road map' for a peaceful settlement, the details of which have not been officially revealed.

He also made a masterly political move to regain the initiative by inviting his supporters from Kandil Mountain on the border between Iraq and Iran, where the guerrillas are based, as well as from refugee camps in Iraq and from European countries, to come to Turkey as peace emissaries. The move was designed to put to the test the resolve of the government and resilience of its proposals.

Within a very short time the Kurds declared that 35 people from the refugee camps in Iraq, including nine guerrillas from Kandil Mountain, would come to Turkey. When they arrived at the border they were greeted by a demonstration in excess of 50,000 people waiting in the open air despite the harsh conditions of Kurdistan. The government had arranged for a mobile court to be moved to the border post in order to evaluate the case of arriving Kurds with a view to applying the 'remorse clause' and facilitating their entry.

The triumphant arrival of the guerrillas and the cordial welcome extended to them by the Kurdish people on the road from the border-crossing, as well as at the massive solidarity demonstration in nearby Diyarbakir, were made available to Turkish and international television channels. The facilitating attitude adopted by the security and justice apparatus was certainly noteworthy. Especially in view of the fact that, when the guerrillas were asked if they wished to express remorse, each made a carefully worded declaration to the effect that they felt no regret for past actions: they had arrived in Turkey on the instructions of their leader as peace emissaries to further the ongoing process of finding a solution to end the armed conflict.

There was an immediate backlash with the organisation of nationalist, racist and Kurd-hating demonstrations. The opposition parties withdrew cooperation from the government, while the judiciary and armed forces started to show their discontent.

This caused the government to backtrack. The arrival of peace emissaries from European countries was indefinitely postponed. And further Kurdish arrivals at the southern borders were stopped dead in their tracks. The government complained that the guerrillas had not kept their promise and had acted in a provocative, triumphalist manner.

The government stated that it was not making an overture to the Kurds as such: it was trying to advance democracy in Turkey as a whole. However, it did not offer any new proposal to back up that claim. And 'democratic overture' remained an empty phrase, while the media remained full of the Kurdish overture.

When the matter was eventually discussed at the national assembly, the CHP (the social democrat Republican People's Party, a member of Socialist International) announced its opposition to the policies of the government, and proposed instead a return to the (genocidal) policies implemented in the war against Alevi Kurds of the Dersim region in the late 1930s.

The Kurdish and Alevi masses were in uproar. At the same time Abdullah Ocalan was moved to a new cell, which is considerably smaller than his previous accommodation. So in the name of ending his 10-year isolation he was placed in a more confined space. Suddenly there were large-scale demonstrations, as well as impromptu street battles between the police and stonethrowing youth.

Meanwhile the ongoing case before the constitutional court to proscribe the DTP (Democratic Society Party, the main legal Kurdish political party represented in the national assembly) on the grounds of aiding and abetting a terrorist organisation was coming to its final stages after two years. One of the hawkish ministers of the government made a statement comparing the DTP case with the Herri Batasuna case of the Basque country, and indicating that the DTP has come to the end of the road by showing disrespect to the government's overture.

The constitutional court promptly banned the party, stripped its co-chairs of their immunity as members of assembly, and imposed a five-year ban on participation in party politics for 39 leading DTP members. The president of the court made a passionate speech explaining how meticulously the case had been examined. Then soon after it

was revealed that one member who was banned for five years was not even a member of the DTP. Leyla Zana, a prominent Kurdish politician and former member of the assembly, who has spent 10 years in jail following the previous expulsion of Kurdish members from the assembly in March 1994, was not allowed to be a member of DTP. But she is now banned for a further five years and there is no legal facility to overturn the order.

The 21 DTP members of the assembly participated in the Democratic Society Congress held in Diyarbakir at the weekend. There, with the approval of the participants, they decided to collectively resign as MPs.

Meanwhile the BDP (Peace and Democracy Party), formed as a 'spare wheel' party ready to take part in any elections, even if an early one is called, immediately started to take over the premises of the former DTP. The language used by Kurdish politicians indicates that they will continue to meet any progress towards a peaceful solution midway. But the streets are becoming quickly ungovernable once more. There could be a return to a campaign of atrocities committed by the state security apparatus and its rightwing auxiliaries. While this article was being written, two people were killed and several wounded when a part-time police 'helper' opened fire on a demonstration in Mus province.

Overtures or finale?

While the Armenian, Alevi and Kurdish overtures have come to an abrupt end, the government and the ruling class have no other realistic option but to continue with the slow and controlled process of liberalisation. Foreign and economic policy considerations oblige Turkey to pursue a peaceful, gradual approach.

The nationalist-racist parties may have succeeded in holding back government policies, but today they have no realistic prospect of being elected to office. For the officer corps and civilian bureaucrats now is not the opportune moment for direct intervention, as they continue to exert their pressure behind the scenes.

The Kurdish people are weary of the armed conflict that has lasted more than a quarter of a century, and believe they have seen the light at the end of the tunnel. Their hopes for a quick solution may have been dashed, but their belief in victory has not been diminished in any way. The expectations of the progressive sections of Alevi community also remain unfulfilled.

So, in a nutshell, the stalemate that prevailed at the start of the year has returned at the end of it, despite the quite dizzy speed of development. However, a year of experience has enriched the collective mind of the proletariat of Turkey. The main lesson is, do not expect any voluntary moves towards democracy from the ruling classes or their government. Every inch of concession gained requires hard struggle.

The second and equally important lesson is that the democratic demands and struggles of different sections of society all point in the same direction. The separate struggle for sectional demands in isolation from the whole leads to a dead end. What is required is a joint struggle around a common programme for a secular, democratic republic. And in that sense the fate of Kurdish people is intertwined with the fate of democracy in Turkey. ●

IRAN

Fighting over the corpse

As the two wings of the regime continue to squabble, write **Chris Strafford** and **Yassamine Mather**, the opposition movement grows in radicalism and confidence

There seems to be no end to the crisis which has erupted after Iranian state television showed protesters tearing down or burning images of ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini following the nationwide student protests of December 7. None of the videos revealed the faces of those responsible, they were not linked to any one student demonstration or protest and most people in Iran believe the screening was a deliberate act by supporters of president Mahmoud Ahmadinejad or supreme leader Ali Khamenei - or both - to increase tension and justify further repression. In fact the event has given a new dimension to the current political conflict between the two factions of the regime.

The opposition denies charges that its supporters were responsible for 'desecration' of Khomeini's image. Prosecutors in Tehran claimed a number of people have been arrested and there would be "no mercy towards those who insulted the imam". Ahmadinejad is warning that a "hurricane of the revolutionary anger of the nation" is coming. In a speech on December 13 Khamenei went further: "Some have converted the election campaign into a campaign against the entire system."

The "incident" is being used by conservatives to attack reformist opponents - while the 'green movement' is blaming Ahmadinejad supporters (of course, repeated use of Photoshop to multiply the number of people attending Ahmadinejad rallies has left the government open to accusations of fraud). The two wings of the regime are fighting over Khomeini's corpse.

The supreme leader's pictures are regularly torn and set on fire these days, yet there seemed to be no major outcry about the 'desecration' of the images of god's current representative on earth, as opposed to the first supreme leader. Many in Iran believe the fabrication of the scandal shows a level of desperation in the government and the ruling faction, as various previous attempts to stop the protests have clearly failed.

Irrespective of who is responsible for the "incident", there is no doubt we are witnessing a deliberate escalation of the current conflict by the government and its supporters. This could cost them dear for a number of reasons.

Attempts to blame the 'reformist' opposition seem to have backfired. There is a consensus even amongst the regime's supporters that Mir-Hossein Moussavi, ayatollah Mohammad Khatami and Mehdi Karroubi, who boast of being the genuine disciples of Khomeini, had little to do with the 'desecration' and, of course, if it is true that the imam's picture was deliberately set on fire by hard-line fundamentalists for political gain, they will be the losers in this piece of theatre. It should also be noted that some of Khomeini's family, including his grandchildren, are involved in the opposition reformist movement.

Putting so much focus to the affair carries its own risks. Now that there is nothing sacred about the image of "the imam", the Islamic Republic's icons, values and therefore legitimacy are clearly being

called into question. In fact many amongst Iran's young population never had any 'respect' for Khomeini in the first place and this incident might make them braver and more determined in challenging every aspect of the Islamic regime.

Each day that goes by, the gap between the protesters and the leaders of the 'green movement' increases. The statements of Moussavi, Khatami and Karroubi expressing allegiance to Khomeini will not go down well with many of their own supporters. Moussavi is clearly concerned that he is losing control of the protests, as he keeps warning everyone about the threat of "radicalism". On Monday December 15 he said: "If people's questions were answered and they were not confronted violently, we would not see some of the controversial moves today ... People want an end to the security-obsessed atmosphere: in such an atmosphere radicalism grows."

Vote rigging

Of course, he is right about the increased radicalisation of the protests. The first demonstrations in June were in opposition to vote-rigging. Many of the slogans addressed the issue of electoral fraud and were against Ahmadinejad. The supreme leader's support for his president radicalised the movement, as slogans against the *vali faghish* (Khamenei) started to become more prominent in September and October, despite attempts by 'reformists' to seek compromises with him.

The demonstration of November 4 was very different from those in the summer. Slogans against the entire regime and in particular against Khamenei dominated the marches, not only in Tehran, but also in dozens of other cities. By December 7 the slogans were almost entirely against the supreme leader - it was as though Ahmadinejad did not matter any more. Students shouted, "Mousavi is an excuse! The entire regime is the target!" That is why, even if the 'desecration' of Khomeini's image was staged by the ultra-conservatives, it nevertheless marks a new phase in the protests, one from which both factions of the regime and the protesters

cannot retreat. Ironically this stupid stunt, probably devised by Ahmadinejad supporters, is a risk too far. As one commentator put it this week, what will happen at the next protest? Will they burn the *Koran*?

The regime has also faced an online backlash after the state's news agency published a picture of student activist Majid Tavakoli dressed in a chador, a black, head-to-toe garment worn by Iranian women, as he was trying to escape arrest by the security forces. Hundreds of men, amongst them well known authors, film directors, artists and academics posted pictures of themselves on the internet wearing women's head-scarves as a political statement. The regime claimed Tavakoli had been caught wearing the veil in an attempt to hide himself. However, opposition bloggers insisted that the photo as published had been manipulated. The government was hoping the pictures would humiliate Majid Tavakoli, presumably because all 'macho' men would see the picture as a sign of shame and weakness. Again the scheme backfired: Iranian men of all ages seemed proud to be photographed in headscarves, and Tavakoli's last speech before his arrest is becoming one of the most popular YouTube videos of the recent upsurge.

Tens of thousands of students have continued their protests throughout Iran. Over the weekend youth and workers joined them and further swelled the numbers. It should be noted that, whilst the major media pick up on one or two big protests,

there are others taking place every day in varying forms. One only has to search YouTube or the endless blogs from Iranian students to get a sense of the size and scope of the movement.

Respect MP George Galloway said on June 15 that the protests "will soon fizzle out".¹ How wrong he was. This week actions have taken place at universities in Isfahan, Tehran (where students have begun a hunger strike against the arrest of their comrades and have staged protests to call for the resignation of the principal), Qazvin, Kerman, Al-Zahra, Shiraz, Beheshti (where some brave students waved a red flag), Sharif and Shahrood. High school students in Tehran and Isfahan have also taken to the streets; young women are at the forefront of these demonstrations, with several inspiring videos captured on mobile phones and distributed across the internet.²

Officially the regime says that they arrested 204 students during last week's protests. However, this figure is a lot lower than the reality, as many students were taken to secret detention centres - and a large number of arrests continued to take place afterwards. The show trials that followed the June protests have now been taken off air, but 80 people have been sentenced to prison terms and five have been given the death penalty.

Long-time imprisoned student Mohammad Pourabdollah was sentenced to six years in prison by the Islamic Republic's revolutionary court. A member of the leftwing Students for Freedom and Equality, he was arrested on February 12 and has spent a large part of his incarceration

in solitary confinement and has been tortured by guards and interrogators. His heavy sentence is no doubt intended as a message to students in the opposition movement who raise their head above the parapet.

The solidarity movement needs to condemn these arrests and call for the immediate release of comrade Pourabdollah, a committed anti-imperialist, along with all other political prisoners in Iran. On December 18 Iranian students from the newly established Independent Left Students are set to confront Ahmadinejad at the Copenhagen climate conference.

Nuclear trigger

Iran's nuclear programme has again been the focus of media attention, with the regime testing its medium-range missile, the Sejil-2, on December 16. The Sejil-2 has an alleged range that could hit Israel and all US military bases in the region.

This comes in the same week that intelligence agencies leaked documents to *The Times* claiming the regime is continuing its nuclear weapons programme.³ The document apparently describes the design of the trigger device involving uranium deuteride, which has no civilian use. This comes as talks between the Islamic Republic and the west have ground to a halt.

Irrespective of the truth of the allegations, it is quite clear that the regime is seeking to use the threat of more sanctions and military action by the US or Israel to strengthen its faltering position, and the left should be very clear: any further sanctions that are imposed on Iran will hit those elements that are capable of bringing substantial change in Iran - the working class and the poor. Gordon Brown has already said that further sanction have to be implemented. This is something the anti-war movement must take seriously. Sanctions against Iran are a stepping stone to military aggression ●

Notes

1. <http://blogs.dailycorner.co.uk/georgegalloway/2009/06/you-can-count-on-the-fact-elec.html>.

2. See, for example, www.youtube.com/watch?v=bFgRsCiwhdA.

3. *The Times* December 14.



Majid Tavakoli: now men of all ages are proud to be veiled

REVIEW

A nail in the Zionist coffin

Shlomo Sand *The invention of the Jewish people* Verso, 2009, pp313, £18.99

Shlomo Sand begins his book with a series of personal stories, whose characters all have a connection with himself. There was Gisela, whose mother was taken from Drancy, just outside Paris, straight to Auschwitz, where she was murdered. Despite dying because the Nazis considered her a Jew, her daughter was not recognised as a Jew in Israel because halachically (ie, according to the rabbinical interpretation of Judaism) her mother was not Jewish. Instead Gisela was what she termed a "national bastard".

Then there was Larissa, a Russian immigrant, whose mother also was not Jewish. She could 'return' to Israel because only one grandparent needed to be Jewish (which was how the Nazis too defined a Jew), but she could not marry a Jew in Israel, because personal matters are in the hands of the orthodox rabbinate, for whom a Jewish mother is essential. Instead, like others of her ilk, she has to bear the 'mark of Cain' and try to disguise her status.

Shlomo Sand is a history lecturer at the University of Tel Aviv. He has written a book which not only questions, but demolishes, the ideological foundations of Israel as a Jewish state. Yet, as Sand acknowledges, he is not a historian of Jewish history. He took the task on because "the recognised experts in Jewish history are not in the habit of confronting simple questions" (p20). As he himself admits, in a book on politico-religious myths it is inevitable that he is going to engage in a "high degree of speculation".

The *Bible* - or rather the *Old Testament* (Christian fundamentalists also consider themselves the children of Israel) - has served a nakedly political purpose: the title deeds to Israel. When asked why they are on the land of the Palestinians, the settlers are apt to retort, 'Because god gave it to us'. Unsurprisingly therefore, Sand's book has not been greeted with a rapturous welcome by the Zionist movement.

In fact it is a mixed feast. Its first chapter on nationalism sometimes borders on the incomprehensible. He describes how nationalism in Europe could take an ethnic, biologically pure form, as well as emancipation and the inclusive political citizenship of France. Take, for example, the following: "Nationalism might not have literally invented nations ... but neither was it invented by them, or by the 'peoples' who preceded them. Without nationalism and its political and intellectual instruments, nations would not have come into being" (p45).

The major weakness of Sand's book is that he is not a historical materialist

or Marxist (although one of the ironies of the secular, 'Marxist' Zionists was that they based their claim to the 'Land of Israel' - Eretz Yisrael - on the promise of a god whose existence they denied). His analysis is subjective and empirical, without at times any explanation as to why, for instance, the Jews have survived as an identifiable religious-political community.

Yet Sand's assault on the biblical foundations of Zionism comes as a far greater shock to the Zionist psyche than the impact of Israel's new historians such as Ilan Pappe and Benny Morris, who destroyed the myths that alleged that the Palestinians went into voluntary exile in 1947-49 in order to facilitate an attack on the Israeli state. The acceptance that the Palestinians were expelled at the point of a gun is quite compatible with the idea of that the Zionists had a right to the land of Palestine. Sand's argument is on an altogether different plane. It strips Zionism of its self-serving mythical identity, leaving it historically and culturally naked.

These myths include the idea that a Jewish nation has existed for over 2,000 years and that the Jewish population of Palestine was exiled after the fall of the second temple in 70AD (pp20-21); that the strong and unified kingdom of David and Solomon was the golden age of Jewish settlement in Palestine (as opposed to David being a minor hill chieftain); and that Judaism was never a proselytising religion. Indeed Solomon (and Joshua) probably never even existed.

As Sand admits, he has conducted no new research. Rather he has reorganised the existing knowledge and questioned the assumptions that others have taken for granted. In particular he destroys the idea that the *Old Testament* is a historical record rather than a collection of stories and parables written between the 6th and 3rd centuries BCE. And he also points out that the emperor has no clothes. Much time, energy and money has been spent on archaeological digs in order to 'prove' the ancient myths true. Yigael Yadin, former chief of staff and deputy prime minister under Menachem Begin was the key figure in this regard. Archaeology in Israel has served a nakedly nationalist agenda and yet, despite all, it has failed to come up with any evidence that supports the myths of the *Bible*.

Instead what has happened is best described in the analogy that Sand uses. The political archaeologists first fired their arrow and then they painted the target around it! So it is with the *Bible*. Its accuracy as a historical record is taken as read, and the only point of archaeology is to prove that which everyone knows is true.

Although, or maybe because, it challenges everything Israelis grew up to believe in, Sand's book has had quite a staggering impact, being in Israel's best-seller lists for 19 weeks before being reprinted in French and now English.

Of course, the fact that this book has been written by someone who is Israeli and Jewish has not prevented the normal accusations of anti-Semitism! Mark Gardener of the Zionist Community Security Trust commented, in relation to Sand's recent tour in Britain, that "There are many ways, often subtle, in which

anti-Israel or anti-Zionist debate can have an anti-Jewish impact." (*Jerusalem Post* November 15).

Sand freely admits that he may have made mistakes and asks his critics for corrections. He is a specialist in French history, so this is not his area of academic expertise. Unfortunately, however, some of his mistakes should have been spotted before publication. For example, he states that the founder of 'Marxist' Zionism, Ber Borochov, abandoned his support for the Palestinians becoming part of the settler Israeli Jewish nation after the 1929 pogroms in Palestine (p262). Which is quite remarkable considering Borochov died in December 1917! Likewise Sand garbles the constitution structures of the United Kingdom, which came into existence in 1801, not 1707, and Northern Ireland which came into existence with partition in 1921-22, not 1801 (p301).

As Sand notes from the outset, there is an irony in the fact that today those who deny Jews form a separate nation are accused of anti-Semitism, whereas "there were times in Europe when anyone who argued that all Jews belong to a nation of alien origin would have been classified at once as an anti-Semite" (p21).

Of course, all nations produce their own historical myths, but there are few that consciously use these myths in order to justify the dispossession of another people by claiming that they have a prior right to the land. This is why Zionism is today *sui generis*.

Sand describes the recent compilation of Jewish history and Zionist mythology from Heinrich Graetz and Simon Dubnow (the latter murdered by the Nazis in Riga) to the Zionist historians Ben Zion Dinur and Yitzhak Baer of the Hebrew University in Jerusalem. In Israel nothing was left to chance. Just as the state-sponsored holocaust museum, Yad Vashem, is dedicated to churning out an approved history of the genocide, with all mention of Zionism's record of collaboration with the Nazis cleaned away, so from 1925 onwards there was a department of history and a separate department of Jewish history in first the Hebrew University then every other Israeli university (p102).

The outrage of Zionist functionaries at Sand's book is understandable. What he says is not new, albeit accessible to only a few. Sand's great achievement lies in writing a book which is a best-seller and in using his academic credentials to demolish layer upon layer of Zionist and Christian mythology.

The 'return' of Jews to Israel was a romantic Christian idea, whose effect was to underpin British imperial interests in the Middle East. Jews in their overwhelming majority were opposed to the idea of 'reclaiming' Zion. For example, when they fled the Russian pogroms from the middle of the 19th century to 1914, of the estimated 2.5 million who emigrated, barely 2% went to Palestine. Nearly all went to the United States.

In the early days of Zionist settlement, "the idea that the bulk of the local population descended from the Judeans was accepted by a good many" (p183). Many Hebrew farmers converted first to Christianity and then, with the Muslim invasion of the 7th century, to Islam. Baer and Dinur, knowing full well that the exile of Jews after the fall of the temple in 70AD was a myth, ascribe to the Muslim invaders the expulsion of the vast majority of Jews. The purpose in so doing is in part to strengthen the Zionist claim to

Palestine by reducing the period when the Jewish 'nation' was exiled. In fact the still large Hebrew population welcomed the Muslim invaders for freeing them from the religious tyranny of the Christian Byzantine empire.

It is well known that there is no evidence for the exodus of Jews from Egypt in the 13th century BCE and the wandering of some three million Jews for 40 years in the Sinai desert (p118). Apart from the impossibility of sustaining such large numbers of people over such a period of time in such an environment, the myth omits a small, yet salient, fact - that Canaan at the time was ruled by the very same Egyptian pharaohs. Far from leading them into the Promised Land, Moses appears to have led the children of Israel from the frying pan into the fire!

Likewise the myth of the Roman deportation of Palestine's Jews after the fall of the second temple in 70AD. Even prior to the sacking of the temple, the vast majority of Jews had already emigrated to the Hellenised cities of Alexandria, Damascus, etc. Rome itself had a large Jewish population. Sand cites Israel Yuval, a Hebrew University historian, to show that the myth of exile was Christian in origin with "the Jews being exiled in punishment for their rejection and crucifixion of Jesus" (p134). "Exile therefore was not a location away from the homeland, but a condition that is not salvation" (p135). Its opposite was messianism and the fires of Megiddo. Zion was not a physical location and the 'return to Zion' simply meant, as Bernard Lazarre put it, that next year we will be free.

Other myths that Sand tackles include the idea that Judaism was never a proselytising religion. On the contrary the rapid growth in the Jewish communities of the Mediterranean, to some four millions in the first century AD, could only be accounted for by the conversion, forcible at times, of neighbouring tribes and peoples. For example the Hasmonean theocracy "used the sword to spread not only its territorial domain, but also its religious following" (p157). Rabbinical Judaism, whose function was not dissimilar to that of the Protestant reformation, virtually dispensed with the *Old Testament* as the oral law, and *halacha*, the *Talmud* and *Mishneh*, took precedence. Even the tracing of Jewish descent via the mother was relatively recent. As Sand points out, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob all took non-Israelite wives - including from their enemies, the Moabites and Edomites - yet their offspring remained Jewish.

Sand convincingly explains how Zionism adopted as its own the racial doctrines of the late 19th century. However, he makes heavy weather of the concept of nationalism, wrongly describing Zionism as yet another form of European nationalism. He accepts both the Zionist concept of an unrelenting and unchanging anti-Semitism and that the key motor of anti-Semitism lay in Christianity. He rightly ridicules the Zionist attempt to find a 'Jewish gene' and the dabbling in the racial sciences and eugenics by the key figures of Zionist history, such as Arthur Ruppiner, and the 'blood and soil' Zionism of Martin Buber, yet his own treatment of nationalism is distinctly ahistorical.

Sand describes how, far from the Hebrews coming into conflict with Greek colonisation, it was precisely the Hellenising of Palestine's Jews which preserved the Hebrews. Alexandria, which contained nearly a million Jews, was the centre of the Hel-

lenic world: "If the junction of Zion and Alexandria produced a universalist outlook, the junction of Judea and Babylonia gave rise to Pharisee Judaism" - rule by the rabbis.

Sand relates the story of European Jews as having originated primarily in the Khazar kingdom, located between the Caspian Sea from the 9th to the 12th century. Sandwiched between Christian Europe and the Muslim east, the rulers of this kingdom took a conscious decision to convert to Judaism because they were a trading people. Yet from 1951 to the present day, not one historical work about the Khazars has appeared in Hebrew. It simply does not fit with the nationalist message (p235).

And this is the major problem with Sand's book. Despite being a member in his earlier days of the Socialist Organisation in Israel (Matzpen), Sand eschews a materialist approach to Jewish history. He describes how the Jewish religion moved from an open to a closed system, where converts were not welcome, but he provides no explanation. Neither does he offer any explanation for the survival of Jewish people throughout the post-temple period.

There is little in this book that was not in Abram Leon's classic *The Jewish question - a Marxist interpretation* - written in 1940, as the Nazis were conquering Belgium. Why had the Jews survived? Not because of their religion, but because of their distinctive socio-economic role as the agents of money in a society based primarily on use-values. Far from religion being the key factor, the opposite was the case. The religion survived because of the people, yet, as the Jewish people of eastern Europe changed, so too did the religion. The failure to ask the question 'why' and to understand the subsequent historical development of Europe's Jews in particular is the major omission of Sand's book.

Indeed his understanding of nationalism, to which he devotes a chapter, is a major weakness of the book. Sand seems puzzled by the fact that nationalism could not only be all-inclusive, as with the French Revolution, but also backward and ethnicised. He fails to see that the bourgeoisie, once it had attained political independence, devoted its energies to fighting the very 'mob' that had enabled it gain ascendancy over the aristocracy. For example, in Britain the enlightened politics of Thomas MacCauley gave way to the racial determinism of social Darwinism and James Hunt and Francis Galton of the London Anthropological Society, as colonial rebellion in Jamaica and India led to the development of eugenics and 'scientific' racism as the ideological justification of imperialist subjugation. So it was that in France the revolution ended up with the Dreyfus affair.

Sand speaks of the "horrible relapse" of culturally inclusive nationalism that was consequent on the Dreyfus affair during World War II. Yet despite the horrors of the Vichy collaboration with the Nazis, France had one of the highest survival rates of Jews of any country in Europe - some 75%. This was a posthumous victory for the Dreyfusards. Yet Sand looks for an explanation not in social forces, but in "the Italian origin of Emile Zola" (p254).

However, despite the telling lack of any analytical framework, this is an important book - one that hammers another nail into Zionism's ideological coffin ●

Tony Greenstein



Shlomo Sand

IRELAND

Church attempt to re-invent is an insult

Anne Mc Shane looks at the beleaguered Catholic establishment

A major damage-limitation exercise has been embarked on by church authorities to try and resolve the crisis provoked by the publication of the recent Murphy report into abuse and cover-up in the Dublin archdiocese.

Still reeling from the fallout from the Ryan report in August - which revealed endemic physical and sexual abuse of children in religious institutions - the clergy are well aware that it is only a matter of time before a fresh controversy emerges. Yet another report, this time into the Cloyne diocese, is due for publication. Pressure has now intensified on the government to extend the inquiry nationally.

This present crisis is unprecedented. Religious influence has waned significantly since revelations of abuse first surfaced in the 1990s, but now the church is institutionally discredited. De Valera, the architect of the 1937 constitution and champion of a 'Catholic state for a Catholic people', would be spinning in his grave. The priests and bishops who have preached their reactionary and oppressive morality for decades are themselves deeply despised.

Yet the church's unique position within the constitution remains. And its leaders are determined to do whatever it takes to maintain the status quo. They are dutifully supported by the taoiseach, Brian Cowen, who has rushed to their rescue. He has called on church leaders to take action to "rebuild moral authority" and redeem itself in the eyes of the population. He has also tried to shirk the central issue by claiming that parents should take responsibility for making sure such abuse does not happen again. The prospect of secularism is anathema to him - his role is to safeguard the current religious establishment and the Irish state.

Conscious of the need for action, cardinal Sean Brady and archbishop Diarmuid Martin hot-footed it to the Vatican last week. After days of talks they emerged on December 11 with a statement from the pope. The "holy father" was apparently deeply traumatised and shocked by the Murphy report. But this is the same man who as head of the Vatican Congregation



Pope: in denial

of the Doctrine of the Faith until 2005, actually oversaw and stage-managed the cover-up (see my previous article, 'Child abuse, the church and the Irish state', December 3). Victim support groups have quite rightly condemned his pronouncements as self-serving and an insult to our intelligence.

Yet more significant has been the announcement that the pope will be writing a 'pastoral letter' to the faithful in Ireland. Such letters from the Vatican are very rare and usually reserved for emergency situations. This particular disaster recovery requires new 'initiatives' - which will be set out in that letter - that can allow the church to 'renew' itself and move on. The involvement of the laity in the affairs of the church is to be encouraged in an effort to make it appear more accountable. But there will be no retreat for the church from education - where it controls over 80% of schools - or other areas of influence within the state.

This attempt at a whitewash must be met with clear and militant secular demands. There must be nothing less than a complete separation of church and state. All religious indoctrination must be removed from the

school curriculum. Children are currently instructed and prepared at school for 'holy communion' and 'confirmation' ceremonies. Parents are given little choice except to acquiesce in this religious programming of their children - it is unthinkable to object. Instead children should be liberated from all state compulsion to become practising Catholics. Religious ideas and the rites that flow from them must be a private matter.

We need a campaign to confront the 1937 constitution and in particular to eliminate articles within it that uphold the church's dominance: eg, the 'sanctity of the family' and the right to life of the 'unborn'. This implies a direct confrontation of the status quo. We must take on the clerical-state alliance and fight for a democratic, secular republic. This is not a task that can be left until socialism. Indeed we will not achieve socialism or working class rule in Ireland unless we challenge the position and influence of established religion. History should teach us just what a crucial role it has played - and continues to play - in our oppression and subjugation. We have everything to gain from the separation of church and state. The clerical state reaches deep into all aspects of our lives and self-liberation is impossible so long as it remains in place.

There are other developments that should be linked to the struggle for secular change from below. A challenge is currently before the European Court against the state ban on abortion. The case has been brought by three women who say that their human rights have been violated because they were forced to travel abroad for terminations. At the same time the Irish supreme court has refused to extend the constitutional 'right to life' to frozen embryos. Pro-life groups are outraged and pledge to wage an intense campaign against the ruling - but their allies within the church are perhaps more preoccupied by their own problems at present.

We in the left can link up these issues with a programme to confront how we are ruled and substitute working class democracy for the theocratic state. ●

Union bosses refuse to fight

The level of frustration at the cuts savagely imposed in the December 9 budget is huge. The poorest and most vulnerable in society have been targeted in across-the-board attacks. The unemployed in particular have suffered greatly and young claimants have had their benefits cut in half. Rent allowances have also been slashed, while child benefit is cut by 16%, further increasing the burden on families.

Public sector workers have also been hit with a further major cut in wages. Their salaries are to be reduced by between 5% and 15% - with the legislation due to be voted through on December 16. A whole raft of measures is being enacted whose effect will be to further impoverish the working class. Of course, that is precisely the intention of government. The current recession is being used as an opportunity to shift the burden of taxation away from welfare and make our class pay for the crisis. There are plenty of areas where cuts have *not* been made. These include ministerial perks, as well as (pertinently in the present political climate) the maintenance of an embassy in the Vatican.

The inability of the trade union leadership to resist - despite overwhelming votes from their members for action, mass dem-

onstrations and a huge nationwide turnout on the public sector strike on November 24 - is loudly and rightly criticised by the left. The Irish Congress of Trade Unions (Ictu) called off the follow-up strike on December 3 amid claims that a deal had almost been reached with the government. And what a deal ... public sector workers would have had to take 12 days compulsory unpaid leave in 2010.

Obviously this was a deal far more in the interests of the bureaucrats than their members. Crucially it would have allowed them to remain in social partnership, satisfied that their members were 'sharing the pain'. But the government was having none of it. At the 11th hour it pulled out of talks and announced that there would be no compromise and the budget it had prepared would go ahead.

Union leaders are now out in the cold. Aggravated by such unfair treatment, they warn the government of a winter of discontent from January. Their members will not put up with the wage cuts. But their members are actually demoralised by *their* actions. Everybody knew the government wanted to make massive cuts. What they did not expect is that union leaders would be prepared to agree to them to the extent that they did.

But the role of the labour bureaucracy is precisely to compromise with capitalism. And the Irish trade union movement in particular is tied in very securely to the establishment and determined to stay there. The left must not sow any illusions in this leadership but aim to construct an alternative. Rank and file organisation in the unions is vital. But the essential question remains the need for a political party for our class. Such a party holds out the possibility of decisively shifting the balance of forces.

And while there is no doubt demoralisation, the struggle continues. For the first time in their history, the Garda Representative Association has ballotled for strike action to resist the cuts. The ballot is illegal and any strike action would be unprecedented. But it is the first time in the history of the state that the gardai have faced a wage cut and they are defiant, despite severe warnings from government.

More struggles certainly lie ahead. The working class has shown its willingness to resist. But trade union struggles are not enough to win - this has been borne out by this latest debacle. We need political unity around a democratic working class programme. ●

What we fight for

■ Our central aim is the organisation of communists, revolutionary socialists and all politically advanced workers into a Communist Party. Without organisation the working class is nothing; with the highest form of organisation it is everything.

■ The Provisional Central Committee organises members of the Communist Party, but there exists no real Communist Party today. There are many so-called 'parties' on the left. In reality they are confessional sects. Members who disagree with the prescribed 'line' are expected to gag themselves in public. Either that or face expulsion.

■ Communists operate according to the principles of democratic centralism. Through ongoing debate we seek to achieve unity in action and a common world outlook. As long as they support agreed actions, members have the right to speak openly and form temporary or permanent factions.

■ Communists oppose the US-UK occupation of Iraq and stand against all imperialist wars but constantly strive to bring to the fore the fundamental question - ending war is bound up with ending capitalism.

■ Communists are internationalists. Everywhere we strive for the closest unity and agreement of working class and progressive parties of all countries. We oppose every manifestation of national sectionalism. It is an internationalist duty to uphold the principle, 'One state, one party'. To the extent that the European Union becomes a state then that necessitates EU-wide trade unions and a Communist Party of the EU.

■ The working class must be organised globally. Without a global Communist Party, a Communist International, the struggle against capital is weakened and lacks coordination.

■ Communists have no interest apart from the working class as a whole. They differ only in recognising the importance of Marxism as a guide to practice. That theory is no dogma, but must be constantly added to and enriched.

■ Capitalism in its ceaseless search for profit puts the future of humanity at risk. Capitalism is synonymous with war, pollution, exploitation and crisis. As a global system capitalism can only be superseded globally. All forms of nationalist socialism are reactionary and anti-working class.

■ The capitalist class will never willingly allow their wealth and power to be taken away by a parliamentary vote. They will resist using every means at their disposal. Communists favour using parliament and winning the biggest possible working class representation. But workers must be ready to make revolution - peacefully if we can, forcibly if we must.

■ Communists fight for extreme democracy in all spheres of society. Democracy must be given a social content.

■ We will use the most militant methods objective circumstances allow to achieve a federal republic of England, Scotland and Wales, a united, federal Ireland and a United States of Europe.

■ Communists favour industrial unions. Bureaucracy and class compromise must be fought and the trade unions transformed into schools for communism.

■ Communists are champions of the oppressed. Women's oppression, combating racism and chauvinism, and the struggle for peace and ecological sustainability are just as much working class questions as pay, trade union rights and demands for high-quality health, housing and education.

■ Socialism represents victory in the battle for democracy. It is the rule of the working class. Socialism is either democratic or, as with Stalin's Soviet Union, it turns into its opposite.

■ Socialism is the first stage of the worldwide transition to communism - a system which knows neither wars, exploitation, money, classes, states nor nations. Communism is general freedom and the real beginning of human history.

■ All who accept these principles are urged to join the Communist Party.

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**Left disarray and
Salmond's white
paper on
Scotland's future**

Make a federal republic fifth option

A little over 10 years since the Scottish parliament first came into being, the Scottish National Party revealed its white paper, putting forward the options for constitutional reform in Scotland. The paper, published on November 30 (St Andrew's day), follows on from the SNP's 'national debate' on the question of independence.

The nationalists hope to pass a bill through the Scottish parliament calling for a referendum on the national question to be held next year. The SNP is trying to persuade the other main parties in the parliament, where it has no majority, of course, to support its referendum proposal by offering at a multi-option ballot paper rather than a clear-cut 'yes' or 'no' to independence.

The SNP's white paper considers four options for the constitutional future of Scotland. Firstly, the status quo, secondly, Scotland retains its current responsibilities, with gradual evolution in response to particular events or pressures. Thirdly, implementing the recommendations of the Commission on Scottish Devolution - the maximum range of responsibilities - while remaining in the United Kingdom (known as 'devolution max' or 'independence light'). Or, fourthly, full independence. The nationalists favour the latter option, although, bizarrely, the UK monarch would remain head of state. Incidentally, the Scottish parliament does not have the power to grant Scotland independence. If a majority of people voted for such an option in a referendum, the best the nationalists could offer would be to begin negotiations with Westminster on the subject.

Despite the courting by the SNP minority government of the 'unionist parties', the referendum proposal will not be get through the parliament - the bill will not be supported by any of the main parties, multi-option or not. Labour, Tories and Liberal Democrats all declare that constitutional reform is not a major question and the parliament should focus its energies on dealing with the effects of recession. Of course, there are elements of the left that take an equivalent view - that the working class should not concern itself with questions of constitutional change, but rather deal only with 'real' working class issues like wages, jobs and cuts.

But the question of Scottish independence is not going to go away. At some point in the next few years people in Scotland could be asked to vote on the constitutional question of devolution and independence, so it is important that the left engages in the debate and takes up a principled position. Moreover, it is important that the left recognises that the working class, if it is to become a hegemonic class, must be politically equipped to deal with such questions.

So what position should communists take? Well, there are two separate questions to be addressed here. Firstly, should we support the call for a referendum? And, secondly, what position do we take as regards backing any of the options on the ballot paper?



Alex Salmond: four options on offer

The fight for socialism is inextricably linked to the fight for democracy. It would be thoroughly undemocratic to oppose the very idea of a referendum on what is, whatever the mainstream UK parties say, a key question in Scotland. That said, the campaign for a referendum is bound up with separatism. In current circumstances it would be tactically unwise to effectively give our backing to the nationalist movement by actively campaigning for a referendum. However, should support for a referendum become more widespread, it is important in the interests of democracy that we support the right of people in Scotland to have their say on the matter.

So how can we engage with the referendum debate in a principled way without pandering to nationalism, while still championing democratic rights? The left in Scotland has not had a good record on this matter so far. Its organisations have adopted a position that attempts to be more nationalist than the nationalists themselves. The Scottish Socialist Party and Solidarity demanded an immediate referendum on the question, even though they knew the SNP was in no position to deliver it and there would be no chance of a 'yes' vote.

Both organisations, of course, back

a vote for independence, as both ridiculously imagine Scottish independence will help further the cause of socialism - rather than a militant fight for the greatest possible unity of our class. Solidarity makes it clear it will be fighting for an independent socialist Scotland - even though socialism will not, of course, be on the ballot paper. Never mind - they will just go ahead and place their crosses against the option for an independent Scottish monarchy.

To put the word 'socialist' between 'independent' and 'Scotland' is meaningless sloganising, which attempts to justify a thoroughly unprincipled position. As experienced comrades in Solidarity well know, socialism within the confines of one country is not possible. Those Trotskyists who have spent decades trying to distance themselves from the legacy of the Soviet Union ought to know better than to promote such a concept.

As for the Scottish Socialist Party, there is not even an attempt to mask its left nationalism, as it would urge MSPs to back the referendum bill as a step towards the key aim of Scottish independence.

According to an article by Eileen Boyle in *Socialist Worker*, the Socialist Workers Party, whose comrades in

Scotland remain unenthusiastic members of Solidarity, will almost certainly support a 'yes' vote too. Comrade Boyle seems a little confused as to why it is that working class people should back independence. She does not believe that this will deliver an independent socialist Scotland "so beloved of some sections of the Scottish left". In fact, she accepts that the working class in Scotland would "continue to be exploited by Scottish and international bosses alike". Her main argument for calling for a vote for Scottish independence seems to be that the union has a history of exploitation of workers both at home and abroad and has only ever served the interests of the ruling class. She argues that "socialist should have no interest in maintaining the unity of this state" (December 5).

In the latest SWP *Pre-conference Bulletin* (No3), a certain "Neil (Edinburgh)" contends that, while "the party as a whole has no formal position agreed by national conference", the SWP "approach in Scotland is ... tactical, as no questions of principle are involved". He then goes on to identify one such question of principle when he states: "... some well-meaning, but deluded, members of the Labour Party will argue that the issue is the unity of the British working class", when actually it is about "the virtues of white, Christian, imperial Britain, alloyed with a little tame multiculturalism at best." In fact "there is no reason why workers in Scotland could not belong to the same unions in the rest of the United Kingdom."

In other words, the "unity of the British working class" - which, strangely, is a demand he associates only with Labour Party members - is perceived as merely unity in the workplace against the bosses, not the *unity of our class against the state*. Comrade Neil concludes that by campaigning for a 'yes' vote socialists will "neutralise the issue of independence". I must say that campaigning for independence is a peculiar way of neutralising the issue.

These comrades fail to recognise

that it is important we do not advocate separation because we *do* have an interest in maintaining such unity of the working class.

Like Neil, comrade Boyle is of the opinion that socialists can "never defend the union", and she is right that we should never defend the ruling class, the monarchy, the House of Lords and the like. Neither can we support an imposed unity and the denial of self-determination or take national pride in British imperialism. But we would surely defend the unity of the working class and the historical struggles that the working class across Britain have fought against our ruling class.

If we are to have a genuine discussion on constitutional issues, we must raise the question of the constitutional monarchy and the democratic fight for republicanism. Not

from the nationalistic and deeply misguided view of a 'Scottish socialist republic', as envisaged by the SSP and others, which would divide the historically constituted working class in Britain, as well as promote the false concept of socialism within the boundaries of one small country. Instead, the left must see the demand for republicanism as part of the democratic fight not only for the removal of the monarch as head of state, but also for the scrapping of the whole constitutional monarchy system of government: unaccountable MPs, the 'checks and balances' against democracy of the second chamber, the system of patronage, the state church, the standing army.

We must recognise that there are national antagonisms within the UK and actively engage with the national question. We must link it to the question of republican democracy, championing the democratic right to self-determination without advocating separatism. We should insist that the option of a federal republic - the only way in current circumstances to promote self-determination while upholding working class unity - must be on any referendum ballot paper •

Sarah McDonald

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