



weekly **worker**



**Karl Popper, teleology,
predictability, modes of
production and Jairus Banaji**

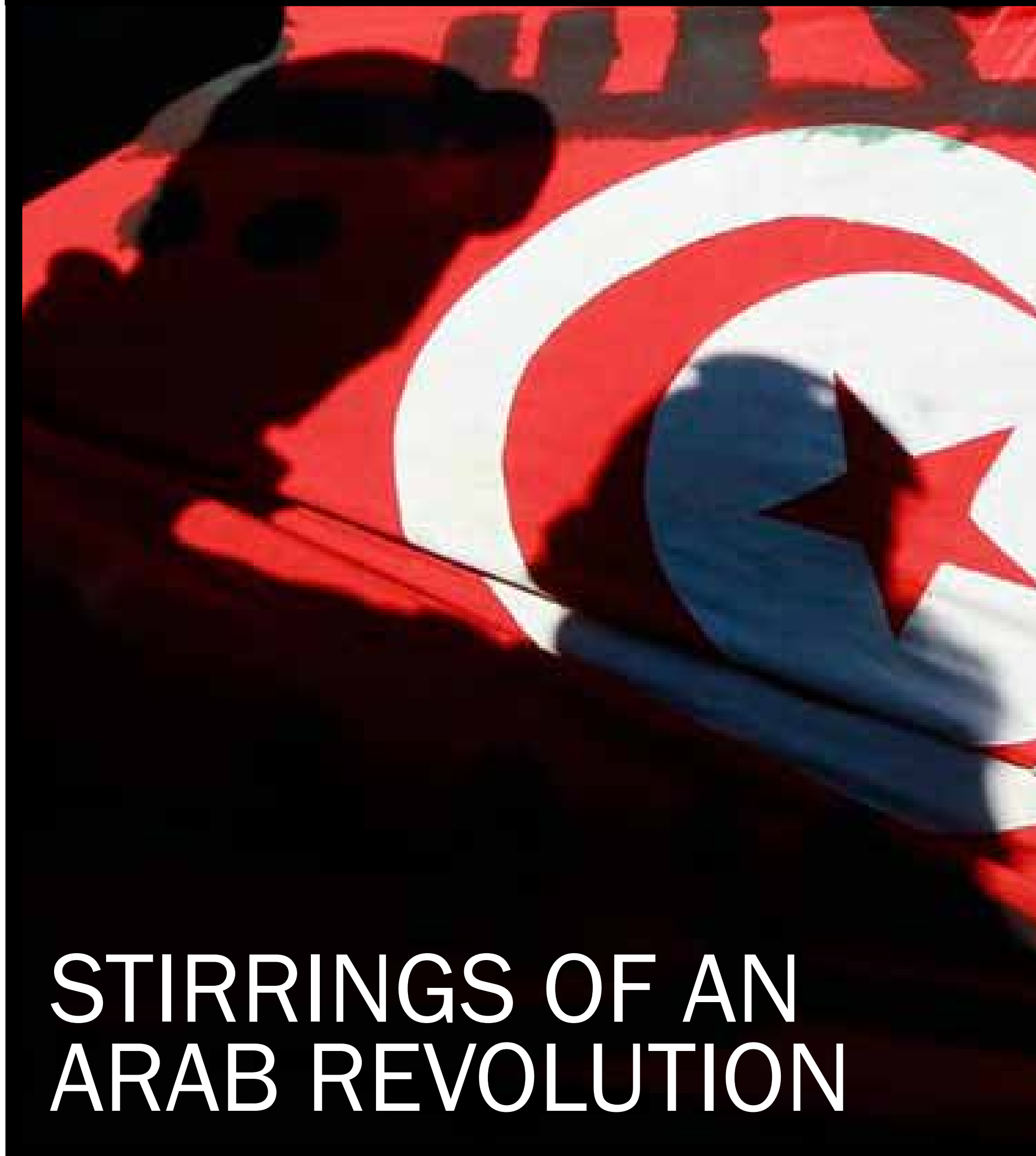
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STIRRINGS OF AN ARAB REVOLUTION

LETTERS



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

Hip hop action

Regional TUCs are expecting 300,000 to converge on central London on March 26. It should be an interesting day. While stewards are being recruited in liaison with police to stop any repeat of what happened to Millbank, there'll be thousands of us with other ideas. If an NUS demonstration of 30,000 can accidentally demolish the Tory Party HQ, what might 300,000 achieve?

In January, anarchists from around Britain met in Manchester to form a 'network of networks' called 'Network X'. It was agreed to mobilise for direct action on March 26. "This is a major step forward for the anarchist movement," quipped Class War's Ian Bone, "being the first time anarchist groups have agreed to a central command since Barcelona in 1936." A kaleidoscope of groups, many of recent invention, is planning street theatre, effigies and spectacles for the big day.

In one occupied art college I visited, a gigantic Trojan horse - inevitably a carthorse! - was being constructed by students as an 'alternative TUC'; this will head an early morning feeder procession from Camberwell to join the march.

While sectarian divisions remain, most recognise that the best remedy is joint action. In addition to the various Trotskyist fronts, horizontal networks of all kinds are contributing to a rich tapestry of national and local anti-cuts coalitions. The big idea is that, whenever a town hall is occupied, it becomes a 'people's assembly'. A still bigger idea is to recycle schools, libraries, workplaces and housing estates as we approach March 26, perhaps even barricading whole neighbourhoods to host people's assemblies and establish Tory-free zones.

Among other prominent bodies preparing direct action on March 26 is the London Student Assembly, initially led and inspired by students, but now open to everyone. A series of anti-EMA abolition and other anti-cuts demonstrations are being planned by this assembly as stepping stones toward the big day.

Direct action endorsements from trades union and Labour Party branches are yet to come, but I detect a dwindling appetite everywhere for the TUC's determination to restrict us to their speechifying after marching from A to B. Too many of us remember the two million-strong anti-war demonstration of 2003, when we all behaved peacefully and were totally ignored. The RMT won't be the only union to encourage some kind of direct action on March 26.

So what exactly is the plan? One idea, dubbed 'Battle of Britain', is to distribute 30 or so direct action blocs all along the march - for example, an RMT contingent, a Lewisham Against the Cuts bloc, a Newcastle Student Assembly contingent, and so forth. Then, say, at 2.02 pm precisely, the 'Battle of Britain' begins. We hear a World War II air raid siren accompanied by smoke flares all along the route. At that point, in each bloc, everyone sits in a circle to convene a people's assembly.

If all goes to plan, each bloc will have prepared by bringing its own megaphone, pair of stepladders, contingent of counter-stewards, hip hop sound system, tea-making equipment, etc. So there would be 30 different people's assemblies along the route.

The idea is to demonstrate quite simply that we are ungovernable. We do this for an hour, before agreeing to move on. Among other things, the

hour is a rehearsal for 'Earth Hour' later that same evening ('Earth Hour' is the World Wildlife Fund's annual synchronised 'switch off the lights' action from 8.30 to 9.30 pm, aimed at cutting light pollution and combating climate change). Brendan Barber (or anyone else from the TUC) could be invited to explain to us why we should follow him to Hyde Park and go quietly home. Then those who wish can proceed in that direction. The rest of us may have other ideas arising from decisions made during the assemblies.

The cuts proposed by this ConDem government are savage. Should they succeed, everything we've built since 1948 will be destroyed. Yet there is much good news. School kids are now in the lead, with the rest of the country behind them. This is a weak government, riddled with divisions and lacking a shred of legitimacy. Together we can bring it down. Direct action on the streets - as shown during the poll tax riot of 1990 - is the only language these people understand.

Further information is available on the web at www.earthhour.org, <http://networkxuk.wordpress.com> and <http://meltdown.uk.net>.

Chris Knight
email

Len's bluster

The Guardian's Matthew Taylor reports that Unite general secretary Len McCluskey has vowed to work with students to fight the government's austerity agenda.

Noting that Unite has signed up to the Coalition of Resistance, Taylor quotes McCluskey as saying: "Unless people are convinced... that there is a coherent alternative to the Cameron-Clegg class-war austerity, then getting millions into action will remain a pipe dream". After praising Ed Miliband for "drawing a line under the party's Blairite past", McCluskey said that a "key part" of that alternative must be a rejection of the need for cuts: "What do we want? Fewer cuts later on", is not a slogan to set the blood coursing" (December 19).

But behind the bluster and rhetoric from McCluskey here is what he is really planning behind the scenes. This is from a report (anonymous, of course) of Unite's instructions to its councillors to carry out all the cuts by setting a legal budget, whilst hypocritically protesting:

"I was at a Unite councillors network meeting on November 12 and there were about 50 councillors present, including a number of council leaders, Labour group leaders, etc. At this meeting it was made very clear that Unite does not expect or support illegal budgets this time round. It was also made clear that councillors should implement the cuts, but what was expected was that they would involve the unions (all of them) to try and mitigate the effects. What Unite, along with the Labour Party, would do is continue to campaign against the cuts... Gail Cartmell was the main union speaker and I must say I was surprised just how strong the 'toe the line' message was. But it went down very well with those at the meeting!"

In an interview with *The Socialist* after his rousing anti-cuts speech at the Coalition of Resistance conference in November, Len set out his vision of the road forward: "Our task is to reject the cuts - not only because they're morally wrong and economically dangerous: that's not good enough. We can't just sloganise against the cuts, we have to explain that there is an alternative." For McCluskey this consists of "economic growth and dealing with tax". He said: "We have to put people before profit. The People's Charter has demands about a fairer tax system and

spells out alternatives" (December 1).

Note, however, that this is a long-term strategy. In the here and now there is no alternative apparently, because that would involve refusing to set a legal budget and encouraging strikes and occupations to stop them right now! The People's Charter makes no demands on union leaders to resist the cuts right now - all is postulated on the parliamentary road to socialism, and getting a left Labour government elected some time in the distant future, which will put back what has already been taken.

In the real world, if these cuts succeed then Cameron will be re-elected with a massive majority, as 'reality' is recognised and the middle class blame the working class for making matters worse by their futile, uncoordinated resistance. And Len McCluskey's task - and that of the entire trade union bureaucracy - is to ensure that resistance is limited to just that.

Gerry Downing
email

Grassroots

At the January 23 meeting of comrades in the London and Eastern region of the campaign to elect Jerry Hicks as Unite general secretary, it was resolved to launch a British and Irish grassroots left organisation in April in either London or Birmingham with a pooled fare so that members can travel from as far away as Ireland.

Jerry spoke passionately of how his campaign had mobilised the ranks of union members with no backing from any section of the union's bureaucratic machine: "I got 100 nominations, McCluskey got 700. Seven times the nominations, but only twice the vote that I got."

Asserting that the grassroots left was now the official opposition in Unite, he said: "McCluskey would not be talking so left now if he wasn't frightened of us... and the illegal action of the students." Our willingness to confront the anti-union legislation is very different from McCluskey's 'opposition', observed Jerry.

Several London busworkers spoke strongly about the corruption of the United Left in Unite - "they are just shit", one female driver said and it provoked an immediate show of hands from almost all the bus drivers present, eager to give the details of just how "shit" their own 'United Left' rightwingers were.

Construction workers spoke of the willingness of the Unite legal team to accept minimum settlements in the blacklisting claims now going through the courts and London cleaners spoke of the record of the United Left cleaners candidate in the executive elections.

A slate was endorsed and the London campaign agreed to meet again on February 27 to discuss how we can assist the cleaners' campaign, the blacklisted construction workers and Abdul Omer, sacked convenor at Sovereign buses.

AJ Byrne
email

No easy money

I am from Greece and I am unemployed. The situation in my country is really bad and concerns us greatly.

The "socialist" Pasok government, which has been in power for a little over a year, is trying to reduce the national deficit. The government's austerity measures are pillaging workers' incomes through unfair taxes and this is causing poverty. Not only the working class, but also the middle class, will suffer during the forthcoming years.

We don't have domestic production and the government has not made any moves to solve this problem. We

have been under the International Monetary Fund's supervision since May 2010. If we take into account the role of the IMF and its policies in other countries that have borrowed money from it, this is dangerous for the Greek people.

Day by day, the public character of health, education and other services is being downgraded. In my opinion, the aim of this government is to attack and remove current communal rights. Under capitalism we have won many rights. Here in Greece, our parents fought for democracy, our grandfathers fought against fascism and the German occupation, and now I suppose that it is our turn to struggle against the economic establishment which controls our life without asking us.

My generation must seek human values again. Yes, we need jobs now, but we need a different society. The society of easy money must die.

Nik Kouvousopoulos
email

Millions died

Robert Wilkinson is correct to note that I am a critic of Trotsky's characterisation of Stalin's regime in the 1930s as a "workers' state" (Letters January 20). Nonetheless he misunderstands my response to Andrew Northall's letter on the purges (January 13).

I do not deny that scholars now have access to the state archives of the Soviet Union - nor that research has uncovered new facts about the period. Neither Northall nor I are one of these researchers. We cannot therefore challenge or confirm the accuracy of Oleg Khlevniuk's claims that there are 700,000 recorded executions in the period from 1937 to 1938. We must take these figures on trust.

On the other hand, I am sceptical whether the non-Marxist writers Wilkinson mentions (such as Sebag Montefiore) are capable of explaining the causes and nature of the purges. My letter suggested that a scientific explanation would place the purges in the context of the elite's attempt to extract a surplus from the labour-power of Soviet workers. It would look something like Hillel Ticktin's account in the journal *Critique*.

Wilkinson ignores the fact that I am a critic of Northall's use of Khlevniuk's figures to exculpate the regime (and presumably Northall's support for it). Northall's argument is that the purges were necessary to build a socialist society worldwide. I disagree with this and I asked readers to question the politics and morality of this interpretation. After all, Northall states that the majority of the victims were guilty (and therefore deserved to die). Besides - despite Putin's rehabilitation of Stalin as a patriotic hero - I would be surprised if even the most rightwing and nationalistic of scholars agrees with Northall that mass executions were the best means to save the regime from a fascist coup d'etat.

My understanding is that Stalin directed the purges against anyone who was or could become a critic of the regime. This included old Bolsheviks, Mensheviks, Socialist Revolutionaries, Trotskyists, left communists and anarchists. In other words one of the functions of the purges was to exterminate the left. Denouncing the victims as fascists and killing them off is consistent with this perception.

Finally, I reject Northall's suggestion that the extent of the purges can be measured by the recorded number of official executions. Accounts of the purges, such as Northall and Wilkinson's, that ig-

nore deaths caused by torture and beatings (or through overwork, malnutrition and starvation in labour camps) are incomplete. Most conventional estimates of deaths are therefore in the millions rather than hundreds of thousands.

Paul B Smith
email

Petty

It was not until last year that I began to appreciate the nuances in the terms 'social formation' and 'dominant mode of production', courtesy of Paul Cockshott. Because of this, I'm not sure about the validity of Banaji's argument about rural proletarians, even if Maoists do tend to throw around the word 'peasant' quite loosely. Small tenant farmers and sharecroppers are no rural proletarians, as opposed to industrial farm workers.

Speaking of Maoists, it has been noted that much of the Trotskyist criticisms of the 'national bourgeoisie' concept are semantic and that it was and is a Maoist mistake to lump small business owners together with the 'non-monopoly bourgeoisie'. They do this so that their 'urban petty bourgeoisie', in the bloc of four classes/new democracy, comprises non-worker intellectuals, lawyers and suchlike, even if they do belong to other classes.

All that aside, the reason I'm writing this is that I do object to Mike Macnair's characterisation of Lenin's two-stage revolutionary-democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry, where he says that "the peasantry could only play a revolutionary role if the urban proletariat took the lead" against "peasant leadership in the revolution" ('Marxism and theoretical overkill', January 20).

Going back to his own video criticising the permanent revolution, Macnair himself repeats Kautsky when he says that the peasantry is not socially revolutionary at all (except to the extent that they can be thoroughly anti-bourgeois), but its 'national' sections can indeed be politically revolutionary on their own. This extends to the 'national' sections of the urban petty bourgeoisie via what Marxists typically call 'petty bourgeois democratism'.

Jacob Richter
email

Correction

Apparently, I made a mistake when reporting on the first meeting of the national council of the Coalition of Resistance on January 15 (*Weekly Worker* January 20).

I wrote that a motion moved by Workers Power, which was seeking COR support for potential moves towards a general strike against the cuts, was defeated with the support of Counterfire and their former comrades in the Socialist Workers Party.

However, at the latest meeting of the COR steering committee, my comrade Tina Becker was approached by Amy Leather of the SWP who told her that this was not so: "I don't read the *Weekly Worker*," she said, "but I have been told that you got this wrong. We voted in favour of the motion."

Of course, I am happy to correct this mistake, which was made in part because it was a very busy meeting and I could not see how everybody was voting at all times. In part though it was because SWP members like Mark Bergfield actually argued vehemently against "putting demands" on the trade union bureaucracy all the way through the meeting.

Lee Rock
Sheffield

CPGB

Programme for the class

After two long days of intense debate and argument, CPGB comrades unanimously agreed our organisation's redrafted *Draft programme* on Sunday January 23.

The redrafting process had taken four years - it was back in 2007 that CPGB cells and committees began discussing the 1995 version of the *Draft programme*. And it is just under a year since the Provisional Central Committee published its proposed new draft, having itself debated the details for the best part of a year before that.¹

Why does a small organisation like the CPGB consider it so important to engage in such a long and painstaking process? After all, the Socialist Workers Party, for example, does not even *have* a programme, let alone consume so much time and energy in working out its contents. The reason is evident: we do not view our *Draft programme* as our own private property, but as a set of proposals to be put before the founding congress of a genuine Communist Party. That is not just our business, but the business of all working class partisans - and it is a matter that we take very seriously indeed.

Because there is no Communist Party, our new document is still referred to as a *draft*, despite the fact it was so enthusiastically endorsed by our whole organisation at the weekend. Similarly our leadership can only be *provisional* - although we have the name we hope a Communist Party will adopt, we do not claim to be that party.

It is true that the preamble to the new draft details the history of our small group. That is because, as Jack Conrad explained in introducing the first session of the conference on the Saturday morning, it is important that others know who exactly is putting the *Draft programme* forward. No doubt the founding congress would want a very different preamble.

But, it may be argued, there are at present no moves towards the creation of a united party based on Marxism. Indeed, there are no attempts even to lash together the kind of lowest-common-denominator alliance that was the feature of 'left unity' initiatives over the last decade. So why all this talk about the adoption of a programme at the founding congress of a party that does not exist?

For us the answer is clear. Just as the *Weekly Worker* in issue after issue tirelessly campaigns for principled Marxist unity within a single party, so our organisation does whatever it can, in however modest a way, to bring the day nearer when such unity will be achieved. The formulating of such a weighty document as the *Draft programme* ought to serve as an example to other left groups - many are committed in theory to the creation of a mass revolutionary party, but in reality focus their main energy on building their own *sect*.

The draft stands as a permanent challenge to them: we believe this document provides the basis for common action to take forward the struggle of our class up to the point where it can challenge for power and beyond. If you disagree with our proposals, put forward your own alternative. But doing nothing to end the criminal division of Marxist revolutionaries into numerous grouplets is not an option.

It was with this understanding that the conference completed the final stages of the redrafting process, discussing dozens of amendments (and amendments to amendments) from individual comrades and CPGB bodies. Plenty of time was allocated to hammer out sections of the draft



Marxism: the basis for unity

where serious differences had been raised, and the debate was conducted in a comradely way throughout. As national organiser Mark Fischer said in introducing the draft rules for a future party, "Today we see in miniature the sort of organisation we envisage the Communist Party will be." It will be one where the expression of such differences will not only be encouraged, but where it will be regarded as a *duty* to express them, both internally and, if necessary, in public through articles in the party press and so on.

Before the conference the PCC had stated its views on the various amendments and issued its voting recommendations. But the debate saw minds being changed, with PCC comrades sometimes voting for amendments that they had previously collectively opposed and, equally, comrades who had put them forward sometimes withdrawing them or even occasionally voting against their own proposals.

Although no CPGB comrade or body had put forward an alternative document, some major redrafting had been attempted - for example, in sections dealing with the development of capitalism, capitalism and nature, the character of the revolution, economic measures to be taken by a workers' state, the extent of concessions to the petty bourgeoisie that would be necessary in the first stages of socialism, and the transition to and definition of communism.

However, exchanges leading up to the conference had allowed for some clarification of the differences and the process permitted parts of the proposed amendments to be informed by or incorporated in the PCC draft. As a result, what we had at the end of the process were, for the most part, differences of nuance, not of principle.

For example, comrades like Nick Rogers - who has consistently opposed the use of the term 'socialism', preferring expressions such as 'working class rule' - most certainly accept the overwhelming thrust of the *Draft programme* despite seeing amendments on this defeated by a large majority.

As well as the big theoretical questions, conference spent a good deal of time discussing the precise detail of the demands we ought to raise in the here and now - indeed around half of the allocated time was

used to fine-tune the section headed 'Immediate demands'. Orthodox Trotskyists totally disapprove of this 'minimum' section of the *Draft programme* (although many seem to agree with large parts of its actual content), believing that the mere existence of such a section damns the organisation upholding it as incorrigibly reformist. Of course, this ignores the fact that the Bolsheviks themselves favoured the minimum-maximum format. In practice, however, the so-called 'transitional demands' of such comrades frequently end up bowing to spontaneity, echoing whatever calls are currently being heard within the working class.

No such objections are raised within the CPGB - for us our 'minimum' demands for extreme democracy and for capital to fully meet workers' needs in every sphere are part and parcel of the revolutionary mobilisation of the Communist Party.

In addition to those contained in the 1995 version, the *Draft programme* now has new 'Immediate demands' subsections on the environment, sexual freedom, health and education. The conference featured intense debate on what ought to be raised in relation to, among other things, working conditions, women's rights, religious and private schools, and state elections.

On the latter, there was an interesting discussion on our demand for proportional representation and the extent to which this conflicts with the recallability of elected representatives. The majority view is that recallability ought to be exercised by parties and this, in conjunction with annual elections, would ensure that rogue representatives could be rapidly replaced. However, when it came to the debate on elections under socialism, it was agreed to leave the precise method open, removing the previous commitment to PR.

This was one of the many areas where views that had previously appeared to sharply diverge were seen to come together. As comrade Fischer said, it was the kind of democracy in action that a Communist Party will practise ●

Notes

1. For the 2010 PCC draft see www.cpgb.org.uk/pdf/draft_programme_20100211.pdf. For the 1995 version go to www.cpgb.org.uk/pdf/draft_programme_19950905.pdf. The new version will be available very shortly.

ACTION

CPGB podcasts

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

For meetings in your area, contact info@communiststudents.org.uk or check out www.communiststudents.org.uk.

Radical Anthropology Group

Tuesdays, 6.45pm to 9pm, St Martin's Community Centre, 43 Carol Street, London NW1 (Camden tube).

February 1: Rapunzel lets down her hair on the Mosquito Coast. Speaker: Mark Jamieson.

February 8: 'The two Wawilak sisters' (Aboriginal Australia). Speaker: Chris Knight.

Palestine solidarity

Saturday-Sunday January 29-30, 9.15am to 5pm: Conference, St Georges West Centre, Shandwick Place Edinburgh - 'Palestine in the Context of the Drive to Permanent War'.

Organised by Scottish Palestine Solidarity Campaign: info@palestinecampaign.org.

Keep the post public

Saturday January 29, 11.30am: March, Victoria Square, Birmingham. Speakers include: Billy Hayes (CWU) and Jack Dromey MP.

Called by CWU: info@cwu.org.

Reinstate EMA

Saturday January 29, 12 noon: Demonstration, Parliament Square, London.

Organised by Education Activist Network, National Campaign Against Fees and Cuts, University and College Union: educationactivist@goolemail.com.

Labour Briefing

Saturday January 29, 12noon: AGM, St Margaret's House, 21 Old Ford Road, London E2 (nearest tube: Bethnal Green). Speakers include: John McDonnell MP, Christine Shawcroft (LP NEC), George Binette (Camden Unison), Lutfur Rahman (Tower Hamlets mayor).

Organised by Labour Briefing: www.labourbriefing.org.uk.

Bloody Sunday anniversary

Monday January 31, 7.30pm: Meeting, Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London WC1. 'Political status for Irish republican prisoners.'

Organised by Irish Republican Prisoners Group: gerdowning@btinternet.com.

Stop deportations

Tuesday February 1, 4.30pm: Protest, Communications House, Immigration Reporting Centre, Old Street, London EC1.

Organised by Fight Racism, Fight Imperialism: 020 7837 1688.

Lambeth united

Thursday February 3, 7pm: Rally, Coin Street Neighbourhood Centre, Stamford Street, London SE1. Against the cuts. Speakers include: John McDonnell MP, John Millington (*Morning Star*), Callum Williamson (Communist Students), Maria Exall (CWU) and Lee Jasper (Black Activists Rising Against the Cuts).

Unite against the EDL

Saturday February 5, 12 noon: Protest, George Square, Luton town centre.

Organised by Unite Against Fascism: uaf.org.uk.

Support Wikileaks

Monday February 7, 7pm: Rally, Conway Hall, 25 Red Lion Square, London WC1. Speakers include: Tariq Ali, Jo Glenton and John Rees.

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

Hands Off the People of Iran

Saturday February 12, 10.am to 5pm: Annual conference, University Of London Union, Malet Street, London WC1. Launch of new campaign to fight for the freedom of Jafar Panahi and all political prisoners in Iran. Speakers: John McDonnell MP, Ruben Markarian (Rahe Kargar). Plus discussion: 'WikiLeaks, whistleblowers and war' with Moshé Machover and Mike Macnair. Organised by Hopi: www.hopoi.org.

People's Convention Against Cuts

Saturday February 12, 11am to 5pm: National conference, Friends Meeting House, Euston Road, London NW1. Unite those in and out of work and build resistance to the cuts.

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

Oppose the cuts

Saturday March 26: National demonstration against cuts in public services. Assemble 11am Victoria Embankment, and march to a rally in Hyde Park.

Organised by the Trade Union Congress. www.tuc.org.uk

Legacy of Stalinism

Saturday February 26, 9am to 5pm: Conference, room H216, Connaught House, London School of Economics, London WC2 (nearest tube: Holborn). 'Stalinism and its destructive legacy'.

Organised by Critique: www.critiquejournal.net.

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.

ANTI-CUTS

Cameron 'easy-peasy' compared to Thatcher

The Socialist Party has further divided the anti-cuts movement, reports **Gerry Downing**

The National Shop Stewards Network effectively split at its January 22 meeting to launch the NSSN All-Britain Anti-Cuts Campaign. At this very 'democratic' conference (the outcome was a foregone conclusion) of well over 500, the votes for the majority and minority resolutions were 305 and 89 respectively.

The entire event was taken up with debating the two motions (apart from hearing appeals from representatives of workers currently on strike). The successful resolution proposed the setting up of a new anti-cuts campaign, while the second called for a fight to "build a single national anti-cuts organisation early in 2011". While the overwhelming majority of those voting for motion 1 were Socialist Party comrades, one of the first speakers in favour was Alex Gordon, president of the RMT union, who

reported that he and Bob Crow had had a meeting with the SP's Linda Taaffe and Bill Mullins, and "agreed with the proposal of the NSSN steering committee on December 4 2010 to launch an anti-cuts campaign" around the slogan, 'No to all cuts in jobs and services'.

Later Steve Hedley, long-time rank-and-file activist and critic of Bob Crow, in a complete political about-turn strongly defended the new RMT line.

Linda Taaffe moved the majority

resolution. She invoked the glorious traditions of the Militant Tendency, from the heroic Liverpool 47 surcharged councillors to the All-Britain Poll Tax Federation, in her justification of the launch of the All-Britain Anti-Cuts Campaign - the third such organisation, now in competition with Right to Work and the Coalition of Resistance.

The main argument for striking out alone concerned the correct attitude to Labour councillors who were implementing the cuts, with Linda berating those in the NSSN who allegedly defended Labour councillors and "stroked their feathers to make them feel not so bad about making the cuts". In the face of the greatest cuts offensive since the 'Geddes axe' of 1921-22, the "enormous power of the working class must be unleashed to stop it". We needed to "push the TUC into action" by "a one-day public sector strike, followed up by a one-day general strike". But it is "not just against the bosses and the city we are fighting, but also Labour councillors in local campaigns."

In response to accusations of division

viding the movement, she stated: "We don't want to do what others want us to do and dissolve ourselves. They call us splitters, but which organisation was here first? RTW split off from the NSSN and they call us splitters." Then came the reference to the great Liverpool 47 and how they had stood up to the vicious Thatcher government - "Cameron and his gang would be easy-peasy compared to Thatcher," she opined.

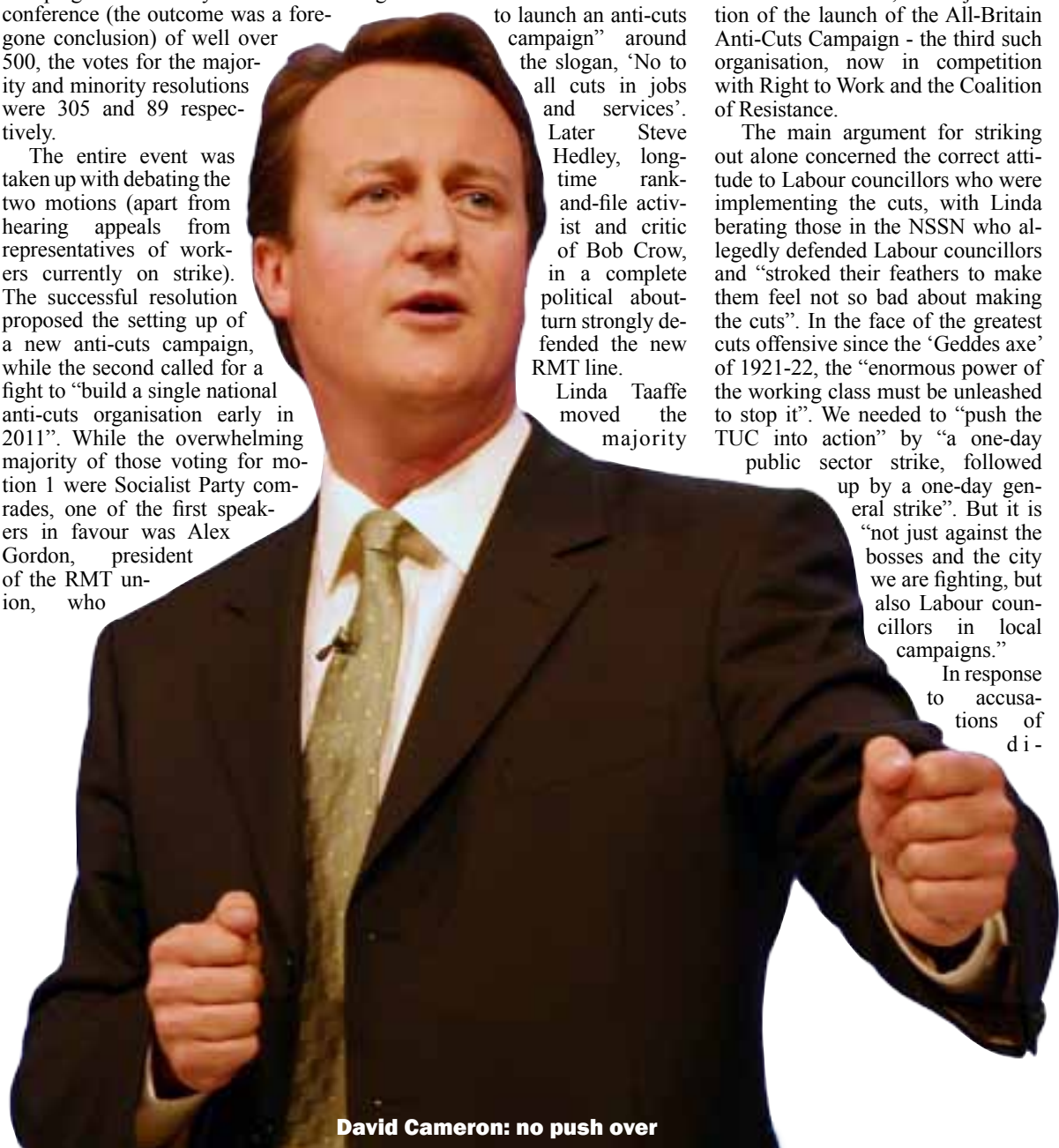
George Binette of Permanent Revolution moved the minority resolution. He pleaded for a "genuine, mass, non-sectarian organisation" and opposed the super-optimism of Linda Taaffe's "barnstorming" speech. The labour movement was "woefully unprepared" for this struggle. He pointed the finger at Unison's Dave Prentis, whose response to the 2,000 redundancies announced by Manchester council was that it was "a tragedy", but "we will continue to work alongside" those wielding the axe. There are very few strikes actually taking place and trade union density is far weaker today than it had been a few decades ago, so we must "stare reality in the face" and "work jointly to build a single, joint anti-cuts campaign".

Then we had innumerable three-minute alternate speeches for and against, where super-optimistic bluster was counterposed to some frankly defeatist contributions ("If the workers decide not to fight then there will be redundancies," said Bob Archer). A range of different positions were apparent in opposition to the SP, from Socialist Workers Party RTW defencism to syndicalist pleas for a return to the "network" conception of the NSSN, when it was an adjunct to the left bureaucrats in pledging not to intervene in the internal affairs of TUC-affiliated unions.

Over 70 'dissidents' met in the Cock Tavern after the meeting to decide the way forward. An-hour long discussion saw some agreement emerge on the need to hang together, with some comrades (Socialist Fight, Workers Power and others) arguing for a genuine rank-and-file opposition, as well as those upholding the old NSSN. It seems there may be space made for such a new body at RTW's People's Convention Against Cuts on February 12 and maybe at future COR events, but all were agreed that a separate meeting was necessary to discuss the way forward in such a diverse tendency.

The Socialist Party slate for the anti-cuts committee was elected unopposed, apart from the addition of Toby Abse, signalling the withdrawal of all the minority 'dissidents'. Apart from Alex Gordon, all the rest are either SP members or fellow-travellers in the Campaign for a New Workers' Party. So we have, among others, Rob Williams, sacked and reinstated Linamar convenor; Glenn Kelly, witch-hunted Unison NEC member; Dave Nellist, Socialist Party councillor; Terry Pearce, CNWP stalwart; and Nancy Taaffe (billed as coordinator of the Waltham Forest Anti-Cuts Union).

Meanwhile, we may be seeing some shift in the balance of forces within the trade unions. The more leftwing unions, such as the PCS, RMT, POA, FBU and CWU, may now be joined by Unite in a sort of alternative TUC, given the absolute craven stance of Brendan Barber to the cuts crisis. This prospect is what is giving such confidence to the SP leaders, who believe they are not striking out on their own, but have outmanoeuvred their rivals, the Socialist Workers Party, for the allegiance of the left bureaucracy ●



David Cameron: no push over

Northampton long haul

"We don't want anyone believing the cuts are necessary," declared Mark Serwotka of the PCS union. He was joined on the platform in Northampton's historic Guildhall by Tracy Morel of Autism Concern and Mick Kavanagh from the Communication Workers Union national executive.

Opening the January 20 meeting, Ron Mendel of Northampton Trades Council called for those present to oppose all cuts and privatisation - "forge unity between providers and users," he urged. On top of county council cuts of £67 million, the borough council is to cut £4.7 million.

Tracy Morel warned of 1.3 million jobs being lost across the public and private sector. There are 1,500 families in Northamptonshire affected by autism and they faced a loss of support if the cuts are implemented. Mick Kavanagh advised the meeting that the government wanted to get its hands on the postal workers' pension fund - worth £25 billion. This was a

"government for the rich" and they were seeking to dismantle the Royal Mail. But postal workers had defeated previous attempts to privatise their service and would do so again.

The final platform speaker was comrade Serwotka. Congratulating the meeting on a "fantastic turnout", he called for a discussion about "what we can do". He went on to list some of the attacks planned by the Con Dem coalition: a rise in VAT; reductions in housing benefit and pensions. What the government promised was not a couple of years of pain, but "generations of misery."

Turning to the coalition's junior partner, comrade Serwotka told those assembled the Lib Dems had "lied to the people of Britain". He recounted a post-election meeting he had with the governor of the Bank of England: "What did you say to Nick Clegg to make him change his mind?" he asked him. "Nothing I didn't say publicly before the election," came the reply.

It was the likes of Vodafone and

Philip Green who were the 'scroungers', not the people on benefits - we must fight under the banner of 'No to all cuts', the comrade declared. There were no "deserving and undeserving" service-users and we must "stand together to defend our communities". Comrade Serwotka finished by calling for the TUC demonstration of March 26 to be the "biggest in British history".

Speakers from the floor reported libraries threatened with closure, care homes closed, and support services reduced or withdrawn altogether. A recurring theme was the £120 billion 'tax gap' - several people demanded action on tax evaders and the closure of loopholes.

Summing up, comrade Mendel called for patience - we were "in it for the long haul" ●

Hannah Phipps

Northampton demonstration: Saturday March 12. See www.againstthecuts.blogspot.com for details.

Fighting fund

Nag, nag, nag

We have received more responses to our campaign to increase our regular income through standing orders this week, with SO forms handed in by comrades DS (£20 a month) and WD (£10). These are very much needed, as shown by the first fighting fund of 2011, which is still £241 under target with only four days to go.

I did, however, receive donations totalling £265 from existing SO contributors SK, RP, DO and GD - thanks to all of you. Then there was a bank transfer from comrade SS and gifts received via our website from PB (£10) and SB (£5). I have to say, though, that £15 is not a very big return from the 12,602 online readers over the last seven days. That is a perennial complaint of mine, isn't it? So many of those who read us on the internet are taking the *Weekly Worker* for

granted. But if you want me to stop nagging you know what to do!

Another distinct disappointment this week has been the absence of any cheques for me in the post. To be honest, I don't care how I get it, but I need your money! And, as we are now so short of time, can I suggest either our PayPal facility on the CPGB website or the example of SS - make a bank transfer via your local branch, via telephone or via your online account.

We have £1,009 and we need £1,250 by noon on Monday January 31. Please help us if you can ●

Robbie Rix

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

COR



A tad more radical

The Coalition of Resistance, whose steering committee meets every week in London, is continuing to build support. In the unfortunate myriad of anti-cuts campaigns, it is clearly the main show in town. It can boast of a range of regional and national trade union affiliations and big-name supporters like Tony Benn, Bob Crow, Ken Loach and John Pilger. It is by far the most publicly visible campaign and for the moment puts its two main rivals, Right to Work (run by the Socialist Workers Party) and the National Shop Stewards Network's All-Britain Anti-Cuts Campaign (run by the Socialist Party in England and Wales), in the shade.

The coalition, led by John Rees's group, Counterfire, has recently made a conscious move to 'open up' - a welcome decision. The weekly meetings of the steering committee are open to representatives of different organisations and are run in a relatively democratic manner. COR regularly sends calls for unity to the other national anti-cuts campaigns - undoubtedly a crucial task: nationally agreed and enforced cuts and attacks on the working class cannot be defeated through local action. It needs national, united action if it is to be effective.

The SWP does send representatives to the COR steering committee (and vice versa with the RtW), but the atmosphere between these former comrades is decidedly frosty - despite the near identical politics of the two groups. SPEW, on the other hand, boycotts COR and continues to bank on the left of the trade union bureaucracy giving its imprimatur to the All-Britain Anti-Cuts Campaign.

The only trajectory towards unity seems to be happening between COR

and the People's Charter (a rather uninspiring, minimalist 'manifesto' dreamed up by the *Morning Star's* Communist Party of Britain and backed by surprisingly wide sections of the trade union bureaucracy).

That points, of course, to its own set of problems: COR bowing to the trade union bureaucracy, just like its former comrades in the SWP. If the unions do not raise a particular demand, we should not either - that is the motto that has been repeated by Counterfire and SWP comrades up and down the country. However, Counterfire seems a tad more radical than the SWP in this respect, but it is only a question of nuance.

The other problem COR is suffering from is the lack of reliable activists. The Counterfire comrades on the steering committee (led by John Rees, Lindsey German and Chris Nineham) still talk and behave as if they had hundreds of members at their disposal who could be sent out to run regular stalls, give out thousands of leaflets or build local meetings. In reality, though, unlike the SWP COR is a loose network, where local components do their own thing.

Unfortunately, no attempt is being made to arrive at political clarity. What lies behind the crisis? Can a general strike defeat the government? Should we encourage the formation of credit unions, as voiced at the COR steering committee? If these are inadequate responses, what kind of action can defeat the government? Such questions remain unanswered.

The COR founding statement, fronted by Tony Benn, might include the idea of drawing up an "alternative budget" and the commitment to "develop and support an alternative programme for economic and social recovery" (sounds a bit like

the CPB's Alternative Economic Strategy, doesn't it?). But no work has been done on that front. In fact, we were told there has been a deliberate decision not to carry this out - instead, there are a number of documents and blog entries available for download on the COR website.

COR has made a good start. But clearly much more is needed if we want to have a fighting chance of not being bled dry by the coalition government ●

Tina Becker

tina.becker@weeklyworker.org.uk

COR plan of action

- There will be a week of action against the cuts, starting on February 14 and culminating in a national day of activity on February 19. All anti-cuts campaigns and groups are encouraged to organise stalls, public meetings or other activity to build for the March 26 demonstration in London, in which COR wants to highlight its opposition to all cuts and not just 'fair cuts'. If you can organise a public meeting that week, let COR know by calling 07939 242229 or emailing coalitionofresistance@mail.com.
- February 5 is 'National day against library closures'. If you can organise read-ins, occupations and protests, please inform COR.
- COR will participate in Right to Work's People's Convention Against Cuts on February 12.
- A 'Carnival of Resistance' is being planned for April.
- There is talk of an 'activists forum' in May.
- A decision-making conference is being organised for early July - in all likelihood July 9.
- A 'European conference' will take place in London in the autumn (to roughly coincide with the European Trade Union Confederation day of action on September 29). An appeal to "unions, progressive forces and anti-cuts campaigns" will be sent out soon.

Affiliate to COR

Individuals: £15 (£5 unwaged)
Local organisation £25
Trade union or trades council £50
National organisation £100
Affiliate online (www.coalitionof-resistance.org.uk) or send cheques, made payable to 'Coalition of Resistance', to:
COR, Housmans Bookshop, 5 Caledonian Road, London N1 9DX.

Robin Jackson
EAATC secretary

Enfield cross-section

A very well attended public meeting of about 90 people at Broad House in Enfield founded an anti-cuts campaign in the London borough last week.

A wide cross-section of political opinion was present, from the PCS, Unison, the Labour Party (several Labour councillors, including council leader Doug Taylor, were there), Green Party, Socialist Workers Party, Communist Party of Britain, Counterfire, Labour MP for Edmonton Andy Love and London

assembly member for Enfield and Haringey Jo McCartney.

Guest speaker Gary Heather gave the meeting the benefit of his experience campaigning for public services in Islington before the meeting decided upon the name of Enfield Alliance Against the Cuts. A founding statement was passed after a vibrant debate and a new steering committee of four men and three women was elected from across the political spectrum ●

Practical Hackney

Around 30 people attended the latest meeting of the Hackney Alliance to Defend Public Services (HADPS) on January 25. The alliance has been meeting bi-weekly since June 2010 and is being maintained by the local branch of the Socialist Workers Party. There were about six SWP members present, and another half dozen sent apologies. Also present were a comrade from the Socialist Party, a member of the Commune, a couple of elderly *Morning Star* supporters, representatives of a number of Turkish groups (Day-Mer and Gik Der) and quite a few independent activists. In Dave Osler there was even a member of the Labour Party in attendance.

The most prominent Hackney residents from the revolutionary left were, however, missing: John Rees and Lindsey German seem to be giving local activity a miss to concentrate on their new endeavour, Counterfire. In fact, nobody from the Coalition of Resistance was there. So it was down to the CPGB's Tina Becker to give a report on the latest activities of COR (to quite a few raised eyebrows).

Hackney is one of the poorest boroughs in London and an estimated 60% of all tenants are dependent on one form of benefit or another. The government's cuts will hit local people hard. Homerton Hospital, for example, has announced it will be making 'savings' of £15 million over the next year. So it is perhaps no wonder that the local Labour Party is somewhat split on the cuts (which in Hackney amount to 9% of the council budget) and how to resist them. Two branches have affiliated to the alliance and comrade Osler reported that some local Labour activists are organising stalls around Hackney on a Saturday in order to highlight their opposition to the coalition assault.

However, while Hackney's Labour mayor, Jules Pipe, has been condemning the government cuts on TV programmes galore, he also announced that he will in fact enforce them locally - what other choice does he have? In its latest bulletin, HADPS makes a few good points on that question. The article, 'Can councillors refuse cuts?', answers with an unequivocal 'yes' and reminds readers that governments in the past had to make concessions towards leftwing councils in revolt - "Liverpool in the 1980s, Clay Cross in the 1970s and nearby Poplar in the 1920s". Of course, such localised revolts cannot defeat nationally enforced cuts, but they can certainly help to build the confidence of the movement.

Unfortunately though, so far only six of the 50 Labour councillors in Hackney have announced that they

will vote against the local budget, which has to be set by March 11. But it is to be welcomed that the alliance decided to drop off some of their bulletins at the Labour Party stall. (After a few people in the audience groaned at the suggestion, SWP national committee member Julie Waterson had to remind them from the chair that "we do want to convince Labour members, don't we?")

Unfortunately, Hackney TUC is involved in efforts to build a rival anti-cuts organisation. "We have made effort after effort to bring them on board, but we are too leftwing for them", reported Glyn Harries from the Hackney Solidarity Network, who acts as joint secretary of the alliance. "There are Tory councillors distributing their leaflets - that gives you an idea of their politics," he said.

HADPS is organising a number of local protests, a meeting with Bob Crow on February 10 and a march on the town hall on February 19. However, there was a decided feeling of 'going through the motions', as well as a lack of ambition. For example, the whole meeting was spent on rather dull organisational matters and hearing local reports.

When comrade Becker raised the suggestion to start future meetings with a political opening - for example, on the question of illegal budgets - there was a lot of nodding. "We used to do that," said comrade Waterson. "But the meetings got smaller and smaller." Which, of course, is not an argument against politics - but one for more of it. Instead, the comrades decided just before Christmas to put more effort into building structures in Hackney's 19 local wards. That might be a good idea, but it should not be done in opposition to making Hackney-wide meetings more interesting and more political.

Our proposal was noted, but who knows what will happen to it? Ditto our suggestion to include COR and the other organisations in plans to hold a "London-wide meeting of anti-cuts campaigns". Again, not a bad idea. But who is organising this? Under what auspices? What is the aim of it? None of this was clarified. But comrade Waterson insisted: "I think it should not be an event where people from different parties get up and announce their programmes. It should be a practical event that discusses how to resist a library closure or how we can defend nurseries from being shut down."

So, in reality, it will probably be organised by the SWP's front, Right to Work, and the only "programmes" announced will be those of the SWP ●

Bev James

Hull anger

Previous lobbies of Hull city council have been sedate affairs, with a small crowd shouting a few slogans and then going off home. But the January 20 gathering outside the Guildhall saw 350-400 people.

I have never seen such visceral anger in Hull. Workers decided to march round the Guildhall and then went into the building. They attempted to enter the council chamber, but found the doors locked. As we pondered what to do, the doors to the public gallery were forced open and people poured in.

Initially everyone was quiet as the councillors continued their business. Then a Labour council-

lor spoke to oppose a motion put forward by the Liberal Democrats, who run the council. He had barely finished his first sentence when the workers erupted into applause and chants of "Shame on you!" to the Lib Dems.

The meeting was brought to a halt and the ashen-faced Lib Dems finally got to know what opposition they can expect. The vast majority of them slunk out of the chamber to chants of "The workers united will never be defeated!"

People came out confident and buoyed up by the protest. We must use this to build for strike action and the maximum possible attendance at the TUC demo ●

Bob Bright

THEORY

Teleology, predictability and modes of production

Jairus Banaji *History as theory: essays on modes of production and exploitation* Historical Materialism books series, Vol 25, Leiden, 2010, pp406, £81

At the end of the first part of this review of Jairus Banaji's book I made a series of points critical of comrade Banaji's argument, and said I would elaborate on some of them further in the second part. In fact, there will be three parts in all. This part will discuss large-scale theoretical issues: 'teleology', and the grounds for historical materialism. A third part will apply the points made here to the problems of the 'direction' of history, historical periodisation, 'transitions' and 'transitional forms', and look at the concrete political implications of the differences between the 'formal subsumption of labour under capital' (merchant/moneylender control of production on a household scale) and the 'real subsumption of labour under capital' (large-scale shipping, factory production and large-scale agriculture).

Teleology is technically a branch of philosophy which deals with 'final ends' or, in more modern English, the ultimate purposes of life, of all sorts of entities, and so on. Greek philosophers Plato and Aristotle, and - following Aristotle - medieval theologian Thomas Aquinas, drew moral conclusions from reasoning as to the purposes of animals, humans, etc.¹ In the 18th and 19th century teleology, in the form of the 'argument from design', was one of the major intellectual props supporting the idea of a creator-god. Marx and Engels employed 'teleology' in this sense - 'arguments from design' which justify the world as it is - among other uses as a criticism of Hegel on the state. They therefore welcomed Charles Darwin's *Origin of species* as a blow to teleology.²

Karl Popper argued that the boot was on the other foot: Marx's and Engels' theory of history was a teleology whose 'final end' was general human emancipation. The idea was not original to Popper, since it was an element in Eduard Bernstein's attack on Marx's alleged residual Hegelianism in *The preconditions of socialism* (1898); but Popper became in the 1950s its main academic standard-bearer. Popper's arguments were hypothetically dependent on his general 'falsificationist' theory of knowledge. In practice they were made plausible by the apparent choice between Stalinism on the one hand, and on the other the post-war social democratic consensus, which appeared to show the 'piecemeal' social reforms Popper defended in *The poverty of historicism* at work.³

But the idea that the traditional sequence of modes of production was a teleology was picked up much more widely than just among strict Popperians. For the 'new left', as we saw in the first part of this review, it was an additional stick to beat reformists and 'official' communists. For Althusser and his supporters it was a stick to beat the Marxist-humanists. In the university history departments, the idea of teleology as a vice of historical writing became merged with the cult of Herbert Butterfield's *The Whig interpretation of history* (1931) as an elementary methodology text for undergraduate history students, to inoculate them against Marxist and other ideas of 'progress' in history.



Karl Popper: morally wrong

In this sub-Popperian sense 'teleology' shifted from its original meaning and became an objection (1) to the claim that it is possible to predict the human future on the basis of the human past and (2) to any theory of history which claims to explain long-range causes for the origins of the present (on the basis that such a theory potentially implies prediction of the human future on the basis of the past).

Popper

The purposive core of Popper's argument is the claim that it is impossible to predict the human future from the human past. Popper claimed that the ideas of *Poverty of historicism* were the first element of his work, originating at the time of his early 1920s break with his student communism. He also claimed that he had in the 1940s proved the claim by pure logic.⁴

The problem posed is that the physical sciences *also* predict the future from the past. *The logic of scientific discovery* (1934) grows out of the project of proving the impossibility of prediction (or, as Popper called it, 'prophecy') by coralling off *scientific* predictions in two ways. In the first place, science proper makes claims not about the future but about the permanent: that is, matters not subject to time and change. Hence Popper never accepted that evolutionary biology was scientific. In his view study of objects which are themselves subject to change will involve change being indeterminate, and therefore a prohibition on unpre-

dictability.

Second, for Popper science works by hypotheses which are *not* grounded on prior inductive inferences from regularities in the past. These emerge in other ways, but are tested for potential falsification by experiments. The arguments of this aspect of *The logic of scientific discovery* were reduced to absurdity by Feyerabend's *Against method* (1975) and have been criticised from various other directions; they are not now generally believed to offer a plausible account of scientific discovery.⁵

If Popper's rejection of inductive inferences from regularities in the past in science is itself rejected, there ceases to be a serious ground for rejecting attempts to predict the future from the human past more generally.⁶ Of course, such predictions are subject to the same problems of complexity and sensitivity to initial conditions which affect attempts to predict climate and weather: short-term predictions can be a lot more detailed and categorical than long-term ones, and so on.

But in reality, all human perception and action involves inductive inferences from past to future; and this is just as much true of human actions as of the physical world. We infer that people living in England will speak English; we take it that there will be a general election by May 2015. Both predictions may turn out to be false, but they are *good enough to act on*. The same may be true of much longer-term predictions which imply action in the present (like human-induced climate change, which

involves not only predictions about natural processes, but also predictions about human behaviour). This last point - that predictions may be less certain than those of physics, but yet still be good enough to act on - is critical.

The poverty of historicism and the rest of Popper's theoretical construction was a body of highly elaborate abstract argument against revolution and in favour of political gradualism and - to some extent - in favour of political inaction. The short answer to this line of reasoning is Martin Niemöller's famous post-1945 judgment: "First they came for the communists, and I didn't speak out because I wasn't a communist. Then they came for the trade unionists, and I didn't speak out because I wasn't a trade unionist. Then they came for the Jews, and I didn't speak out because I wasn't a Jew. Then they came for me and there was no-one left to speak out for me." In other words, inaction as much as action has moral and practical consequences.

Popper had some difficulty getting published between leaving Austria in 1937 and the outbreak of the cold war, and had particular difficulty with *The poverty of historicism*. The most plausible explanation is that he was - rightly - seen from his submitted manuscripts as an adherent of the Austrian school of marginalist economics. And the Austrian school's 'do nothing' approach to economic crises was - equally rightly - given a significant moral responsibility for the mass unemployment of 1931-33 and, hence, the victory of the Nazis in Germany. Popper played down his Austrian-school connections in the published version of *The poverty of historicism*, and emphasised the consistency of his method with social democratic reformism. The real Austrian-school leaders - Mises and Hayek - remained intellectually marginal and disreputable until the generation who lived through the 1930s as adults began to die or retire.

While gradualism and partial reforms may have real advantages if they are actually available, and it is wrong to *fetishise* the moment of revolution, under some circumstances the overthrow and radical reconstruction of the state is plainly inevitable and necessary. Popper objects to Marx's talk of 'shortening the birth pangs' of the new society as involving 'prophecy'. But it is hard to avoid the conclusion that well-organised, forcible resistance to the Nazis in 1933, leading to a civil war in which the cities carried fire and the sword through the small towns and countryside, would at minimum have 'shortened the birthpangs' of what emerged after the Red Army and Allies carried fire and the sword through Germany in 1944-45 after a devastating global war. Under these circumstances promoting gradualism actually costs *many more* lives than it saves.

Causation

If the Popperian objection to predicting the human future from the human past is rejected on epistemological and moral grounds, as it is here, it follows that Popper's and his followers' more general objections to the ideas of long-term causality and

directionality in human history can also be rejected, since this objection is merely ancillary to the objections to predicting the future. This does not, of course, establish positively that there *is* long-term causality and directionality in human history: it merely means that 'teleological' is not a knock-down objection without a lot of further specification.

The question of directionality in history will have to wait until I have addressed that of the foundations of historical materialism. 'Teleology' in the minimal sense of long-term causality leading up to the present is actually indispensable to the historical enterprise. In the first place, all claims to have discovered *transhistorical* truths in reality depend on historical evidence. To say, for example, as Popper did, that the Austrian school of marginalist economics has the same sort of status as Newtonian physics would imply showing that marginalist laws *did* function in Roman antiquity, the European middle ages, pre-modern China and so on. Of course, when we make this sort of investigation, we discover that the role of subjective marginal utility in the theory actually has the effect of rendering marginalism ... unfalsifiable.⁷

Secondly, it is simply and blindingly obvious that there is *some* long-term historical causation. To return to an earlier and simple example, most people in England today speak English, not French, a P-Celtic language (Welsh/ Cornish/ Breton), or a Romance language independently derived from late vulgar Latin. Any explanation of the fact is necessarily historical, and historical over the long term. To refuse long-term, causative explanations in history is therefore to refuse *any* explanation of - taking this single example - language diversity in the present.

Thirdly, indeterminacy objections to long-term causality in history are, in reality, also objections to *short-term* causality in history. The result, if they are taken seriously, is to reduce history increasingly to its medieval form, the chronicle - a narrative of effectively unexplained events. An egregious example is Anthony Fletcher's *The outbreak of the English civil war* (1981).

Alternatively, historians may - as in the case of the 'revisionist' school of early modern history of which Fletcher's book was part - argue that the actual outcome was highly unlikely. The deeper this sort of argument is carried, the closer it comes to the 'alternate history' science fiction of Harry Turtledove and similar writers. Or we may have a pinpoint description of a moment in the past which floats free of anything else, so that it might be travel writing for time-travellers - or hobbyists' anti-quarianism.

Banaji's essays belong with the variety of historical work which tests and attempts to falsify by empirical evidence an interpretation of the origins of the present. He ends by making some quite limited criticisms of the traditional Marxist scheme. In this context his episodic use of 'teleological' as a 'boo word' is close to meaningless.

In a sense, like Popper, it belongs

with the past of bourgeois ideology. Official discourse no longer counterposes reformist gradualism to revolution. ‘Reform’ in official discourse now means reaction - *taking away* the working class gains of the 20th century in the hope of returning to a (falsely) imagined 19th. And tipping points, phase transitions and so on are intellectually respectable, and even revolutions that overthrow states are entirely desirable as long as they are ‘colour’ revolutions to bring in neoliberal regimes. Fitting in with this shift, the study of early modern English history is crawling painfully out of the slough of ‘revisionism’, marginalists write (commonly wildly speculative) long-term histories of the origin of capitalism, and so on.

In spite of this I have discussed the point at length for two reasons. First, sub-Popperian hostility to ‘teleology’ is methodologically poisonous in ‘left’ as well as in conventional academic forms. Second, in Banaji’s essays in *History as theory* the use of ‘teleological’ as a ‘boo word’ licenses his failure to construct an alternative general narrative of the origins of the present in which his specific studies could be integrated.

Materialist foundations

I said in the first part that there are solid non-historical grounds in human biological nature and our material needs for the core of historical materialism - that the ways in which historical societies produce their material subsistence constrain the sort of general social orders possible. And similar grounds support the rejection of methodological individualism (humans are a social species) and of marginalism (there are physical minimum subsistence levels, maximum working hours and maximum quantities of land). These grounds require the analysis of societies and their dynamics in terms of the social division of labour. What follows will travel some distance from Banaji’s arguments but will begin to return to them later.

To defend historical materialism it is necessary to get out of the way what it is not. I begin, therefore, by repeating something I have previously written⁸ against the sort of materialism which bases itself on Lenin’s *Materialism and empirio-criticism* (*MEC*) and therefore argues that ideas are merely ‘reflections’ of the material world and (in strong forms) for a fully determinist account of human history. This approach is opposed to the Marx who wrote in the first and 11th ‘Theses on Feuerbach’: “The main defect of all hitherto-existing materialism - that of Feuerbach included - is that the Object [*der Gegenstand*], actuality, sensuousness, are conceived only in the form of the object [*Objekts*], or of contemplation [*Anschaung*], but not as human sensuous activity, practice [*Praxis*], not subjectively. Hence it happened that the active side, in opposition to materialism, was developed by idealism - but only abstractly, since, of course, idealism does not know real, sensuous activity as such.” And: “Philosophers have hitherto only interpreted the world in various ways; the point is to change it.” Or more snappily in the *18th Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* that “Men make their own history, but they do not make it as they please; they do not make it under self-selected circumstances, but under circumstances existing already, given and transmitted from the past.”⁹

‘Materialism’, in the sense of Marxist materialism, has more than one level. The most basic level is that it is unnecessary to suppose the existence of god or gods, a ‘world-spirit’, the Hegelian self-moving Idea, spirits, the existence of the soul, the *élan*

vital, or an immaterial homunculus ‘consciousness’ which sits in the human body and drives it as a motorist drives a car. The phenomena can be adequately explained by the methods of the sciences without any such suppositions. The ideas in my head are electro-chemical phenomena in my brain which are part of an *embodied* consciousness, which has developed through the physical (Darwinian) and social evolution of the human species. The words I am writing are - as I write them - electrical patterns in the computer; when they are printed they will be patterns of ink on the printed page. They are just as material as trees, etc.

At a second level, within this framework, material forces in the real world vary in power. The power of the ideas in my head, or the words I write, is very limited. Using the methods of the sciences requires us to presuppose the real existence, or more exactly the recalcitrance, of the material world outside our heads.¹⁰ If I had the idea that I could walk on water, it would not prevent me getting wet. If I do not have the idea of a tree in front of me (because I am not looking where I am going) I will walk into the tree and injure myself. It is this fundamental point which Bogdanov and his co-thinkers denied, and which Lenin defended in a muddled way in *MEC*.

Hence, within the framework of *praxis* - of ‘the active side’ and “the point is to change it” - materialism implies that ideas are commonly more powerful to the extent that they are adapted to the external forces in the material world and applied to manipulate these forces. The idea of a stone hand-axe is a means to various human actions to change the world. From this small starting point begins what develops into the massive physical powers of modern technology (the forces of production ...). The idea of a hand-axe and of how to make one - together with the materials to do so - is more powerful than a dream of eating meat or spells cast by a shaman.

This leads in turn to the third level of materialism. This is that social orders and dynamics are in the last analysis governed by technology (the forces of production) and the material division of labour (the relations of production) as means to satisfy very basic human needs (food, shelter, etc). In the last analysis, because, for example, though 13th century England and Japan were both characterised by (in Marxist terms) feudal social orders, these were markedly different from one another, and even now, under globalisation, both Japanese capitalism and Japanese language and culture are profoundly different from their British equivalents.¹¹

In a passage which used to be commonly prescribed to students as an antidote to Marxism, John Plamenatz argued in 1963 that recognition of material basic necessities is a truism without practical consequences for social ordering. This argument is manifestly apologetic-ideological.¹² Clear biological necessities for the continuation of the human species are food, protection from predators which may attack humans, and (in cold and temperate climates) clothing, shelter and heat; and the availability of these not only for the adult population, but also for the nurture of sufficient children for population replacement. Recognition of our biological character means that satisfaction of these basic needs have to be seen as preconditions for other activities. Further, both techniques and modes of organisation themselves create derivative necessities, which may become quite elaborate, but are necessary if there is not to be a regression to a less efficient technique and mode of organisation

and a consequent reduction in the sustainable population: for a rather basic example, cities need systems for getting clean water and for disposing of human waste products. For the purposes of the present point it is not necessary to go too far beyond the basic biological necessities. In today’s world large numbers of people lack access to some or all of the basic necessities, or feel their access to them to be insecure - including in such ‘advanced’ countries as the USA and Britain.

Division of labour

Elementary and obvious features of human biology equally imply, as I have said above, outright rejection of methodological individualism, of marginal-utility economics, and of Say’s Law as interpreted by the marginalists (that there is an equilibrium price at which every product or service would find a buyer).

In the first place, a species simply cannot exist without the existence of a breeding population: otherwise all that we have is a mutant or ‘sport’ who cannot pass on his or her peculiar characteristics. Secondly, if the human lifestyle under low-technology and low-population conditions found in the archaeological and anthropological evidence was analogous to that of the European wildcat (asocial except for mating and the early youth of offspring) methodological individualism might still be defensible. In fact it is not: humans characteristically live and breed in social groups (and this is predictable both from chimpanzee lifestyles and from the needs imposed by humans’ rather limited teeth and claws).

If marginalism was right, the organisation of social groups could in spite of these observations fall to be explained largely by individuals’ choices with a view to their own marginal utility. (Intra-family relations would still remain very problematic, because children are irretrievably ‘downstream’ of their parents: ie receive benefits for no obligatory return). Anything which didn’t fit the paradigm could either be explained as *really* utility-maximising (as, for example, early ‘Chicago school’ economist Frank Knight argued that the armed robber’s profit properly and legitimately reflected his investment in weapons and the risks he took on). Or it could be identified as a defect in the social order (insufficiently free-market).

The problem is quite simply that there are biological maximum working hours and minimum subsistence costs, given by biological human needs. In addition, the quantity of land is subject to absolute limits (we have only one planet). And the quantity of money is subject to necessary relative limits: if the quantity of money was not limited, it could not serve as a store of value and, given the time element in exchange, if it could not serve as a store of value it could not serve as a means of exchange (witness the Zimbabwe dollar). These limits mean that markets *do not* invariably or even generally clear. A common form is the so-called ‘downward stickiness of wages’; but it is also the case that goods may remain unsold because the producer cannot afford to accept the price on offer, and eventually be dumped in landfill.

The result is that *pure* private-choice regimes simply do not work in the way the ‘hidden hand’ suggests. The larger the private-choice element of the economic order, the stronger the tendency towards polarisation (extremes of rich and poor) and in capitalism towards crises (periodic radical dislocations of production); in pre-modern society, towards famine vulnerability and hence periodic famines.

Now this may appear to be merely

a point about *capitalist* markets, but it is not (which is why I expressed it as ‘private-choice regimes’) though it is most *transparent* in capitalism. It can apply equally if less intensely to the private choices of pastoralists, peasants or artisans, of slave-takers or feudal lords.

It is from these points that it follows that we have to analyse social orders in terms of the *total material social division of labour* in the society. Precisely because marginalism and pure private-choice regimes do not work, it is *necessary* to every society that this social division of labour contain both a familial/gender element (how the reproduction of the species takes place) and a *public*, state and/or religious element, involving two dimensions.

One of these dimensions is common and public infrastructure (public ways, etc), defence and emergency management, and measurements, which only have any productive utility as *collective* practices of the social group, including money issuance. Another dimension is that every society which is not merely ‘tribal’ or ‘segmentary’ (and some that are) necessarily contains *redistributive* institutions (commonly religious) which mitigate the inherent tendency of private-choice regimes to produce violent social inequality and episodic general breakdown.

From this angle Banaji is perfectly right to insist that we cannot characterise social orders and their dynamics *simply* in terms of relations of exploitation at the point of production, as they appear *directly* as master-slave, landlord-tenant or employer-worker relations. He slightly suggests that we may be able to characterise them in terms of the incentives and aspirations of the *elite or ruling* classes. This is helpful - for example, in pointing to the land-hunger which landlord classes shared with peasants¹³ - but still deficient, because it does not analyse the material division of labour *as a whole-society practice*.

Base and superstructure

What I have just said is as ‘revisionist’ of Marx and Engels as Banaji’s argument is, so I should be explicit about it. It is conventional Marxism to divide the economic ‘base’ from the political, religious, cultural, etc, ‘superstructure’. The point I am making is that the ‘base’ is the *total material division of labour* in the society, not those forms which are immediately analogous to the capitalist ‘economy’. In this context, the family form and - more strikingly - the *state* and the *institutions of redistribution* (whether or not religious) are both elements of the material division of labour, hence part of the ‘base’, not part of the ‘superstructure’.

Applying this approach involves real complexities. It is certainly the case that a large part of both law, and other forms of state self-image, and of religious doctrine is genuinely superstructural. To take an instance from law, in the medieval period both Christendom and Islam adopted fixed-share rules affecting inheritance. These rules tended to produce fragmentation of estates, and in both social orders landlord classes found ways to evade them. But the legal doctrines adopted for this purpose are wildly different: the Muslim *waqf* purports to be a perpetual charity for ‘poor’ relations; the continental *fideicommissum* imposes a personal obligation on one ‘absolute’ owner to hand over to the next in succession; the English *entail/settlement* divides ownership into time-slices. The problem posed is to disentangle the aspect of law which is expressive of underlying social relations of production, from the aspect of law

which is expressive merely of the intellectual creativity of lawyers.

The same problem applies with equal or more force to religious doctrine and institutions (to the extent that legal and religious institutions can be themselves disentangled from one another, which is quite variable at different periods and in different countries).

It is, nonetheless, both possible and necessary that this work should be done. The reason is that neither states nor religious institutions are *simple* parasites on an imagined private-choice economy. They do real material jobs, and to understand the social division of labour, and hence the ‘social relations of production’, we need to distinguish the real jobs from the parasitic aspects.

One last point should be made in this context. Whatever their particular forms, private property, the family and class division set up competition between families and reasons to aspire to you or your family climbing rather than sliding down the greasy pole. This set-up is *prima facie* competitive and therefore a *dynamic* element in social order. The state, and religious redistribution, are in contrast *prima facie conservative* institutions. Only *prima facie*: states may exploit by conquest; temples or monasteries may compete among themselves. But this point provides a limited reason for supposing that we *should* characterise societies, or historical periods, primarily by their class forms - even if ‘their class forms’ does not mean counting the frequency of the relations of master and slave, lord and man, or employer and employee. We will return to this point in the third part of this review ●

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Notes

1. *Oxford English Dictionary*, 2nd ed, sv, <http://oed.com:80/Entry/198710>; C Dubray, sv in *The Catholic encyclopedia*, New York 1912, from <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/14474a.htm>.
2. Eg, on Hegel, Marx, ‘Passage from The Kreuznach Notebooks of 1843’ <http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1843/07/kreu.htm>; *Anti-Dühring* ch 7, <http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1877/anti-duhring/ch05.htm>, *Dialectics of Nature*, pp. 202-210, http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1859/letters/59_12_11.htm; Marx to Lassalle, January 16 1861, *MECW* Vol 41 p245, http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1861/letters/61_01_16.htm.
3. There is a useful short sharp critique of Popper with references by Mike Burgess at <http://www.tkpw.net/cafe/etc/burgess95.txt>.
4. *Poverty of historicism* (Routledge classics edition, Abingdon 2002) historical note and preface. MH Hacoen, *Karl Popper: the formative years 1902-1945* (Cambridge 2002) ch 2 dates both the break and the argument rather later than Popper did himself.
5. Eg, (among many) Roy Bhaskar, *A realist theory of science* (2nd ed London 1978); L Jonathan Cohen, *The probable and the provable* (Oxford 1977); David Stove, *Popper and after: Four modern irrationalists* (Oxford 1982).
6. Eg, one rather obscure version of the point: R Bhaskar, *The possibility of naturalism* (London 1979).
7. G Hodgson, *How economics forgot history* (London 2001); Cf also (eg) CD Mackie, *Canonizing economic theory* (Armonk, NY, 1998); Alan Freeman, ‘The godless religion’ (2001) http://mpira.uni-muenchen.de/14777/1/MPRA_paper_14777.pdf.
8. The next five paragraphs are slightly adapted from ‘Against philosopher kings’ *Weekly Worker* 11 December 2008.
9. *Theses on Feuerbach*, Cyril Smith’s 2002 translation: www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1845/theses/index.htm. *18th Brumaire*, chapter 1: www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1852/18th-brumaire/ch01.htm.
10. R Bhaskar *A realist theory of science* (Leeds 1975) presents powerful though difficult arguments for this proposition.
11. Kanichi Kuroda in *Praxiology* (Kobushi Shobo 1998) makes this point in the preface as an explanation of the difficulties of translation.
12. J Plamenatz *Man and Society*, (2 vols, London 1963) ii pp277-79; for trenchant comment on other ideologues of this type, I Meszaros, *The Power of Ideology* (Hemel Hempstead 1990).
13. Most clearly in an essay not printed in *History as theory*, ‘The peasantry in the feudal mode of production’ (1976) 3 *Journal of peasant studies* 299.

TUNISIA

Stirrings of an Arab revolution

Mass revolts and protests from Tunisia to Egypt once again raise the question of pan-Arab unity, writes Eddie Ford

Much to the alarm of imperialism, the popular uprising that erupted in Tunisia shows no sign of fizzling out. Indeed, instead of a return to business as usual - as no doubt originally expected by the governmental heads in Washington, Paris and London - Tunisia's mass revolt is spreading into neighbouring countries and the region as a whole, threatening the existence of oppressive and corrupt western-sponsored regimes. Far from being an outlandish or quixotic notion, Tunisia could act as the spark that ignites a revolutionary fire.

Thus after literally fleeing for his life on January 14, the former longstanding president, Zine al-Abidine Ben Ali - often described as "Tunisia's Ceausescu" - is now holed up in Saudi Arabia, a common refuge for despots past their sell-by-date. Almost inevitably, the interim or 'unity' government that came into existence after Ben Ali's fall is now on the ropes - meeting nothing but determined hostility from the increasingly confident Tunisian masses, now sensing their own power. The appetite grows with the eating.

So the Tunisian cabinet is being endlessly shuffled and reshuffled, in a desperate attempt to cobble together a new government of 'wise men' to replace the already hated interim government - which was nothing more than the continuation of the old regime minus Ben Ali. Needless to say, all the members of the putative new government have vowed in the spirit of enlightened populism to "protect the revolution" - including Rachid Ammar, the chief of staff of the Tunisian army (sacked by Ben Ali for refusing to obey orders and then hastily reinstated by Mohamed Ghannouchi, currently both the prime minister and acting president). However, Ammar has warned of the dangers of a "power vacuum" if the present situation is not resolved. Such a "void", he declared, will only bring "terror" and "dictatorship" - and in the process, "our revolution, your revolution, the revolution of the young, risks being lost". Perhaps significantly, the Egyptian daily newspaper, *Almasry Alyoum*, has carried stories which allege that the United States embassy in Tunisia had instructed Ammar to "take control" if the country became too unstable.

Yet the protests against the government, any government fashioned from above by elements associated with the old order, continues apace. Hence at the beginning of the week, there were clashes between stone-throwing protestors and the police outside the ministerial quarter - with several windows of the finance ministry being smashed. Ammar responded by making an appeal to the demonstrators, urging them to clear the ministerial quarter, which they had occupied, and "let the government work" - whether it be "this government or another one". But *Al Jazeera* reports that, far from being cowed by Ammar or any other figure of the political-bureaucratic elite, the protestors were determined to continue their sit-in for "as long as it takes until we topple the government". In the same spirit, the General Union of Tunisian Workers has called an indefinite strike - refusing to recognise the current government and demanding the ousting of *all* former ruling party



Tunisia's revolt: a flame has been lit

officials from the governmental structure.

The democratic genie now out of the bottle, pro-Tunisia demonstrations quickly burst out across the Arab world - most notably in Egypt, the most important country by far in the region. Egyptians took to the streets of Cairo on January 25 - many of them waving Tunisian flags - in one of the biggest anti-government protests the capital has ever seen. Brilliantly appropriating the *official* Revolution Day public holiday, held on the anniversary of the 1952 Free Officers Movement action which brought Abdul Nasser to power, it instead became a *real* "day of revolution against torture, corruption, poverty and unemployment" by the protest leaders. This saw Cairo become a "war zone" late into the night, the police shooting dead three people and firing repeated rounds of tear gas at the gigantic mass of people congregated at Tahrir Square, as angry demonstrators demanded that the despised Hosni Mubarak - Egypt's strong man for the last 30 years - quit and go share an apartment with Ben Ali.

And they wanted more than Mubarak's head. The demonstrators also called for the sacking of the country's interior minister, the cancelling of Egypt's perpetual emergency law - which suspends basic democratic rights - and a new term limit on the presidency: no more entrenched dictators like Mubarak. Now a second day of protest has been called for by various opposition leaders. Naturally, state security officials have warned that any such protest would be illegal and that those taking part will be dealt with "strictly" - that is to say, they threatened to kill more people. In turn, Tunisian activists announced they would be holding their own protests in solidarity with their Egyptian counterparts - especially in remembrance of the three January 25 police victims. Furthermore, parallel protests are also scheduled to take place outside the Egyptian embassies in London, Washington and other capitals.

Egypt's rulers are not the only ones to be worried by the "Tunisian effect", a term beginning to gain common parlance in the Arab world and beyond. In next-door Algeria the police brutally waded into a pro-democracy/pro-Tunisia demonstration in Algiers on January

22 - injuring 40 people and arresting many dozens, including Othmane Amazouz, the leader of the Rally for Culture and Democracy's parliamentary group. The main aim of the demonstration was to demand the abolition of the law banning public gatherings, which has been in place since a state of emergency was declared in 1992. Talking tough, the government's official news agency reminded the masses that "marches are not allowed in Algiers" and that "all assemblies on public roads are considered a breach of public order". Quite obviously, the Algerian government fears going the same way as the Ben Ali administration - and, as in Tunisia, the feeling of rage amongst the masses is palpable.

As for the Jordanian regime, it fears the writing might be on the wall - unless something is done quickly. But what? Government officials held a series of semi-emergency meetings to discuss the implications of the Tunisian revolt. "They are on a nervous watching brief," said one Jordanian official - as "they know that if Tunisia spreads, there are a few steps before it gets to here". Lebanon too had a "day of rage" on January 25, principally - though not entirely - by supporters of the recently ousted prime minister, Saad Hariri, whose largely Sunni Muslim supporters claim that democracy is being subverted by Syria and the Iranian-backed Hezbollah. Damascus is also jittery - as well it should be - suddenly announcing by presidential decree a tripling of the heating fuel subsidy for Syrian families, from \$12 to \$35 per month. Make concessions in order to prevent revolution - or so the plan goes. Nor was Yemen immune, protests breaking out in Sanaa when the prominent activist and journalist, Tawakel Karman, was arrested following two student demonstrations in support of the Tunisian revolt.

Everywhere in the Arab world then, as made more than clear by the wave of protests unfolding right before our eyes - with far more certain to come - the masses face the same problem of grinding poverty, grotesque inequality, rampant nepotism and the humiliation of being ruled over by obscenely corrupt and oppressive regimes. Most backed and bankrolled by the US - the most fitting, and disgusting, example being Saudi Arabia. A country of staggering wealth, possessing the world's

largest oil reserves, yet sponsoring regional counterrevolution in order to defend and preserve the abominable privileges of its ruling family.

Common solution

In other words, the Arab masses have a shared problem. The answer should be a common solution, which, of course, there is - *revolutionary* pan-Arab unity. There are nearly 300 million Arabs in a contiguous territory that stretches from the Atlantic Ocean, across north Africa, down the Nile to north Sudan, and all the way to the Persian Gulf and up to the Caspian Sea. Though studded here and there with national minorities, though separated into 25 different states and divided by religion and religious sect - Sunni, Shi'ite, Druze, Orthodox Christian, Catholic Christian, etc - there is a definite Arab or Arabised community. Yes, Arabs are binational - being Tunisians, Algerians, Yemenis, Egyptians, Jordanians, and so on. But for all that there is also a much wider Arab identity, which has its origins going back to the Muslim conquests of the 7th and 8th centuries. A community that comes out of a strong bond of pan-Arab consciousness, born not only of a common language, but of a closely related and interwoven history - of a shared *experience*.

The 'practical' ramifications of this shared history, and understanding, is that throughout the entire Arab world official documents, literature, school textbooks, religion and the media (television, radio, newspapers, etc) use a literary Arabic based on and derived from the *Qur'an*. Consequently, instead of national divergence there is convergence - a common language. Even Arabs who have nothing more than a standard primary and secondary school education - the overwhelming majority, of course - still find no difficulty in switching from colloquial to literary Arabic - depending on the social situation and the nationality of the fellow Arab they are communicating with. So our Tunisian would effortlessly switch to literary Arabic when visiting Casablanca, Algiers or Tripoli. To put it more directly still, Tunisians, Algerians, Moroccans, etc intellectually and emotionally feel themselves to be Arabs. Hence the January 25 protestors in Cairo on the Day of Revolution instinctively identified with the masses in Tunisia as *fellow Arabs* - not in any narrow national sense as 'Egyptians' or 'Tunisians'.

Therefore the objective and cultural-psychological conditions for pan-Arab unity exist in abundance. Yet the Saudi monarchy, the sole remaining Hashemite kingdom in Jordan, the Gulf sheikdoms, etc have a record of total failure - if not betrayal - when it comes to Arab unity. But we should expect nothing else. Tied hand and foot to US imperialism, they can only oppose pan-Arabism all down the line - after all, what is in it for them?

The highest achievement of pan-Arabism to date came in the form of Nasser - who led the overthrow of the pro-British monarchy of Farouk I. Immediately, Nasser oversaw a radical agrarian reform programme, nationalised the Suez canal, allied Egypt with the Soviet Union and put his country on the course

of state-capitalist development. Development from above. At the same time, he ruthlessly crushed both the Muslim Brotherhood and the working class movement as part of his commitment to 'Arab socialism'. But despite that Nasser rode the wave of popularity following his success - though not necessarily due to any great military acumen - during the 1956 crisis, which saw an Israeli invasion followed by a pre-planned joint French and British intervention and then an unexpected American veto. Pro-Nasser Arab socialist parties, groups and conspiracies flourished, his name becoming almost synonymous with pan-Arabism. Nasser demanded that natural resources be used for the benefit of all Arabs. This was hugely popular with those below, as everyone knew that what he primarily meant by that call was *oil* - that is, the revenue generated should be used to alleviate the worst sufferings and poverty of the poor.

Saudi Arabia instantly became an implacable enemy, only further adding to Nasser's appeal amongst the masses. Yet, feeling the weight of mass pressure, the Ba'athist authorities in Syria sought a merger with Nasser's 'socialist' Egypt. Conveniently forgetting the repression suffered by their co-thinkers in Egypt, the 'official communists' and the Syrian branch of the Muslim Brotherhood likewise favoured unity and the United Arab Republic was formed on February 1 1958. Nasser was proudly appointed president and Cairo became the capital of the new republic - the promised land of pan-Arab unity beckoned.

Yet the UAR had a painfully short life. Syrian capitalists did not gain access to the Egyptian market and Egyptian administrative personnel were painted by Syrian officers, bureaucrats and top politicians as acting like colonial officials. The union ignominiously collapsed in 1961. Opposition came from the Damascus street. However, from then onwards the UAR became a mockery, 'uniting' no other country apart from Egypt. Then the 1967 six-day war with Israel came along and proved to be the final, ignominious straw for Nasserism. Israel's blitzkrieg annihilated the air forces of Egypt, Syria and Jordan on the ground and by the end of the short-lived hostilities Israel occupied the Sinai, the West Bank and the Golan Heights. Nasser, Nasserism and 'Arab socialism' were humiliated and defeated - both militarily and ideologically.

Self-evidently, Arab reunification remains an urgent but unfulfilled task. Indeed, the fact that Nasser's UAR saw the light of day at all is testimony to mass support for Arab unity. The ability of the popular revolt in Tunisia to so quickly spark off mass protests across the region reveals the widespread solidarity. The role of communists is to give this pan-Arabism a new democratic and class content. Communists need to take an active lead in this fight. By definition, this is a task inseparable from the struggle for socialist revolution and the formation of mass Marxist parties - first in each Arab country and then throughout the Arab world, leading to the world-historic creation of a Communist Party of Arabia ●

REVIEW

Conversations with the sat-nav

Jonathan Coe *The terrible privacy of Maxwell Sim* Viking, 2010, pp344, £18.99 hardback (paperback £12.99)

More and more cultural products take the safe route these days. They perform the 'bare minimum' of their genre (detective fiction) or offer attention-grabbing thrills or comfortable nostalgia. Popular TV series like *Downton Abbey* create a consoling past, where not only does everyone know their place, but satisfyingly they have time to give comfort and advice - even across the class divide, even to the extent of servants hugging employers.

Remakes and sequels make for safe drama, superheroes for secure fantasy; comedy, meanwhile, is mainly intimate and observational (if not abusive); documentaries promote empathy, not new information or interesting opinion. The papers and airwaves are dominated as never before by celebrity gossip (often from the celebrities themselves). News focuses on personalised disasters (a murder rather than a war), moral panics ('offensiveness') or how plausible a politician is, how well liked and attractive - or not. Enjoyment is offered through humiliation contests of the self-deceiving, as well as the embarrassment of select VIPs.

It is harder to find really challenging art work, intellectually or otherwise, even on the internet, which is more and more clogged with advertising and distractions. In fact, Jaron Lanier in *You are not a gadget* (London 2010) asks whether the net has come up with any new art at all in the last 10 years. What music style is there to compare with hip hop, new wave, reggae, jazz, the symphony or the Beatles? Is avatar gaming much of an advance on animated Tolkien or *Terminator* films? How many YouTube clips of kittens and painful incidents can equal the movies - whether Chaplin, Eisenstein, Ford, Spielberg or, for that matter, *Toy Story 2*? Maybe the triumphs are ahead. After all, there was that very funny pastiche of the 'Thriller' promo with someone playing Obama as Michael Jackson...

This lack of creativity may not just be down to the flattening of 'shared' technology (Wikipedia does facts, not 'opinions'), but to the centrist consensus that pervades everywhere. Many issues - capitalism, the existence of nation-states, civil partnerships - seem settled, though others - bankers' bonuses and politicians' expenses - remain hot.

The interest in new worlds that even some of the most abstract modernists, like Mondrian, showed in the 20th century, has gone. A vision of a new world, like the one aboard the Enterprise in *Star Trek*, has been replaced by TV sci-fi about hostile visitors from other worlds appearing through space or time gate to spoil our 'non-discriminatory' society.

Exception

One exception last year to the consensus of pastiche or evasive works was a novel published to little fanfare. While no masterpiece, it did engage with the present in ways few other fictions dare. *The terrible privacy of Maxwell Sim* is Jonathan Coe's ninth novel (all page references to Viking hardback edition). Coe is probably most famous for *The rotters' club*, which was adapted for TV. This attempted to sum up the 1970s from the point of view of a Birmingham schoolboy. In *Maxwell Sim*, Coe seems to have set himself a more ambitious task - to catch some of the texture of life today.

The novel begins with the character of Maxwell Sim and his particular problem: he feels isolated, bereft of nourishing human contact. His paid work follows no definite career; he is divorced; he does not consider himself to be fully adult. He suffers a very modern - or postmodern - malaise. Over the first few pages, Sim considers his separation from others: his ex-wife and daughter, his father in Australia, as well as a man he started talking to on a plane who dies beside him without Maxwell noticing.

What is emphasised here is people's separation from each other. But then in a world where capital is mobile - going where the workers are cheapest - human beings will find many of their relationships shifting, as the jobs go and state benefits disappear.

Maxwell Sim is not the sort to stay in one place either. He leaves his current job of 'after sales service' - a job even he cannot explain simply - and joins a 'promotion' for a new design of toothbrush. The marketing people have devised a campaign involving sales reps driving cars to the far ends of the UK (for Maxwell, it is the Hebrides). These journeys are supposed to show how 'committed' the drivers are to selling the product. In other words, they are a stunt. They have no point, not even to sell to customers where the cars arrive. They are a movement through space, pursued, with effort and expense, to merely suggest something is worth having, to propose an image of desirability, to stimulate a fashion, a promise of something intangible: a virtual reality.

On his journey, Maxwell Sim does not see much of the places in Britain he moves through. They are in any case mainly motorway and service stations. He does though manage to look up various friends and family along the way. None, however, supply the satisfactory relationship of which he dreams. Of course, being constantly on the move does not help.



During the course of his drive, Maxwell Sim exhibits nostalgia too. He is obsessed with another solitary traveller, lone yachtsman Donald Crowhurst. In 1968, Crowhurst took part in a round-the-world race during which he had a breakdown, started faking his log and eventually went overboard. However, despite Crowhurst being revealed as a failure and a cheat, Maxwell insists on admiring him. He sees Crowhurst as the adult he is not.

By the final stretch of the drive, Maxwell gets to the point of imagining that his sat-nav is talking back to him: "she" is someone with whom he feels he can have a conversation. Of course, how many of us come very close to this kind of relationship with our technology - relying on our 'personal' machines, swearing at them, seeking playfulness and comfort from them? There are even net heads who think that one day the 'cloud' (the sum of all web technology and interactions) will become a super-intelligence, for which human beings will simply be researchers and pets (see Lanier, *op cit*).

Early on, Sim meets one human being with whom he thinks he has a chance of contact. Poppy is a young traveller who also turns out to be a promoter of 'image' - or rather virtuality in sound. Her job is to visit various cities and make recordings of their noise. The recording is then sold to a client who, for example, when they are next in Singapore or Paris with their lover, can play the CD in the background when they ring their spouse. The spouse believes they somewhere more mundane.

At the first hint, though, of Sim's disapproval, Poppy is ready to retaliate: "... if there's anything people of my age cannot stand hearing, it's people of your age giving us lectures on morality ... you're the ones who brought us up to be consumerist zombies ... Yeah, let's get those losers in the far east to make everything for us and we can just sit on out backsides in front of the TV, watching the world go to hell in a handcart - in wide screen and HD, of course" (pp37-38). Clearly, Poppy accepts her situation, but is not fooled by it.

Maxwell Sim's story is shot through with insecurity: his fear of his own managers, of the bank foreclosing on the company, of poverty. Just so - as mobile capital vacates the west for that very far east Poppy refers to (such as China), even the incomes of the middle class recede. Those 'middle class' with the money to invest - that is, the entrenched mega-rich - hand their capital on to their children (think of the Murdoch dynasty), while the working middle class find they have to support their own children for longer and longer: perhaps one source of the feeling that so many young people have not yet achieved adulthood. The fashion lately has been to blame this on the older generation of 'babyboomers' rather than the system where wealth flows increasingly to the entrenched elite.

New division

One searing post-crunch diagnosis, or forecast, in this situation is *Melt-down: how the 'masters of the universe' destroyed the west's power and prosperity* by Stephen Haseler (Forth Press, 2008). Haseler points out that "the new division between the global aristocracy (based on capital and inheritance) and sinking 'uncompetitive' workers has so embedded

privilege that it is now almost impossible to rise from bottom to top, from bottom to middle and from middle to top ... In the age of global capitalism [globally mobile capital] when the state has been weakened and politics reduced, then those with wealth are the only ones with power. The old 'rags to riches' myth was never much of a reality, but today it is an utterly impossible dream" (pp244-45).

Haseler sees this as leading to a new aristocratic ethos, which will devalue the previously 'bourgeois' ethic of meritocracy and effort. It is not what you do, but what you are that guarantees position. The rise in British tuition fees, for example, will force parents and offspring to calculate where a 16-17-year-old will be over the rest of their life, and whether they can afford the debt incurred by earning above £21,000. For some expecting to be 'on the cusp' of this salary, it may not be judged worthwhile. They just will not go to the especially high-charging institutions. Families with the money (for maintenance and fees) will, of course, send their children there, where they will be enabled to go on to the high-paying jobs. This is tantamount to creating a caste society. Offspring of doctors, management and even entertainers will step into their parents' shoes. The offspring of the unemployed and low-paid are 'free' to find what they can. Those in the 'middle' middle class may remain deluded that their children can 'get on', if not as far as before, at least somewhere. Too many will stand by the 'low income tax' parties in the belief that these will 'protect' them: most of the 'middle class' are, however, effectively proletarian.

At the end of the novel, Maxwell Sim does not get anywhere much either - not even to his designated finish line. The company he is working for is swallowed up by higher powers. This journey that started as pointless ends up as useless. Maxwell, however, manages to pull back from madness, divorcing himself in time from his sat-nav. Finally, he sets off on a journey all his own, across to the other side of the world to find family there, as well as someone 'non-European' he glimpsed in a restaurant that he wanted to contact. Maxwell's own solution then is not to be found 'at home'.

The narrative focuses on one consciousness, Maxwell Sim, but we are constantly aware of how all others are connected, even in their seeming disconnectedness. We are all items in a market, human commodities (with some - the 'redundant' - not even that), organised by a few who are also subject to the needs of the elite for short-term profits. As Haseler shows, this elite are not the 'moguls' of yesteryear - top hat-wearing adventurers with whims and ideas. These high-caste individuals (and families) work to the plots and profit-making programmes designed by others, the super accountants. They are mostly discreet, anonymous, because they are afraid: afraid of their employees, the volatile public and any limitation on their parasitic practices, like proportionate tax or withdrawal of 'bailouts'.

Even a successful financier like George Soros has felt the need to question the market as the bedrock of freedom. In the ideal market, Soros declares, "supply and demand were taken as independently given ... [but this] cannot be reconciled

with reality" ('The capitalist threat' *Atlantic Monthly* February 1997). Soros's counter-argument is that market players, certainly in the financial sector, far from providing free interaction with customers, are inevitably imposing their will, in the form of expectations, but also in the form of their values and interests. The financial markets have 'moods', make judgements and demands. This is potentate capitalism, more like royal spongers than 'captains' of industry or, for that matter, financial 'services'.

For Maxwell Sim a solution to this 'privatised' world is an individual effort at face-to-face connection. For the Keynesian Haseler, it is a return to nationalisation, state intervention: "[Western countries] can either tolerate increasing inequality - a strategy which in the coming downturn will lead to social resentment, the growth of stealing and violence, and innumerable social problems. This route will need vast increases in public expenditure on prisons and police, if not on social welfare. Or, alternatively, we can change tack and try new policies, particularly tax and trade, to lessen these sharp inequalities with a degree of economic redistribution throughout the social structure" (S Haseler *op cit* p245).

Coe's novel, however, affirms that in a disconnected world - disconnected by working practices and misuse of technology - an effort at personal connection is still possible and not limited to your own kin or national group. Maxwell Sim, though, does not press through to any sort of organisation, one founded on a few fundamental revolutionary demands with room for debate. He does, however, act to make personal connections: he maintains an idea of the human subject who can work along with others - essential for any social transformation beyond a 'command economy'.

That other future, the continuation of 'royal' sponger capitalism, is mind-numbing: an entrenched caste presiding over decreasing social mobility while national democracy, though not perhaps nationalism, disappears into a fragmented global society; a managerial state subservient to mobile capital and global finance, bringing us ever closer to worldwide war, a degraded living space and environmental catastrophe.

The old Labour/'official communist' solution of a nationalising nation-state is dead, in any form; the only alternative is some kind of world network of modular - that is, semi-autonomous - connections between local and international assemblies, no doubt using e-technology for more than Facebook. Not a big society or a big state, but a web of participation, all the way from workplace and neighbourhood to a global delegate assembly; a cooperative economy where individuals do the work they want while sharing the less empowering labour and taking decisions in common (See M Albert *Parecon life after capitalism* London 2003).

Whatever the alternative proposals, there will be no 'return' to any golden age of a national welfare state; thinking internationally is now a necessity for any workable solution. The choice is not between the state and the market, but between elite rule (state or market) and worldwide participation ●

Mike Belbin

IRAN

Amadinejad slapped as factions turn on each other

Yassamine Mather looks at the growing tensions in the Islamic regime



Mahmoud Ahmadinejad: grooming a successor

Last week's stalemate in nuclear talks between Iran and the so-called 'five plus one' countries (US, China, France, Russia, Britain and Germany) came at a time when a number of events had already promised a turbulent start to the new year for Iranians: a plane crash for which sanctions must have been partly responsible; the execution of 53 prisoners, including four political prisoners, in less than three weeks; accusations by the 'principlist' faction of the regime that president Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's closest ally, chief of staff Esfandiar Rahim Mashaei, is an "agent of foreign powers" (Israel); that vice-president Rahimi is corrupt; stories that Ahmadinejad was slapped in the face by a revolutionary guard commander; confirmation that Israel and US jointly sponsored the Stuxnet computer worm; the escalation of US sanctions against Iranian shipping companies; Afghan protests over Iran's month-long near blockade of cross-border fuel shipments; the passing of harsh sentences against film maker Jafar Panahi, 'human rights' lawyer Nasrin Sotoudeh and journalist Shiva Nazar Ahari; and a wave of workers' strikes demanding the release of all political prisoners ...

Seventy-five people were killed on January 9 when an Iran Air flight with 105 passengers and crew aboard crashed near Orumiye in north-western Iran. The US-made Boeing 727 plane, bought 37 years

ago, broke into pieces when it attempted to make an emergency landing in a snowstorm near Orumiye in Iranian Azerbaijan. The incident led to a spontaneous anti-sanctions campaign when a Facebook page got the support of 25,000 Iranians - US sanctions prevent Iran from purchasing new aircraft and spare parts. Iran's ageing civilian air fleet (and, one assumes, military aircrafts) use spare parts bought on the black market or taken from older aircraft. In 2005 the International Civil Aviation Organisation warned that sanctions on Iran were "placing civilian lives in danger" by denying Iranian aviation the necessary spare parts and aircraft repair, and the situation has inevitably become worse in the last few years.

Following the accident, transport minister Hamid Behbehani, still in denial about the effect of sanctions, said that the number of aviation accidents in Iran was low compared to the world average. The Iranian press and media derided Behbehani's statement. Farda, a website associated with one of the conservative blocs, claimed that the minister's remarks showed complete disregard for public concern over the unacceptable number of aviation accidents. The website said that Iranians killed in plane crashes in the past 30 years made up nearly 30% of the world's total aviation accident fatalities (1,610 out of 5,416 people killed) - 795 people had been killed in the

past seven years alone, about 23% of the global total in the same period.

Corruption

Throughout the Middle East and North Africa, where corruption is characteristic of secular, pro-western governments, Islamists claim to lead the battle against it (and over-consumption), at times pointing to Ahmadinejad as their champion. However Iranians are well aware that, for all his election promises of combating corruption, Ahmadinejad presides over one of the most rotten governments Iran has experienced - and this is quite an achievement, given the depth and spread of corruption during the Rafsanjani/Khatami presidencies, not to mention the pre-1979 Pahlavi era.

Allegations of corruption against first vice-president Mohammad-Reza Rahimi were first published by the conservative 'principlists' in April 2010. They claimed to possess evidence proving Rahimi was the ringleader of a corruption band known as the 'Fatemi circle'. Eleven people implicated in a government-linked embezzlement case are already in jail awaiting trial. A number of prominent conservative MPs have called for Rahimi be put on trial as well. Last week, in an open letter to chief justice Ayatollah Sadeq Larijani, Ahmad Tavakoli wrote: "Is it fair that a low-ranking defendant in the Iran Insurance Company case ... should be jailed ... when [Rahimi] is

not even indicted?"

There are also allegations that the first vice-president spent large sums of government money bribing legislators to vote for a government bill when he was the parliamentary liaison deputy. Had it not been for the fierce internal battles between various factions of the Islamic regime, all this would have been forgotten, like many similar allegations. However, last month, the prosecutor general, Gholam-Hossein Mohseni Ejei, confirmed that Rahimi faced charges of corruption that needed to be investigated and, of course, if he is put to trial this would indicate a major shift in policy. According to journalists inside Iran, it would signify that the supreme leader, Ali Khamenei, has finally decided to stop giving his entire support to the president and ignore the complaints of the principlists.

Clearly the infighting between the Ahmadinejad and conservative camps has risen to a new level in recent months. They disagree on every subject from foreign policy to nuclear development and economic policies, from the never-ending issue of women's headscarves to cultural freedoms. However, the conservatives have chosen Ahmadinejad's seemingly unconditional support for Rahimi and Mashaei as the battleground.

'Liberal'

Ahmadinejad?

According to Wikileaks documents released on December 31, at a meeting of Iran's supreme national security council (SNSC) held in early 2010 to discuss steps in dealing with protests, Ahmadinejad surprised other SNSC members by taking up a liberal posture. According to sources quoted by Wikileaks, Ahmadinejad claimed that "people feel suffocated" and argued that in order to defuse the situation it may be necessary to allow more personal and social freedoms, including more freedom of the press. The source claimed Ahmadinejad's statements infuriated Revolutionary Guard chief of staff Mohammed Jafari, who said: "You are wrong! It is *you* who created this mess and now you say, give more freedom to the press?!" Allegedly Jafari then slapped Ahmadinejad in the face, causing an uproar.

Of course Iran's Revolutionary Guards have subsequently denied the report. However, even if one doubts the veracity of the slapping incident it is certainly true that the conflict within the state has now engulfed various factions of Iran's militia and, like members of the *majles* (Islamic parliament), they are expressing their disapproval of Ahmadinejad's new-found liberal and nationalist (as opposed to Islamic) posturing in the open.

Perhaps it was inevitable that, faced with major demonstrations and envious of the apparent popularity of the nationalist reformists, Ahmadinejad would try and steal their policies. In this he has relied heavily on the controversial opinions of chief of staff Mashaei (to whom he happens to be related).

Mashaei was first vice-president of Iran for one week in July 2009. His appointment was heavily criticised by the hard-line conservatives and he resigned following the direct intervention of Khamenei. Today Mashaei is still under attack for his unorthodox religious views and for allegedly influencing the president's decisions in other matters, including the appointment and firing of cabinet members.

Mashaei belongs to a group that believe the return of the 12th Shia Imam is imminent, while senior Shia clerics are opposed to such views, as 'nobody knows when the imam will return'. Mashaei has also expressed controversial views about an 'Iranian school of thought', as opposed to an 'Islamic school of thought', about the hijab, the religious ban on music and more recently about cultural freedom.

In fact on most of these issues, in particular the emphasis on Iranian nationalism, he and Ahmadinejad echo the views of the 'reformist' leaders, Mir-Hossein Mousavi and Mohammad Khatami. All this because Ahmadinejad is apparently grooming Mashaei to be his successor in the 2013 presidential elections - alarming news for conservative hardliner and senior ayatollahs.

Mashaei controversies

Over the last few years Mashaei has been blamed for a number of comments and incidents considered

unacceptable by Ahmadinejad’s enemies, who have been busy compiling them:

- July 2008: Mashaei is quoted as saying: “Today, Iran is a friend of the United States and Israeli nations. No nation in the world is our enemy. This is an honour.” For the first time since the 1979 revolution, an Iranian regime politician acknowledged the Israelis as a nation. In response 200 MPs released a statement calling for Mashaei to be “dealt with seriously” and ayatollah Khamenei denounced his remarks in Friday prayers. The day before, Ahmadinejad had said that Mashaei’s opinions were also those of the government.
- November 2008: In Iran, opening ceremonies for public events almost always begin with the recitation of a few verses of the *Qur’an* by a *qari* (reciter). The reciter of the international conference on investment in Iran’s tourism industry had to wait for the *Qur’an* to be delivered to him by women dressed in Kurdish traditional clothes playing frame drums (dafs). Two senior clerics from Qom were outraged at the incident, but Mashaei blamed his deputy, who was subsequently sacked.
- September 2009: At the inauguration of the minister for higher education, Mashaei told the audience: “God ... created the human ... if the human were removed, there is no need to remove god.” While it is not clear exactly what this meant, it was considered blasphemous by senior clerics.
- November 2009: The hard-line newspaper, *Kayhan*, quoted Mashaei as saying: “God cannot be the fulcrum of unity for humankind”. The paper commented that his remarks were “unjustifiable” and paved the way for malicious propaganda.
- January 2010: Following Mashaei’s presence at a photo exhibition with actress Hedieh Tehrani, there were rumours that she was his mistress (as opposed to his *sigheh* - a Shia ‘temporary wife’) and that the Organisation of Cultural Heritage had loaned her \$200,000 for the event. Mashaei claimed that the picture taken of him sitting side by side with Tehrani had been doctored to make the two appear intimate. The actress denied rumours that Mashaei had bought one of her most expensive photo works. However, the incident prompted some bloggers to compare the “scandal” with the “decadence” of the last years of the shah’s rule.
- July 2010: Mashaei invited a number of Los Angeles-based Iranian singers - most of them from the pre-Islamic Republic era - back to Iran. Supporters of the supreme leader slammed Mashaei, claiming that he wanted to “invert the situation” (favour supporters of the monarchy). Mashaei had said that expatriate Iranian singers would have no problem returning to the country if their activities were legal.
- August 2010: In a speech at the Razi Medical Research Festival, Mashaei said that the ‘god-sent prophet’ Noah failed to undertake a “comprehensive management style” since he did not establish justice. He reiterated similar remarks regarding other prophets in his subsequent speeches.
- August 2010: In the closing ceremony of a conference of expatriate Iranians, Mashaei made what was perhaps his most controversial remark to date: “Some criticise me for refusing to talk of the school of Islam and instead preferring the school of Iran. There are diverse interpretations of Islam, but our perception of the essence of Islam is the school of Iran, which we should promote to the world.” Former head of the judiciary ayatollah Mesbah Yazdi accused Mashaei of parroting the words of monarchists, while general Hassan Firouzabadi, joint chief of staff of the Iranian armed forces, went further, claiming the remarks were an act against national security, and an attack on the tenets of the Islamic Republic and the Islamic Revolution. Yazdi threatened: “If someone turns away from Islam, we warn him, and then, if that does not work, we beat him.”

Conservative cleric Ebrahim Nikoonam referred to the “possibil-

ity that the ‘incitement’ created by the presidential chief of staff might be rooted in foreign agendas”. Previously, some high-ranking officials had insinuated that Ahmadinejad’s office had been infiltrated by a foreign state (this is usually taken to mean Israel). Nikoonam said: “Such words might be said by those who are not part of the government, but when they are said by those who are they cause serious concern.” Yazdi called on Ahmadinejad to “beware of letting anyone infiltrate the government who might later turn out to be an agent of foreigners”.

Pure theatre

On January 11 theatregoers queuing outside Tehran’s City Theatre to watch Henrik Ibsen’s *Hedda Gabler* were informed by police that the play, which had been running for a week, had been suspended.

One of the play’s characters is a former alcoholic, but in the Tehran production there was no mention of alcoholism, and male and female characters were kept away from each other on stage. However, the Fars News Agency reported that conservative papers had claimed the theatre was promoting “nihilism, licentiousness and vulgarity as the main points of the play”, which has “nothing to do with national and Islamic ideas and is based on western nihilistic philosophy”.

All artistic activities in Iran are controlled and regulated by the ministry of culture and Islamic guidance, and the Iranian version of *Hedda Gabler* had apparently passed its vetting procedures following changes to the original script imposed by the censor. The subsequent news that a new body to regulate cultural affairs was to be created came amid a very public row between the ministry of culture and the regime’s more conservative elements. Culture minister Mohammad Hosseini said there was “no moral issue” with the play and accused its critics of “exaggeration”, while Mashaei himself used the incident to reassert Ahmadinejad’s new-found ‘reformist’ credentials.

Mashaei also commented that Ahmadinejad was not in favour of the jailing of renowned filmmaker Jafar Panahi. Panahi was handed a six-year prison sentence and a 20-year work ban for making propaganda against the Islamic establishment. The work ban covers writing scripts, film-making and travel abroad, as well as giving interviews to local and foreign media. Mashaei added: “The sentence was issued by the judiciary and reflects neither my opinion nor that of the president.”

Crisis? What crisis?

The history of Iran’s Islamic regime has been one of permanent crises and constant conflict between various factions of the regime. However, over the last 30 years they have agreed to share power in accordance with their respective votes in elections (the choice being limited, of course, to factions of the Islamic Republic) and subsequent negotiations. Last year’s rigged presidential elections broke this pattern and for the first time since 1979 there is no precedence for resolving the current conflict. Hence the paralysis that has overtaken decision-making and the total uncertainty regarding the forthcoming *majles* poll. In December, former president Mohammad Khatami warned that ‘reformist’ parties would not take part in future elections “unless prisoners are freed and the elections are clean”.

The battle lines for 2011 have already been drawn, with unprecedented animosity not just between conservatives and ‘reformists’, but more significantly *within* both groups. It is important to emphasise that these divisions are expressions of the inability of the religious state in its entirety to rule the country. The current crisis of government - mainly between the president, his advisers and ministers, on the one hand, and the conservative principlists in the *majles* and revolutionary guards, on the other - has brought the state to a standstill and it is unlikely that this crisis,

coinciding as it does with the escalation of sanctions, will be resolved as easily as previous ones.

For example, the appointment of the governor of Iran’s central bank has become a battleground between the warring factions. The *majles* voted in November in favour of a bill authorising a change in the composition of the bank’s board to block government “interference” and ensure its “independence”. The bill effectively removed the president’s executive control over the central bank, highlighting the intensity of the infighting between parliament and government at a time of discontent over price rises, the ending of subsidies and mass unemployment. Parliament, strengthened in recent months by the backlash against the crippling impact of the latest round of UN sanctions, seemed to have wrested day-to-day control of monetary policy from the government, but Ahmadinejad simply refused to accept the bill, creating deadlock.

In another development, the ministry of foreign affairs has barred Tehran’s mayor, Mohammad Qalibaf, from attending an awards ceremony in Washington in an attempt to prevent a rival to the Iranian president from gaining international publicity. The inability of the regime to agree on peaceful coexistence between its factions has led to renewed speculation about regime change through military intervention by one section of the Revolutionary Guards against another or through the US escalation of sanctions combined with cyber war and armed insurrection amongst national minorities.

Iranians have been looking at events in Tunisia with envy and websites have compared the success of the protests in overthrowing Ben Ali’s government with the failure of larger, more militant protests last year in Iran to achieve similar results. Answering the question, “Why Tunis, not Iran?”, one cartoonist sums up the feelings of frustration and anger amongst young Iranians: “Moussavi talks about the ‘golden years’ under Khomeini, Karroubi is nostalgic for the ‘dear imam’, Khatami supports *velayate faghih* [religious guardianship of the nation], Rafsanjani addresses Khamenei as the ‘dear leader’ ... Now do you get why Ben Ali fled and Seyyed Ali [Khamenei] is still in power?”

In the words of Mohammad Reza Shalgouni, a leading comrade of Rahe Kargar, the Organisation of Revolutionary Workers of Iran, “The situation in Iran is such that even the resolution of a most modest demand, that of the position of a headscarf a few millimetres above or below the woman’s eyebrow, cannot be resolved by ‘reform’. Such a simple demand requires a revolution.”

At a time when leaders of the green movement have reached a dead end, their failure is also that of their leftwing supporters. A recent battle between Farrokh Negahdar, a leading figure of the Fedayeen Majority, and other members of that organisation’s central committee shows the bankruptcy of both sides. Negahdar was criticised for the content of his open letter to Khamenei, which could have been written, word for word, by Hashemi Rafsanjani or any other leading ‘reformist’ supporter of the supreme leader. It warns Khamenei that he will lose power unless he listens to the calls for reform!

Although the letter is an appalling text, it is difficult to understand the anger of other members of Majority Fedayeen central committee. After all, what Negahdar has written is the inevitable consequence of the policy advocated by that organisation for more than a decade of tailing Islamist ‘reformists’. No doubt Negahdar’s text is shameful, but so are the policies of all those who advocate accommodation with a wing of this brutal religious dictatorship ●

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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 all imperialist wars and occupations 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.**

Become a Communist Party associate member

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weekly worker

Labour loses top capitalist donors

The pull to the left

Ed Ball's promotion to shadow chancellor gives Labour the Keynesian option, argues James Turley

The first major reshuffle of Ed Miliband's front-bench team has taken place, provoked by Alan Johnson's surprise resignation as shadow chancellor.

As readers will know, his replacement is Ed Balls, who was third in last year's Labour leadership contest. While Johnson ever getting the job at all was widely perceived as a snub to Balls, grudges die pretty easily in the careerist snake-pit of bourgeois politics.

His candidacy attempted - somewhat ineptly - to occupy the same ground as Miliband, trying to be a pole of attraction both for soft lefts and the second preferences of the Labour left proper. His supporters included 'Red' Ken Livingstone and other soft-left pin-ups, but in the end, his lackluster campaign was left in the shade by the two Milibands.

Nonetheless, it came as a surprise to many that he was passed over for the shadow chancellor's job in favour of Johnson. The latter, after all, is a pretty mundane career Labourite - working class roots, a long career in the Communication Workers Union bureaucracy (during which time he was the only union general secretary to support Tony Blair's ditching of clause four). He is not an economist by profession at all. Balls, on the other hand, is a public school, Oxbridge- and Harvard-educated boffin who worked under Gordon Brown in the treasury from 1997 until his election as an MP.

Miliband's choice, then, was widely - and probably correctly - interpreted as a bit of political manoeuvring. It sent a message both to the hard-line Blairites, in a state of shock after the new leader edged the race against his brother, and to the capitalist class as a whole. Even though Johnson could comfortably joke that his first job would be to pick up a primer in basic economics, he was nevertheless, as a committed Blairite, seen as a safe pair of hands *politically*.

Balls, however, had attempted to reposition himself during the leadership campaign as leaning more towards Keynesian stimulus measures than enormous budget cuts - though not in such a way that he could be pinned down definitively to anything. 'Reposition' has to be stressed; the image widely touted during the Blair era that the treasury was a hot-bed of clandestine leftism hostile to Blair was always false. Alastair Campbell claims in his recently published diaries that Balls, in particular, was an enthusiastic proponent of privatisation in his days under Brown (*Evening Standard* January 25).

Miliband and Balls were quick to issue a statement proclaiming them to be 'united' on the need for cuts. Yet this has not stopped a raft of big-money donors to the Labour Party, led by supermarket tycoon and Blair-era science minister Lord Sainsbury, threatening to withhold cash in the future. Balls' appointment is read as yet another sign that Labour, in op-



Ed Balls: boffin

position, will move to the left - even if only fractionally.

Is this as likely as the capitalists fear? Perhaps not - but it is certainly possible. At the end of the day, Miliband and Balls are straws in the proverbial wind. Labour is in opposition. Its function, according to the norms of bourgeois politics, is to *oppose*. There is no doubt as to the flagship policy of the coalition government - sustained and brutal attacks on the public sector, ushering in an 'age of austerity'.

This is pretty much an open goal

for *any* party of the opposition. The deleterious effects of capitalist austerity awake the most dystopian parts of the imagination. There are cities in Britain where, in a year or two, one will be able to count the local authority-run secondary schools on the fingers of one hand. There are to be £20 billion of 'efficiency savings' in an NHS already wracked by scandals surrounding the outsourcing of key care roles to barely trained private agencies - it is not too *gauche* a prediction to suggest that deaths in hospitals will soar under such conditions.

Yet something is currently holding back Miliband and Balls from even feigning a hard line against cuts (one can hardly expect them to formally adopt one, of course). It is expressed in terms of political strategy, in New Labour jargon, as 'triangulation' - political power is won and lost in a small number of marginal constituencies, so the logic goes, and won through the votes of an even smaller proportion of 'swing voters'. In order to attract these people, one must take the 'middle ground' between the left and the right. It is hardly an exact science, but it accounts for the Brown-Darling and now Miliband-Balls line on cuts - (slightly) less of them, (slightly) later.

It is also expressed on the brute economic level. The Labour establishment - Blairite, Brownite or otherwise - fully and sincerely identifies with its role as 'responsible' government (or official opposition) of the British state. Constitutional loyalism is hardwired into Labourism. It certainly is 'irresponsible' to duck out of imposing brutal austerity measures within this framework. The relations between states, the structure of the economy since the fall of the Bretton-Woods system, and the new conditions ushered in by the financial collapse of 2007-09 conspire towards one result. Failure to 'get the deficit under control' will, indeed, prompt

financial speculators to hover in the manner of vultures and lead a country, ultimately, to the fate of Greece or Ireland. If Miliband was to oppose all cuts, the Tories would roast him alive on exactly this basis. (His line does at least allow him leeway to attack each *individual* cut as one that is excessive, that Labour would not have made, etc.)

Whether this will be enough to truly harness the energy of the anti-cuts movement, however, is debatable. It is more likely that we will see official Labour figures - if not from the shadow cabinet proper - more and more willing to engage in anti-cuts struggles, speak from the platforms at rallies and so forth. This is certainly going to be the case with leading Labour-supporting union bureaucrats who are, on the whole, to the left of New Labour orthodoxy (if utterly craven when it comes to challenging it). Indeed, it is already happening - the TUC march against cuts takes place in a little less than two months; and Len McCluskey, the new Unite general secretary, is the highest-profile union figure to publicly sign up to the Coalition of Resistance.

On the economic front, it should not escape notice that the threat of a dreaded 'double dip' recession once again hangs over our collective heads. UK GDP has contracted by 0.5% in the last quarter, to much consternation in the City, giving the pugnacious Balls his first opportunity to go for the jugular of chancellor George Osborne. If we do end up in a downward economic spiral, the pressure will be on governments to produce big-time bailout money - in other words, to exercise yet another wrenching shift into pseudo-Keynesianism (as one neoliberal economist put it at the time of the bank bailouts, "We're all Keynesians in a foxhole"). Balls, the economic boffin *par excellence*, is well placed to give such a shift serious intellectual cover. That

may not translate into a shift to the *left*, of course - but it will somewhat neutralise the bourgeois cuts consensus and, should resistance to the coalition government continue with any kind of momentum, the Labour Party will be able to sell it to its activists in those terms.

The danger is that the anti-cuts movement - and in particular, the far left, which overall has been in a perpetual state of disarray over the Labour Party more or less since World War II - will miss the real dynamics of this process, or indeed the different possible outcomes of this chaotic situation. When the Labour leadership moves left, it is fundamentally a *pose*, though one with real effects in the class struggle. Again and again, when Labour is in government and therefore forced into implementing attacks on the working class, sections of the left write it off completely as a simple bourgeois party. Then, when Labour is in opposition and forced into posing left, other sections write off *everything else* in favour of Labour work.

Communists must not be pulled into either of these blind alleys, recognising the real dynamics of Labour politics both in terms of the cyclical motions of capital and the British *political* cycle. In the coming period, the internal life of the Labour Party is likely to liven up; it *will* act as a pole of attraction for opposition to government cuts (and indeed, is already doing so, its poll ratings having pretty much recovered at the expense of the Liberal Democrats). That - combined with its ongoing relationship with the unions - marks out this bourgeois workers' party as a site of struggle.

The challenge is to break the cycle of Labourism for good. That, in the end, means transforming Labour beyond recognition by building a real Marxist pole within it as part of the struggle for a genuine Communist Party ●

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