



# weekly **worker**

**The pope and the Pentagon:  
Chris Knight analyses the split  
world of Noam Chomsky**

■ Football sexism  
■ Egypt's revolution  
■ Moshé Machover  
■ Israel's far right

No 851

Thursday February 3 2011

Towards a Communist Party of the European Union

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# Mubarak unleashes thugs ... masses need a popular militia





# LETTERS



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

## Anarchy

In his letter last week Chris Knight provides us with some ideas of what united anarchist (a contradiction in terms surely) tactics might be on the London March 26 demonstration (January 27).

"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."

In *The art of war* Sun Tzu says: "The spot where we intend to fight must not be made known; for then the enemy will have to prepare against a possible attack at several different points; and, his forces being thus distributed in many directions, the numbers we shall have to face at any given point will be proportionately few." The brilliant anarchist idea appears to be the exact opposite. We take action at a place and time known well in advance to the cops who will be well prepared for it. We then sit down to ensure that we are defenceless when the riot cops attack us. This idea would be to demonstrate simply that we are completely and utterly stupid. Quite frankly it sounds like the kind of 'idea' that could have come from a police agent provocateur - recalling recent events, a far from extravagant proposition.

If our anarchist friends really do want to get 'stuck in', then I suggest that on March 26 they form into their 30 or so contingents and carry out a whole series of Stop The City-type actions whilst a significant number of cops are otherwise engaged with the main demo. This would have the advantages of (a) allowing the main demonstration to act as all it is - a piece of peaceful propaganda; and (b) allowing the activists to engage in events which, presuming that they can refrain from mouthing off on their multitude of online forums, would not be pre-announced to the forces of darkness. 'All warfare is based on deception.'

If this done properly some impact might very well be made without many participants being injured, imprisoned or fined.

**Ted Talbot**  
email

## Peak Labour

James Turley refers to the need to recognise "the real dynamics of Labour politics both in terms of the cyclical motions of capital and the British political cycle" ('The pull to the left', January 27). So what is the real dynamics of Labour politics in relation to the above cycles mentioned by Turley?

Firstly, we need to understand Labour politics from the standpoint of the long-term cycle of capitalism, and how this shapes the British political cycle. Blinded by traditional Marxist orthodoxy, most of the left do not yet realise that the rules of the game are changing. What has changed is that the present crisis is not simply the expression of a normal business cycle where boom leads to bust, which is then followed by another period of capitalist expansion.

In the previous era before peak oil, boom-bust and growth again were contained within the long-term ascendancy of capitalism, upon which

the rightwing leadership of the working class depended. Now we are faced with the decline of capitalism, which will destroy the material base that facilitated such leadership. Because the present crisis and decline of capitalism is related to the fact that the world has reached the global peak in oil production, there is no likelihood of the bourgeoisie being able to resolve it. Even if the bourgeoisie were to miraculously find a solution to the energy crisis, this would not solve the problems of capitalism. More energy under capitalism would simply lead to more overproduction. Capitalism is trapped between a looming great oil crisis on the one hand and overproduction on the other.

This irreversible, long-term decline of capitalism, related to global peak oil, means the Labour Party will have to move left or face destruction by the voters, once the full impact of the crisis begins to hit Britain. The Labour Party has entered a period of transition away from rightwing leadership to leftwing leadership. While I cannot say how long this transition period will be, it is nevertheless necessary to oppose those who claim that Labour is no longer a bourgeois workers' party. Since capitalism will not be able to solve the present crisis, the real debate should be about whether Labour can make the transition from a traditional bourgeois workers' party to a real socialist party, and by this I don't necessarily mean a Marxist party.

To waste time trying to convert the Labour Party into a 'Marxist' party in my view will simply lead to dogmatism and sectarianism, which opens the door to totalitarianism. In any case, orthodox Marxism does not fully explain the present crisis, and further, contrary to classical Marxism, it is more likely to be underproduction rather than overproduction which will bring about the downfall of capitalism.

**Tony Clark**  
email

## Cul-de-sac

Although I disagree with Paul Smith's assertion that the former Soviet Union was not to some degree socialist or progressive (Soviet society was far more diverse and multi-dimensional than it was given credit for), I do broadly agree with the main thrust of his letter (January 27).

The show trials of the 1936-38 period were a final expression of the general realignment and victory of the European ruling classes, and internally of the victory of the labour bureaucracy, which Stalin had come to front. To argue whether it was 700,000 or 700 million that were shot is irrelevant. Equally whether Stalin was behind Kirov's murder is best left to the liberal historians and Stalin's apologists, who seem intent on turning it into an Agatha Christie murder-mystery soap opera.

The Trotsky versus Stalin historical analysis of the Soviet Union inspired by the aforementioned liberal historians merely leads the revolutionary left down a historical cul-de-sac with inadequate conclusions.

**Colin McGhie**  
Lanarkshire

## Mass movement

Wikileaks has made clear the Bonapartist character of the Lula government. That is, by balancing between classes, Lula was better able to stabilise Brazilian capitalism than military dictatorship. 'Balancing' requires duplicity and amoral behaviour.

The left in the US gets confused easily. It is easily impressed by radical rhetoric, and reformism usually appears more 'practical' than revolution.

There were some so-called Marxists in the Lula government. Clearly, some of them get tired of talking about taking power when they can get a few molecules of power (and money) within the system.

About two years ago I talked to an advisor of Lula who claimed to be a Marxist. Her defence of Lula was there was "no mass movement in Brazil". That is, revolution from above is impossible without a mass movement from below.

Agreed! But then I questioned whether the left in these conditions should have taken electoral office. Electoralism is the opposite of revolution - but electoral reformism has become revived with the electoral victories of Chávez in Venezuela and Morales in Bolivia. Both countries are still expressing socialist goals in words, though both countries remain capitalist.

But in the final instance the task of revolutionaries is to build a mass movement. We will see whether it can be done from above. Lula never tried.

**Earl Gilman**  
USA

## Rape myths

I endured Eddie Ford's article defending Assange, in which he relied on a reiteration of most of the rape myths we thought had gone the way of Sky football pundits ('Hands off Assange', December 16 2010).

Do me a favour, love. It might be an idea to do some research before committing yourselves to that level of misogynist rubbish again. When I researched this subject myself, I was struck by the similarities between Eddie's piece and the online *Counterpunch* article (September 2010). Try Sandra Cuffe on the *Mostly Water* website for an accurate view of the way rape myths were perpetuated in this case.

I was later intrigued by a report in *The Guardian* (February 1) concerning Assange and Wikileaks. The article refers to the role played by Israel Shamir in Wikileaks in general, and his suggestion, with Paul Bennett in *Counterpunch*, that Assange was framed for sexual assault, and that one of his accusers was associated with the CIA. From his article has developed the entire character assassination of the women involved, and the unquestioning assumption that they are lying and Assange is innocent.

I'm sure readers of this paper will be familiar with the usual tenor. Basically, establish a connection with the CIA (on no evidence, see Cuffe in *Mostly Water*) and then use that unfounded allegation to discredit everything else the women say. Better still, point out one of them was a gender equality officer. Run for your lives, boys! That means 'feminist', that means 'man-hater', that means 'frigid', that means 'liar'. We now end up with both women comprehensively discredited on the basis of an unproven allegation of association and some basic misogyny. It's been repeated so often that you all believe it.

So who, I hear you ask, is the original *Counterpunch* author, Israel Shamir, who provides key inspiration for Eddie Ford's piece? According to a 2005 article in the *Weekly Worker*, he "would appear to be an ex-Russian/Swedish fascist" ('Blind eye to anti-Semitism', July 8 2005). In the same article, Shamir is described as "a medieval Christian anti-Semite" and credited with describing "the most odious characterisations of Jews as 'Christ-killers', the staple of classic European Christian anti-Semitism".

So remind me again how this

works. The women are lying because they have *unproven* associations with the CIA. But Shamir, and by association Assange, are telling the truth, although one has *proven* associations with fascists.

When did we decide that was OK? Did I miss a meeting?

**Heather Downs**  
email

## Stooge

I would like to comment on Eddie Ford's article, 'Stirrings of an Arab revolution' (January 22). It is generally excellent. But it makes one regrettable error. In the list of the progressive popular movements shaking the Arab world, he includes the following:

"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."

Oops! Hariri is a US stooge, and his supporters' claim to being democratic is shakier than that of the counter-demonstrators.

**Moshé Machover**  
email

## Free Jonathan

We are calling on all our allies in radical struggles the world over to send letters of support to political prisoner Jonathan Pollak, currently serving a three-month prison sentence in Israel. A long-time activist in anarchist, anti-occupation and animal rights struggles, Jonathan has been imprisoned since January 11 after a blatantly political trial stemming from his participation in a protest against the siege on Gaza.

Write to: Jonathan Pollak, Hermon prison NS Wing, PO Box 4011, Maghar 14930, Israel; or email xfree-jonathanx@gmail.com (messages will be printed and passed on to him).

**Sarah**  
email

## Beyond

Continuing from my previous letter on the petty bourgeoisie, while the 'national'/'patriotic' sections have their petty bourgeois democratism, Mike Macnair himself noted that the rural sections have peasant absolutism, patrimonialism, etc, and that this regime too can in fact achieve progressive measures. What we have here in the framework of thinking for the old bourgeois liberals is something that goes against their conception of a 'republic', which masks oligarchic/plutocratic domination, while supposedly combining democracy, (non-hereditary) aristocracy and (non-hereditary) monarchy, as shown in the original US arrangement of the House, Senate and presidency respectively. It also eschews the pitfalls of mob rule on the one hand and supposedly benevolent tyranny on the other.

In much of the third world, the proletariat is not in the demographic majority, so the question of the pre-orthodox minimum programme of Marx (dictatorship of the proletariat) is for the time being set aside. The Kautskyan minimum programme, however, is quite compatible with what I am about to propose: a triad of independent working class political organisation, urban petty bourgeois democratism and peasant patrimonialism. This, not to mention rendering the feudal relations/non-relations arguments irrelevant, goes:

1. beyond revolutionary-democratic dictatorships of the proletariat and peasantry;
2. beyond permanent revolution;
3. beyond new democracy.

This triad is inspired by ancient origins. In prison Gramsci wrote of four political figures, deeming two progressive and two reactionary: Otto von Bismarck, Louis Bonaparte, Napoleon Bonaparte, and a fourth individual. While he was wrong to deem Napoleon as progressive, he was onto something. Perhaps he was beginning to wean himself away from the gentlemen's history set by the rich nobility that found its way into Karl Marx, Wilhelm Liebknecht and all the way into today's accounts like those of the CPGB's own Jack Conrad. Perhaps he was discovering, shall I say, 'people's history'.

**Jacob Richter**  
email

## Stepping up

On Saturday January 29 Manchester played host to a national mobilisation sparked by Pubic and Commercial Services union young members section and backed eventually by the TUC and the rightwing leaders of the National Union of Students. It was supported by around 5,000 people.

Before the demonstration I attended the conference organised by Manchester Trades Union Council, which attracted around 60 people - mainly from the left groups, community organisations and the unions. A motion for the conference to be postponed and join the demonstration was passed by 35 votes to 20. But before we did so many speakers had highlighted cuts in their industry or workplace and described how they have brought new people into struggle. A speaker who worked at the Connexions youth service told of how she had gone from despair to optimism, as young people who used the service began getting involved and discussing politics for the first time.

I left early, though I was told that the conference agreed to build for the March 26 demonstration, passed a motion in support of the uprisings in Egypt and Tunisia, elected officers and established a united campaign called Manchester Coalition Against Cuts.

As I walked up to the demonstration, Aaron Porter was being chased off it by around 300 students, chanting "Scab!" and accusing him of selling out. As for the alleged 'anti-Semitic chanting' during this incident, no-one I asked had heard it and the group at the forefront included a good number of Alliance for Workers' Liberty students. While it is likely that this is another *Daily Mail* fabrication, it is important to state that anti-Semitism has no place in our movement. After students confronted Porter the mood of the march was militant and angry, but remained peaceful.

The rally was held in a field far from sight of Saturday shoppers and the speakers were for the most part dreadful, being duly heckled by the impatient crowd. Porter did not dare to take to the stage and Shane Chowen, NUS vice-president for higher education, was forced off before he could finish his speech.

There was then a small break-away demonstration that marched through the Arndale centre and this resulted in around 15 arrests and a small group getting kettled at Deansgate.

Both the conference and demonstration were small compared to the numbers we need to mobilise, but anti-cuts campaigners have definitely taken a step forward. On Saturday March 5 there will be an all-Manchester demonstration against the swingeing cuts the Labour council is set to vote through on March 9.

**Julian Langevin**  
Manchester



## FOOTBALL

# Ruling sexism offside

It has been a bit of a rollercoaster for Rupert Murdoch's media empire these last few weeks. While the occasional Murdoch nemesis, Tommy Sheridan, has been sent down for perjury, the *News of the World* phone-hacking scandal has threatened ever higher echelons of the Murdoch press operation, forcing erstwhile *NotW* editor Andy Coulson from his job as David Cameron's chief spin doctor.

Now a different kind of furore has sprung up at Sky TV: to gleeful crowing from other sections of the media, Andy Gray and Richard Keys - the two men who have fronted Sky Sports' football coverage since the channel's inception - have found themselves out of their jobs, after they were unknowingly recorded making moronically sexist comments about a female assistant referee, Sian Massey. In the opinion of these two esteemed football experts, it seems, Massey was a "bit of a looker" - but, thanks to a brace of X chromosomes, could not possibly grasp the intricacies of the offside rule. Gray was first to go - he was sacked when it emerged he had previously suggested, in an equally commendable display of witty repartee, that colleague Charlotte Jackson tuck a microphone down his trousers. Keys resigned a few days later, as the scandal refused to die down.

It is difficult to defend Gray and Keys for their gaffes - being as they are not simply sexist, but, really, from the absolute bottom rung of artless boorishness. They are supposed to be professional football pundits, whose words are worth listening to; instead they come across as a pair of unreconstructed pain in the necks. They have been defended, however; indeed the whole affair has triggered off another round of hand-wringing about the 'dark side' of football culture, and the fine line between 'banter' and harassment.

It should be noted that, however tasteless, implying oh-so-originally that women cannot understand the offside rule is not exactly on a level in terms of sheer brazen offensiveness as the infamous previous occasion on which Ron Atkinson was unknowingly broadcast calling Marcel Desailly "a fucking thick, lazy nigger" on certain Middle Eastern TV stations. Given the

total unacceptability of racist abuse in British official culture, it was very difficult to imagine Atkinson's career surviving that particularly remark - somewhat ironic, given that he had been something of a trailblazer in his managerial career in fielding black players.

There has been some debate, therefore, on the matter of Keys' and Gray's inability to avoid the same fate. Some have darkly suggested that Sky were keen to get rid of Gray on the basis that he launched one of many civil actions against the *News of the World* over the phone-hacking affair. It is certainly a pretty bizarre bit of hypocrisy on the part of Sky to find, all of a sudden, a hard-line feminist streak. The same people who bankroll it, after all, bankroll the country's oldest page three feature in the *Sun*; the latter's general tone apes exactly the sort of unreconstructed laddishness which has seen the two pundits come to grief. It is also the tone of much of Sky's more light-hearted football programming.

That said, the phone-hacking connection is probably wishful thinking on the part of Murdoch's competitors in the press - at the very least, it does not account for Keys' subsequent departure. Instead, the selective political correctness of the Murdoch empire has to be put in the context of a broader objective hypocrisy at work in society in general. The state equally likes to project an image of liberal opposition to racism, sexism and other bigotries - yet reinforces them through immigration controls and various kinds of support for religious organisations respectively.

So it is for the media - while organs like the *Sun* and the *Daily Mail* can amount to daily papers for the British National Party, an ersatz liberal sheen is created by various utterly shallow tick-box policing of a given media organisation's public image. Kelvin McKenzie can contribute unabashedly racist and misogynist bilge to the *Sun* on a regular basis, provided that *someone* is punished for the same crimes as proof positive that Murdoch takes his tolerant self-image seriously. Step forward Gray and Keys, careers sacrificed for a ruthless media tyrant's public image. It does not even matter, at the end of the day, that nobody takes it seriously - in the hands of big capital and the state, the epic struggles of oppressed groups are replaced by empty gestures.

In this case, it is no great loss. There are plenty of aspiring pundits to replace Gray and Keys, who hardly embody timeless broadcasting genius. There is another context to all this, however, which is the question of football culture in general. There is no point trying to deny it - football remains, as a whole, defiantly and unashamedly male. At the top, FIFA's idiot-in-chief, Sepp Blatter, once courted controversy by seriously suggesting female footballers wear tighter shorts and skimpier shirts to attract fans. (At least Gray did not actually expect Charlotte Jackson to clip his microphone onto his underpants.)

At the base, meanwhile, mass football support is particularly given to machismo and casual offensiveness. Abuse, of a kind which makes the bargain-basement lechery of an Andy Gray look positively tame, is shouted from every terrace in the land on every match day. Periodically it surfaces in the news - Manchester United fans' contention that Arsenal manager Arsène Wenger is a paedophile, or spurned Spurs fans' eminently unrepeatable rewrite of *Lord of the*

*dance* for the benefit of Sol Campbell, both sparked wider outrage.

The official spokespeople of the beautiful game do not quite know what to do with this phenomenon. It is both a spontaneous act of popular creativity which deepens football die-hards' connection to the game, and frequently a manifestation of exactly the *wrong* image. Top-flight football is sold to the world as a whole as an art form, in order to attract bigger-spending middle and ruling class support. Old Trafford is rather grandiloquently referred to as the Theatre of Dreams. The football money-men evidently do not want 'Sit down, you paedophile' in the script.

As such, the last few decades have seen various official campaigns sold in liberal right-on terms - most prominently, Let's Kick Racism Out of Football - that in practice serve to justify the increased state harassment of fans on terraces, and tighter central control of football culture in general. Far from scoring important victories for oppressed groups, these initiatives are ultimately cynical exercises in control by people who want the sport purged of all its remaining reserves of mass initiative. It should be noted that Murdoch's empire is deeply implicated in these shifts within football, providing a far glitzier media operation to the football establishment and bringing an enormous amount of capital into the game through lucrative rights deals and so forth.

Casual racism and sexism, of course, is hardly something worth defending in itself. The point is, rather, that it is wholly illusory to imagine that these things can be banished from football - or indeed, anything else - by police actions. Terrace race-baiting and Sky studio sexism are equally inevitable in a society which is still organised on broadly patriarchal lines and riddled with unresolved racial tensions.

Phenomena generated by objective contradictions in the system cannot be legislated out of existence. A serious cultural shift in football as a whole, conversely, could challenge the more bigoted expressions of its fans and pundits, and at particular clubs - most famously, the Hamburg-based cult club, FC St Pauli - this is already happening; at its ground, a racist taunt is likely to land the culprit in hospital. We should heartily look forward to any such development - at the very least, it would make the obscene terrace chants funnier. For it to work, however, it has to be the initiative of the fans themselves rather than the impositions of capital and the state; not least because, in practice, it would have to be linked to political struggle in broader society against the fundamental bases of oppression. Handing genuine control of the game over to its fans and players, of course, would also be an important precondition, equally unpalatable to the powers that be: FIFA, the English FA and Sky Sports alike sit atop the game, crushing the initiative out of it.

Those who applaud the fate of Gray and Keys should consider exactly who it is, in this case, acting as judge, jury and executioner. At the end of the day, football - Sky Sports football coverage, even - is not any the less riddled by sexist machismo for the departure of two boorish pundits. Their artless quips should not be considered a sackable offence; those who wish to rid the world of such idiocy should set their sights higher than this, and consider what really needs to change in society for it to become truly unacceptable ●

James Turley

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## 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](mailto:info@communiststudents.org.uk) or check out [www.comuniststudents.org.uk](http://www.comuniststudents.org.uk).

### Radical Anthropology Group

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

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

**February 15:** 'The social origins of language'. Speaker: Jean-Louis Dessalles.

### Solidarity with Egyptian people

**Saturday February 5, 2.30pm:** Emergency demonstration - US, UK, EU, hands off the Middle East. Assemble US embassy, Grosvenor Square, London W1, march to Egyptian embassy.

Organised by Stop the War Coalition: <http://stopwar.org.uk>.

### Unite against the EDL

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

Organised by Unite Against Fascism: [uaf.org.uk](http://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](http://stopwar.org.uk).

### Hands Off the People of Iran

**Saturday February 12, 10am 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](http://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](http://www.righttowork.org.uk).

### Hands off our homes

**Tuesday February 15, 12 noon:** Rally, Central Hall Westminster and mass lobby of parliament.

Organised by Defend Council Housing: [www.defendcouncilhousing.org.uk](http://www.defendcouncilhousing.org.uk).

### Organising against cuts

**Saturday February 19, 10am:** Day school, Falmer House, University of Sussex, Brighton. Speakers include: Pat Sikorski (RMT). Sessions include 'Anti-cuts economics' and 'Building anti-cuts groups in your area'.

Organised by Brighton Stop the Cuts Coalition.

### Everybody out!

**Saturday and Sunday February 19 and 20, 10am:** Conference, Mechanics Institute, 103 Princess Street, Manchester M1. Celebrating LGBT trades union history. Followed by social and cabaret.

Organised by Manchester Trades Council: [www.manchestertuc.org](http://www.manchestertuc.org).

### Keep the post public

**Saturday February 19, 1pm:** March - assemble Mail Centre, Padge Road, Beeston, Nottingham. Speakers include: Billy Hayes (CWU), Lilian Greenwood MP.

Organised by CWU and Nottingham Labour Party: 01159 518362.

**Saturday February 26, 11am:** March - assemble St Nicholas, Marks and Spencer, Aberdeen.

Organised by Grampian and Shetland CWU: 01224 870261.

### Lewisham says no

**Tuesday February 22, 7pm:** Rally, Ian Gulland lecture theatre, Goldsmiths College, Laurie Grove, New Cross, London SE14. Speakers include: Brendan Barber (TUC).

Organised by Lewisham TUC: 020 8691 5572.

### Unite Against Fascism

**Saturday February 26, 10.30am:** Conference, TUC Congress House, Great Russell Street, London WC1.

Organised by Unite Against Fascism: [uaf.org.uk](http://uaf.org.uk).

### Critique conference

**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'. Speakers include: Mick Cox, Christos Memos, Chris Ford, Mike Macnair, Savas Matsas, Hillel Ticktin, Yassamine Mather.

Organised by Critique: [www.critiquejournal.net](http://www.critiquejournal.net).

### 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](http://www.tuc.org.uk)

### 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.



Sian Massey: assistant referee



## EGYPT

# Mubarak unleashes thugs

The masses need to arm themselves and win over soldiers to their side, writes **Eddie Ford**

**W**ith events in Egypt and elsewhere in the Arab world still moving rapidly, the 82-year-old Hosni Mubarak continues to cling onto power like a limpet. Inspired by the mass revolt in Tunisia which within days forced the dictator Ben Ali to flee the country, millions are demanding that Mubarak goes.

Of course, it is not just Mubarak the masses want rid of, but the entire *regime* and all those associated with it. The same is true of the Tunisian masses who continue to resist the post-Ali 'unity' government that is stuffed with figures from the political-military establishment. More than that, what we are clearly witnessing in Egypt - no matter what the eventual outcome - is the beginnings of a democratic revolution from below which seeks, albeit in an inchoate way, to sweep away the current state-governmental system in Egypt.

This was made more than obvious by the 'million man march' on February 1, when some 250,000 people (of both sexes) converged on Cairo's Tahrir Square - with an equivalent demonstration in Alexandria, Egypt's second city. In what was the largest protest gathering in living memory, widely reported by various mainstream journalists as having the atmosphere of a "festival" or "carnival", the masses vented their hatred for Mubarak and his cronies - chanting out in unison, "The people demand the fall of the regime" and "Mubarak must go now".

The anti-Mubarak uprising is made up of Egyptians of *all* religions and denominations - and those of none. A real rainbow coalition, if you like. That is, except for the wilfully blind, the mass movement is not some attempted power grab by the Muslim Brotherhood or some other such Islamist group. Indeed, all the evidence points to the MB being to a large extent left behind by events - it is certainly unable to exert control or leadership over the uprising, doubtlessly to its frustration. The masses are not looking to the Islamic Republic of Iran or anything like it as an example that they want to emulate - why swap one tyranny for another?

The high spirits and confidence in Cairo was largely attributable to the announcement by the army that it would not use force against the demonstrators - the top brass saying they recognised the "legitimacy" of the people's demands. In other words, the army appears to have distanced itself from Mubarak and is not prepared to openly defend him. Not that this means that the army is for democracy - of course not. But the generals are clearly worried about keeping their own privileges and cannot fully rely on the soldiers they command. Would the rank and file be prepared to open fire on the protestors that have been fraternising with them?

So the regime is splintering. That explains the decision by the leadership of Mubarak's National Democratic Party to unleash thousands of thugs onto the streets of Cairo and Alexandria. Paid a pittance, many lumpen elements are nevertheless prepared to march with pro-Mubarak slogans and attack his enemies with stones, sticks and Molotov cocktails. Quite clearly, however, this is a desperate move; though it might allow the army to intervene by claiming that it wants to restore peace and keep the two fac-



**In Cairo's Tahrir Square**

tions apart. But Mubarak's days are clearly numbered. International support is draining away. Interestingly in this respect the Socialist International expelled the NDP from its ranks on January 31 - its past affiliation says all you need to know about the SI (to which, of course, the Labour Party in Britain also belongs). As for the hated police force - a brutal band of torturers and extortionists, especially the paramilitary Central Security Forces - they are back on the streets. Hence the working class and its allies need to hit back by combining mass demonstrations with a general strike and the formation of a popular militia. Only if the masses are armed themselves can rank-and-file soldiers be won.

They also need to arm themselves with a correct political programme. No faith should be placed in the cross-class politics which unite the left with the Nasserites, New Wafd and Muslim Brotherhood. The Egyptian Communist Party says that the revolution "will continue until the demands of the masses are achieved", but it wants to reconcile those demands with the setting up of a "presidential council" and a "coalition government" with liberal, bourgeois and outright reactionary parties (ECP statement). On the contrary, a provisional government needs to be born of a complete, far-reaching revolution, which puts power in the hands of those below - ie, the workers and small farmers - not a rotten deal with the army, the bureaucracy, big business and the mosque.

## Time's up

Ruling class divisions, in Egypt and internationally, have opened up a huge space for popular initiative. Mubarak's sponsors in the west have concluded - though very reluctantly - that he must go and go soon. Hence the talk suddenly emanating from Washington about the "legitimate demands" of the Egyptian people, etc. A theme subsequently taken up by David Cameron, who, speaking in parliament, insisted that the transition needs to be "rapid and credible and it needs to start now".

Obama has sent a special envoy to Cairo, a former US ambassador to Egypt - the rumour is to give Mubarak his marching orders personally. But Mubarak is intent hanging

on - for the moment. He still hopes to weather the storm. He has claimed that he had always been planning to quit in September - just that, you understand, he had never made that position "public until now". However, he will not go before that. Mubarak boasts that he had "exhausted" his life "serving Egypt and my people" and "will die on the soil of Egypt" - an obvious reference to Ben Ali, who is now residing in Saudi Arabia. Whether gracefully or not, Mubarak finished his TV address in a defiant, finger-wagging way by attacking the protestors for being "manipulated by political forces" that wanted to cause "mayhem and chaos" and endanger the "stability of the nation". Old autocratic habits die hard, it seems.

Too little, too late though. That is how the people in Tahrir Square and throughout Egypt saw it, now chanting "Irhal!" (Go!) and "We will not leave! He will leave!" Reuters reports one protestor as saying that Mubarak's pledge to go in September was "useless" and "only inflames our anger". Similarly, former United Nations weapons inspector and the west's favourite opposition leader Mohamed ElBaradei - who joined the crowds in Tahrir Square - dismissed Mubarak's offer to *eventually* leave office as no more than a "trick" to stay in power.

Despite that, the leader of the Wafd and Tagammu parties say they are prepared to negotiate with Mubarak. Traitors - and they are denounced as such by others, not least the MB. There should be no dialogue, no deals with the Mubarak government. Instead preparations need to be made for a nationwide insurrection, which alone can sweep away the hated regime.

Self-evidently, Mubarak and his regime are utterly despised by the overwhelming majority of Egyptians. The contrast with Abdel Nasser's Egypt could not be greater. Though Egypt under Nasser was hardly a democracy, let alone 'socialist' (more an authoritarian, state-capitalist bureaucracy, which crushed dissent to its left or right: eg, the Muslim Brotherhood) it still retained mass support through the perception that it was acting in the interest of the masses, whether it be nationalising the Suez Canal or standing up to Israel militarily (even if it did get creamed

each time). But Mubarak's Egypt is the exact reverse, seen by the masses as a state for *others* - principally the US, Israel, France, the UK and a tiny sprinkling of home-grown neoliberal *nouveaux riches*. An everyday living insult, and humiliation, to ordinary Egyptians and the very idea of pan-Arabism in general. Therefore the explosion of anger and hatred, which had always been there, bubbling away underneath the surface of Egyptian society, just waiting for a spark to ignite a mass uprising. And, of course, that spark was Tunisia.

## Domino

Now the 'Tunisian effect' has become the Egyptian domino - or so the regional powers and imperialism fear, for good reason. The beginning of the week saw a militant wave of mass protests hit seemingly sleepy Jordan, with thousands of opposition activists ranging from Islamist groups to trade unionists gathering in the capital - waving banners demanding the jailing of corrupt officials and politicians.

Poverty and unemployment is now endemic in Jordan, with about 25% of the population out of work. The main demand of the demonstrators was for the resignation of the loathed prime minister, Samir Rifai - who is blamed for a steep rise in fuel and food prices and for obstructing political and democratic reforms. Panicked, feeling the heat of revolution coming from Tunisia and Egypt, King Abdullah II promptly sacked the entire government - not just Rifai - and instructed the new prime minister-designate, Marouf al-Bakhit, to "undertake quick and tangible steps for real political reforms", which "reflect our vision for comprehensive modernisation and development in Jordan".

The same story goes for Yemen - only more so, if anything. Over the last few days tens of thousands have demonstrated in Sanaa, calling for the removal of president Ali Abdullah Saleh, who just like Mubarak has been in office for the last 30 years (becoming leader of North Yemen in 1978, then ruler of the 'unified' Republic of Yemen in 1990 and eventually the first president of the 'reunified' republic in 1999). Chanting "Time for change", ordinary Yemenis have been influ-

riated - leaving aside the grinding poverty they have to endure - by parliament's attempts to relax the rules on presidential term limits and by the suspicion that Saleh, in what is now an unfortunate tradition in the Arab world, is trying to hand over power to his eldest son, Ahmed.

Tunisia, Egypt, Jordan, Yemen: all in the grip of crisis, all shaky, all ripe for revolution. Who next - Saudi Arabia, the ultimate nightmare for the west?

Yes, the democratic contagion is spreading across the Arab world. Over the last few days, we have heard fine, sanctimonious, pro-democracy words from the likes of Barack Obama, Hillary Clinton, David Cameron, William Hague, etc - something of a recent conversion with regard to the Middle East, it does have to be said. But in reality they fear the prospect of *real* democracy and people power coming to the region, so the likes of Tony Blair (supposed 'peace envoy' to the Middle East) are raising the bogeyman of "extremists" gaining control in Egypt - usually interpreted as code for the Muslim Brotherhood and Islamists, but the label would also be stuck on any anti-imperialist force, not least one under the hegemony of the working class. The need to prevent such an eventuality is why there has been a "managed" or "orderly" transfer in Egypt, which defuses the masses and essentially gives power back to the *ancien régime* (minus a few faces).

By definition, a Middle East where the masses rather than despots started to exert power would be one that was much harder to control - far less subservient to imperialism and its interests. Certainly one, to put it mildly, that would not accept the continued subjugation of the Palestinian people. A free Egypt, as part of a pan-Arab revolution that rages across the entire region, would challenge the hegemony of Israel - which at the moment is a regional super-power acting, in the last analysis, as a Middle East outpost or garrison for imperialism. No wonder that Jerusalem is extremely alarmed by the Egyptian uprising, calling upon the US and Europe to "curb their criticism" of Mubarak so as to preserve "stability" in the region - ie, maintain the status quo which so favours Israel. "The Americans and the Europeans are being pulled along by public opinion and aren't considering their genuine interests", complained one senior Israeli official - going on to say that the "abandoning" of Mubarak will have "very serious implications" (*Ha'aretz* January 31). Israel wants to remain the only 'democracy' in the Middle East, so as to keep the Palestinian and Arab masses boxed in and subdued - hence little or no threat to Zionist supremacism. Welcome to the democracy of oppressors.

First Tunisia and then Egypt have shown us the incendiary nature of pan-Arabism. Some comrades on the revolutionary left call for a "socialist federation of the Middle East", or some other such approximate formulation. A worthy, but abstract slogan, with no political dynamic behind it. Rather what goes with the grain of history is the unity of the Arab nation - the question being which class will take the lead? ●

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## BACKGROUND

# Unity is only temporary

The anti-Mubarak coalition will break apart once alternative political and economic interests are presented, writes **Yassamine Mather**

**T**he dramatic events unfolding in the Arab world will have long-lasting effects on the political and economic situation of the region and beyond. In Egypt, Tunisia and Yemen we are witnessing uprisings against dictators who have been in power for over 30 years. These events take place against the background of the global financial crisis, as the countries of the periphery bear the brunt of the fall-out.

For more than two decades the Egyptian state embarked on a policy of privatisation of its industries, services and facilities - in a country where under president Gamal Abdel Nasser (1956-70) "even the grocery shops were nationalised".<sup>1</sup> Under the 'structural adjustment programme' agreed with the International Monetary Fund and World Bank, 314 public sector enterprises were eligible for privatisation. By mid-2002 190 had been sold off.

It is no great surprise that workers have been the main losers under these policies. As services and wages were cut, subsidies and benefits disappeared. There was little job security. While even bread became too expensive for the majority, for the elite Egypt's economy was booming. The rich in their villas around Cairo and other main urban centres in their gated communities did not listen when workers demanded a rise in the minimum wage - set at \$7 per month in 2010. One Mubarak official went as far as claiming the average wage was around \$70 a month anyway.

Until January 2011, Egypt was hailed as a success story by international financial institutions. In the World Bank's *Doing business* report, Egypt is named as one of the top global performers in four of the past seven years. The government of prime minister Ahmed Nazif oversaw annual GDP growth of 5%-7%. Yet, in the most populous Arab country, it seems this was not high enough to sustain its population. The gap between rich and poor has continued to widen, with 40% now living below the poverty line. A fifth of Egypt's 80 million population live on less than \$1 a day. Since 2008 the rate of unemployment has risen constantly. In February 2010 official figures put it at 12.9% in urban areas, although the real figure, as in all capitalist economies, is much higher. Unemployment amongst graduates is also high and many of them accept jobs with low wages to survive.

Mubarak's regime attempted to deliver its promise of political stability and growth by banning opposition parties and organisations. For the markets this authoritarian regime offered a degree of reliability, but in fact trouble was never far away. During 2007, strikes spread from the textile and clothing industry to building, transport, food processing, telecommunications, oil and many others. By the summer of that year white-collar employees, civil servants and professionals were in dispute with their employers or the state. In 2008 outrage against soaring inflation, the scarcity of basic food, as well as discontent with the regime, led to riots. According to *Al-Ahram Weekly*, "The city is burning. Thousands of demonstrators are out on the street, throwing stones, chanting anti-government slogans and defying the batons of the riot police, tear gas and bullets."<sup>2</sup> Since the mid-2000s Egyptian labour activists have reported over 3,000 factory occupations, strikes and other workers'

protests.

Given the worsening economic situation, and opposition to repeated electoral fraud, dictatorship and corruption - not to mention a sense of national impotence *vis-à-vis* Israel - the current uprising in Egypt was predictable. Yet it seems to have come as a shock to world markets and politicians alike. On Friday January 28, as demonstrations in defiance of bans and curfews took place in Cairo, the Dow Jones industrial average dropped 166 points - the biggest one-day fall in nearly half a year. Oil prices rose by more than 4% and everyone knows this is just the beginning. The Saudi stock market, the region's largest, registered a one-day drop of 6%, entirely due to events in Egypt.

After years of implying that the peoples of the Middle East are genetically disposed to obeying corrupt dictators, the western press and media have been forced to admit that in Tunisia, Egypt, Yemen, etc the battle for democracy, better living standards and against corrupt dictatorships has entered a new phase. All this not as a result of US/Nato military intervention, but, on the contrary, action from below against pro-imperialist dictators. The humiliating retreat of one of the most important allies of the hegemon capitalist power and the prospect of the downfall of the recipient of major US loans, whose government's repressive policies were never challenged by the US or EU, will have major implications.

Last week in Davos, Masood Ahmed, the IMF's Middle East director, observed: "There is now rising concern about the chronic levels of youth unemployment in the Middle East, and these events have shown that governments need to address this. If they do, that could unlock human resources and really boost growth." Of course, the same could be said of any capitalist economy. The crucial question is, at a time of global economic crisis, capitalism relies on unprecedented rates of unemployment to maintain control of the working class. In the Middle East as elsewhere, rulers are faced with a dilemma: high levels of unemployment combined with rocketing price rises pave the way for volatile political situations.

After last year's events in Greece, Iceland, Iran and Ireland - all political crises shattering illusions of economic stability - how can anyone imagine the current upheavals in the Arab world will not in turn worsen the economic situation for world capital? According to the *Financial Times*, "Now gravity has reasserted itself; just as it did two years ago with respect to subprime loans, or Greek debt."<sup>3</sup> The 'emerging' economies are crumbling with unprecedented speed.

Imperialism is worried and western leaders' show of concern for the 'transition to democracy' in the Arab world and the Middle East is too little and too late. Nevertheless pro-western dictators across the globe must be disconcerted by this sudden change of heart in imperialist capital cities.

### Favourable for business

In Davos last week, two ministers of Tunisia's transition government told delegates that "Tunisia is open for business again." Mustapha Kamel, the new central bank governor, tried

to talk up the post-Ben Ali situation by saying there is now "a much more favourable business environment".

Someone should tell the new Tunisian government that it was the "favourable business environment" that paved the way for last month's upheavals. Unless they come up with an economic miracle, the rebellion of unemployed youth could well continue and in the absence of working class parties Tunisia may well fall into chaos.

On January 30 Tunisia's Muslim leader, Rached Ghannouchi, returned after 22 years of exile. He insisted that he had no plans to run for the presidency, and would instead help to "anchor a democratic system, social justice, and to put a stop to discrimination against banned groups. We are taking part so we can move to a true multi-party system without corruption or oppression."<sup>4</sup> It was almost word for word what ayatollah Khomeini said just before returning from exile to Iran in January 1979. No wonder some Tunisians were wary of his arrival. At the airport they held up banners reading: "No Islamism, no theocracy, no sharia and no stupidity."

Unlike Tunisia, where there is a long tradition of secularism and the Islamists are relatively weak, in Egypt the Muslim Brotherhood is likely to play a significant role in any future government. Some consider it Egypt's most popular unofficial political organisation, yet it was caught unprepared for the strength of the protests that started last week, and had to rally its forces to intervene more effectively over the last few days, starting with its traditional stronghold, Alexandria.

The 'Brotherhood' was founded in 1928 and has long fought to establish sharia law in Egypt under the slogan, 'Islam is the solution'. Yet on Saturday January 29 an MB spokesman was quoted on Al Jazeera TV as saying his movement was not interested in forming or being part of a government. On Sunday, however, the organisation said it was talking to other opposition groups with a view to forming a committee to coordinate the protest movement. According to spokesman Saad el-Katatni, former Iraq weapons inspector Mohamed ElBaradei would be a member of the committee, but not necessarily its leader. (ElBaradei, who is talked of as Egypt's interim leader, might not be aware that in Tehran people are already calling him the Egyptian Bazargan - a reference to Mehdi Bazargan, who became the interim prime minister of Khomeini's Islamic regime in February 1979.)

Some think the influence of the MB has been overstated. Khalil al-Anani of Durham University said: "There is widespread exaggeration about the role of the Brotherhood in Egyptian society, and I think these demonstrations have exposed that."<sup>5</sup> According to Anani, "The Mubarak regime was adept at inflating the influence of the Brotherhood and painting them as a threat to Egyptian society and to the west. It was the pretext for Mubarak's rule, and it was a lie." The MB has always seen itself as a political and social movement, claiming to protect the poor against tyranny and foreign powers. It has founded 'charitable' institutions, hospitals, pharmacies, schools and food distribution centres, and most of its support relies on networks built around these 'social charities'. How-

ever, in addition to holding conservative views on issues such as women's rights, the MB is anti-communist and has been hostile to independent working class popular organisations.

Egyptians should also be aware that Islamists in Iran, Turkey and Iraq have set up similar social institutions to gain support when in opposition, only to use the very same institutions to accumulate wealth for their cronies, once in power. In the case of Iran, it took less than a year for the Islamic charitable organisations to become the centres of corruption and financial deceit.

### Opposition

In Egypt the April 6 Youth Movement has played a prominent role in organising and coordinating the recent protests, making use of the internet, social networking sites and Twitter until they were blocked by the regime. The group is named after the 2008 attack by the authorities on striking textile workers. Its activists are mainly secular, but they have made alliances with other anti-Mubarak forces.

According to the western press and media, Egypt's new vice-president, Omar Suleiman, has offered to open a dialogue with the opposition in order to discuss a programme of reforms. Commentators have described him as a "distinguished" and "respected" man. But it turns out that he is distinguished for, among other things, his central role in Egyptian torture and the US 'rendition' programme.

Because of the brutal suppression of the left by Mubarak and Anwar El Sadat before him, there is at present no viable secular, progressive opposition party to challenge the governing National Democratic Party established by Sadat in 1978. Many of the parties considered 'left of centre' uphold sharia law. The Egyptian Arab Socialist Party calls for "the adoption of Islamic sharia as a main source of legislation" and, although it supports freedom of religious affiliation and expression, its main concern seems to be "preserving Egypt's Islamic identity". The

Young Egypt Party supports the adoption of a "socialist Islamic economic system", while boosting the private sector. Similarly the Social Justice Party, whose declared aims include enhancing the principles of democracy and socialism and protecting the gains of the working class and peasants, wants to keep Islamic sharia as a guide for Egyptian legislation.

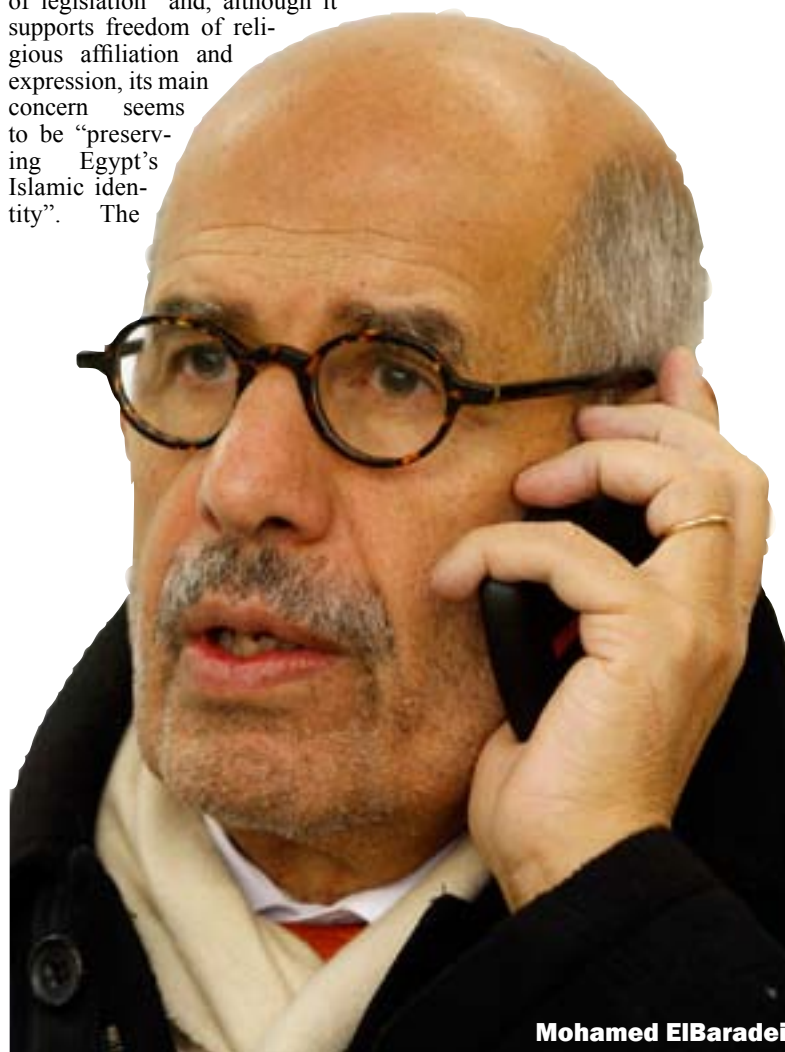
On Sunday January 30 representatives of the Egyptian trade union movement met. They announced the setting up of the new Federation of Egyptian Trade Unions and committees in all factories and enterprises to protect and defend workers. They declared their intention to set a date for a general strike. Workers' strikes during the last three to four years have paved the way for this week's uprising, but in the absence of political leadership it is difficult to envisage how trade unions can respond to demands for radical economic change.

In opposition to Mubarak there is unity. Everyone - secular or religious, men and women, rich and poor - have joined forces to call for regime change from below. Political and economic divisions are not yet evident. However, no-one believes such unity can continue once it is a question of a positive alternative. The balance of class forces will decide. That is why it is vital that the Egyptian workers' movement makes its presence felt ●

### Notes

1. Mohamed ElBaradei in an interview with Robert Fisk *The Independent* February 1.
2. [www.agenceglobal.com/article.asp?id=1572](http://www.agenceglobal.com/article.asp?id=1572).
3. *Financial Times* January 27.
4. <http://uk.reuters.com/article/2011/01/29/uk-tunisia-protests-islamist-interview-idUKTRE70S2YQ20110129>.
5. *The Guardian* January 31.

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Mohamed ElBaradei



## INTERVIEW

# Grounds for optimism

Israeli socialist **Moshé Machover** talks to Mark Fischer about the implications of the uprising in Egypt for the whole region

**F**irst, I would like to compliment the *Weekly Worker* on its article on Egypt in its current issue ('Stirrings of an Arab revolution', January 27). It was absolutely the right political stance to take - for the Arab revolution.

However, the justifications that were given for this stance in the *Weekly Worker* miss out one important point. It not just a common cultural affinity that the masses feel subjectively that makes unity a necessity - this was explained very well in the article in terms of history, language, etc. But there is also a material basis for Arab unification, which is its *economic* necessity.

Resources in the Arab world are very unevenly spread. You have fuel resources concentrated in one place; material resources of various kinds - like minerals, land or water - somewhere else. For the genuine development of the Arab world, it *needs* unity.

For example, let's take Egypt, as the eyes of the world are currently upon it. It seems to be a huge country - one million square kilometres, or four times the size of the UK. But it is actually a very small country, because the inhabited strip is only along the Nile. So you have 80-plus million people, concentrated in that narrow area. The amount of land actually available is very limited.

A country like Syria is very large and very fertile - it is part of the fertile crescent - but with a relatively small population. Then, oil is concentrated in some desert countries. So, when you come to look at this region of the world, it is like a jigsaw that requires economic unification for the whole to function properly.

History is developing in a very strange way. About two years ago I published an article in the *Weekly Worker* about the Palestinian problem ('Breaking the chains of Zionist oppression', February 19 2009). I concluded by saying that the solution could not be within the 'box' of Palestine and what was required was an Arab revolution and global changes - so *don't hold your breath*, I rather pessimistically concluded! This was not something that was going to happen in the short or medium term, I opined. OK, although we might not now be seeing the thing itself - the Arab revolution I was envisaging - but it's a hell of a good preview, or dress rehearsal.

**What speaks of the future is the fact that the dynamics of revolt are spilling over from one country to another - it underlines the organic links between these peoples.**

And there is a genuine potential for revolution in this region. The masses are striving for change and a fundamental overturning of what existed before. No matter how it ends this time round, that is a hugely important lesson.

**So what is missing?**

Well you can topple a regime, but in order to actually replace it you need a more organised alternative. I don't need to tell you comrades! You need a mass, working class party. Of course, there are workers' organisations, but the left in the region suffers from the same problems as the left in the rest of the world. They have called for a general strike, for example. But still, things are too fragmented and dominated by the past.

So the current conflict can end in

all sorts of ways. A temporary military dictatorship, perhaps. A sort of 'soft' Islamic regime - but nothing like Iran is on the cards, in my opinion. An unstable coalition of various bourgeois democratic forces is a possibility. It is very difficult - and foolish - to prophesy. But what is clear is that this is a turning point in world history and so I think I should now turn to what I see as the global implications of what is happening in the Middle East.

What we witnessing is a defining moment in the process of the unravelling of United States hegemony over the post-World War II world. The fact that the US could not even *predict* this unfolding revolution - let alone control it - shows that things are slipping from its hands. The first reaction of Hillary Clinton was - 'Egypt is stable'! This was a blandly stated assertion of supposed fact. What this means is that they did not have the slightest clue about what was actually happening in that society.

**Which is strange, isn't it? Comrades of ours talk anecdotally of being in Egypt and sensing this was a society on the brink, ripe with mass revolt ...**

Yes, but the point is that the US was aware of the sentiment of the masses, but they had faith that the regime would be capable of containing it. That is their blindness, not the fact that mass discontent exists - they were well aware of that. They are not stupid - as Wikileaks has taught us. Their ability to process all that data and how they assess the ability of repressive regimes to contain the masses is seriously flawed - after all, by definition they don't understand history.

No matter how this episode in Egypt ends, it confirms that the US is losing control of the world. And, more specifically, Egypt is a key country in the Middle East, and the Middle East is the most strategically important region of the world because of *oil*. When we were arranging this interview, I was planning to predict that the price of oil would rocket. But the news this morning, revealing it has broken through the \$100 a barrel level for the first time in two years, has taken the wind out of my sails!

**So, if US hegemony over this strategically important region actually is unravelling, what are the implications - not simply for that area, but the world as a whole?**

OK, first the short-term implications. As we have seen, the price of oil will rise, which will exacerbate the global economic recession and slow down any recovery. At the same time, it will also make big money for the oil companies. Capitalism is not a monolithic system in that sense: it has divided sectors; it is an organic bundle of contradictions.

The long-term effects are momentous. The leader of the so-called international community - in other words, the United States and its camp followers - is in profound decline. Regimes all over the world are going to look at this and have second thoughts about their allegiances and how they position themselves in the world in relation to stronger powers. What the implications of that will be ... well, your guess is as good as mine.

The short term is more problematic and unpredictable. Two very different reactions are possible. The neo-con instinct would be to attempt to reverse the decline and reassert US hegemony, if necessary through wars and interventions ...

**But the specific influence of the neo-cons has been very much on the wane since the disaster of Iraq ...**

But can you safely predict who will be the next American president or what his or her programme will be? US politics is very unstable, given internal contradictions and conflicts within that society and its ruling elite. It may happen that a version of the neo-cons - the 'neo-neo-cons' - could take control and launch a huge effort to reverse the decline ...

**But by definition that would require a massive deployment in the region, not simply in this or that state ...**

Yes, that is a possibility, I think. It is another way that the 'Vietnam syndrome' plays out. A defeat costs them prestige. So how do you react? You can retrench, lick your wounds and adjust to the new world equilibrium between the contending powers. That would be a *sane* way to manage your decline. But you can hardly rely on a system in decline - and the people who are its political personifications - to act sanely.

I think people have spoken quite correctly of a tectonic shift over this period. I think when we look back in a few years' time 2011 will be noted as a turning point. Not only in the history of the region, but in the history of the world. It is not on the same scale as the Russian Revolution, which was the defining event of the early 20th century, but it certainly bears comparison at the very least to something like the Vietnam war.

**Clearly these developments do potentially pose an important shift in the power balance in that whole region, primarily expressed in a loss of US influence and hegemonic status. Then there is Israel which - in addition to acting as the US's proxy - has its own distinct interests.**

Of course. I think it is going to have contradictory effects as far as Israel is concerned. We have to look at it dialectically. The Israeli regime is very worried. Initially, it kept very quiet in an attempt not to exacerbate the situation, but that was unsustainable.

The Israeli press is now describing the events in Egypt as a huge strategic loss. For Israel as a subcontractor of American hegemony in the region - as the local 'franchise', if you like - it relied on alliances with other US client states in the region. In the past, it had three local allies - Iran under the shah, Turkey and Ethiopia. Well, despite continued relations with Israel, Ethiopia is not now a major player; Iran was lost in 1979 and Turkey is now playing a far more independent role and has shifted from being orientated towards the west to looking east.

This new orientation of Turkey is in itself actually indicative of the US's decline. The regime has concluded that it no longer *needs* to be obedient to America, especially because of the stalling of the negotiations with the European Union. The first indication of the regime's newfound independence came during the invasion of Iraq, when the Turkish

parliament decided not to allow the US to use the country as one of the invasion routes. This was an early sign of change.

Turkey had already truly ruined its relationship with Israel because of the Mavi Marmara incident and now, given the developments across the region, they are going to feel vindicated. By the way, the head of the Islamist movement in Tunisia, Annahdah, has returned to the country and has met with some popular support undoubtedly, but he said his model is *not* Iran. It is Turkey. That indicates a real shift - and not simply amongst progressive, radical forces. It also finds reflection in the Erdoğan regime in Turkey or the new government that will come to power in Tunisia and, inevitably, in other states around the world which will feel instinctively that they are able to play a more independent game.

Israel specifically is very worried because, after losing Iran and Turkey as regional allies, it is basically left with three 'friends' - Egypt, Jordan and the subservient Palestinian authority. And this authority is simply a proxy for the Israeli occupation anyway, as was confirmed by the Palestine leaks. Egypt was by far the most important - it is the lynchpin of the modern Arab world. Even if this current upsurge does not result in Israel losing Egypt completely as an ally, what is becoming manifest is that it is not stable. And Israel is the guardian in that part of the world of 'stability' - that is, the stability of the repressive regimes in the area and the stability of American hegemony.

Whatever happens in Egypt, even if 'order' could be re-imposed, this equilibrium has now gone. Yet in the short term this will actually strengthen Israel's positions *vis-à-vis* the United States. It can now present itself as the *only* safe, stable asset for the US in the entire region. So there is no chance that the United States will downgrade its relations with Israel in the short term.

In the longer term, Israel's relationship with the US has been radically undermined. What's the point of an expensive guard dog (Israel is by far the largest recipient of so-called American aid ... and Egypt is the second) when you have nothing left to guard? Israel is going to look less and less cost-effective.

**Strategic thinkers in Israel itself must have considered the same possibility? What responses are being mooted?**

Reading the Israeli press, I think it is right to say that just like the Americans they were caught totally unaware by these developments in Egypt. Of course, they have talked up the danger of a 'new Iran' - but you would expect them to do that and the scenario is not a very likely one in my view. As I have said, it would probably look more like Turkey than Iran, if we can talk in those terms and accept those political paradigms for the moment.

It does not look to me as if the Israeli strategic planners made any plan B at all. As we speak, I suspect they are sitting down and trying to catch up with developments. In the short term, it could be very dangerous. One possibility is an overt military strike against Iran - they have been conducting low-level military, terrorist-style, strikes in Iran for some time, of course.

On the other hand, they could

simply keep a watching brief so as not to exacerbate the situation. Perhaps they have instinctively internalised an historical lesson about regimes or social forms in decline - if they attempt to assert their power in response to that decline, they end up further degrading it. It is a law of history that they may have learned. Perhaps not. The short term remains dangerous, most probably, and we could see irrational military adventures that could have a huge cost in terms of human life.

Now, the political turmoil in Egypt poses a particular sensitive problem for Israel. Egypt is crucial in the siege of the Gaza strip. That siege cannot continue without Egyptian complicity - it is an *Israeli-Egyptian* siege. Egypt has also colluded with Israel to keep the political forces of the Palestinians divided. It needed to isolate the Palestinian authority from Hamas in the Gaza strip, all the better to use the Palestinian authority as a Vichy-type regime, a government of collaborators. We know from the various leaks that the Egyptians have consciously sabotaged tentative moves at some form of rapprochement between the PA and Hamas.

In Egypt, the eventual outcome of the current upsurge will be - at the very least - a more democratic, popular-influenced regime. I am not making any wild predictions, but we can say that at the very least. Such a regime simply will not be able to maintain the blockade of Gaza in the face of popular anger. For Israel, this will be a very big strategic loss.

**You made the point that there is no solution to the ongoing hell within the 'box' of Palestine itself. An Arab revolution is posed.**

That's right. This is the instinctive response of the people, and it has real roots in history. We should also be very clear: an Arab revolution is *counterposed* to Islamism. The whole idea of the Arabs being a nation in the modern sense of the word is a 19th century concept that arose in conflict with pan-Islamism. The literature, the language, the culture obviously predate the 19th century, but that is when the notion of 'Arab' as a *nationality* gained currency. This is an *antidote* to Islamism, not the form Islamism takes in this part of the world.

Take some incidents in Egypt over this past period. At one point on one of the bridges of the Nile, it was prayer time for the Muslims. As they knelt together, *Christian* demonstrators were actually surrounding them and guarding them from any attack by the state forces.

Now this is a country where a few weeks ago there were inter-confessional riots, in which Muslims were killing Christians - an ancient but minority community in Egypt. Now, the Muslim Brotherhood has organised a demo in a Christian - or Coptic - area of Cairo. It was not the sort of provocation we see in Northern Ireland, as organised by the loyalist reactionaries. It was an act of solidarity! 'We are with you!' they were telling the local people.

This is a very optimistic sign. For the world revolution, this is a fantastic moment. Not only do we have this question of regional revolutionary change in general terms: we have the chance to watch a full dress rehearsal, as it were ●



## ISRAEL

# The religious right and genocide

Tony Greenstein looks at sections of Israel's orthodox rabbinate and makes a less than flattering comparison

**M**arxists differ from bourgeois ideologues in that we see that ideas in society are located in material circumstances. There is no mechanistic, one-to-one relationship, because ideology can have long-lasting consequences even when the social basis for them has disappeared or is disappearing. I would argue that Nazi anti-Semitism and the holocaust were a vivid example of this autonomy of ideology when allied to a modern political movement which artificially preserves it.

So too it is with Zionism. Like many of its founders, Theodore Herzl was a non-believer whose own son was uncircumcised. This was unsurprising since, as Herzl's deputy, Max Nordau (himself married to a Christian) explained in an interview with the anti-Semitic paper *La Libre Parole* in 1903, Zionism "is not a question of religion, but exclusively of race and there is no-one with whom I am in greater agreement on this position than M Drumont".<sup>1</sup> The early Zionists based their claim to Palestine on a god whose existence they denied. Their colonial project took as its starting point the then popular ideas of superior and inferior races and infused it with a religious legitimisation.

This was the Gordian knot that Zionism's secular founders could not untie. Although the predominant trend in Zionism for the first 80 years was that of Labour Zionism, they deliberately sought alliances with the Mizrahi religious Zionist movement. In the very first Israeli elections in 1949, the Israeli Labour Party, together with its left-Zionist rivals, Mapam, secured an overall majority. But the ILP insisted on the participation of Misrahi, who, when the 1967 war ended in victory, began their move to an open racism and expansionism, joining the coalition headed by the rightwing Likud in 1977.

Over the years there have been many attempts to prevent the orthodox religious from increasing their power. Even Yisrael Beiteinu, represented by fascist foreign minister Avigdor Lieberman, and the Tsomet Party, led by former army chief of staff Rafil Eitan, sought without success to prevent the religious Zionists from dominating every aspect of civil life.

At the same time we have seen the decline, almost to the point of non-existence, of Labour and left Zionism. From 65 out of 120 seats in 1949 to 16 at the last election, the ideological contradiction of reconciling even left rhetoric to colonialism has proved too difficult to surmount.

With the war in 1967 and the regaining of the symbols of the Jewish religion - the Wailing Wall in Jerusalem and the Cave of Machpelah in Hebron, the secular ideology of Zionism's founders, which was always an uneasy compromise, gave way to the open colonial racism of the Greater Israel movement, Gush Emunim (Bloc of the Faithful). And, when the Israeli left protested about the settlements and occupation, they were reminded that the right to settle Kiryat Arba near Hebron was no less than the right to establish Tel Aviv. Both were established despite and against the wishes of the Arab population and on Arab land.

But, where secular ideologies have been unable to fully rationalise an enterprise founded on biblical



Dov Lior

myths (witness the contortions of the 'Marxist' Zionism of Ber Borochov<sup>2</sup>), the religious were more than capable of stepping into the breach.<sup>3</sup> It is not human, but god-given, law (as they interpret it) that they recognise. Ancient religious texts, in a colonial setting, can more than fill the void.

And so the Zionist left, for all the concessions it made, could not withstand the challenge of those who openly espoused naked chauvinism - all with god's blessing. The Israeli Labour Party has just seen its leader, Ehud Barak, his predecessor, Amir Peretz, and two others jump ship, leaving it with a rump of seven members of the knesset. The 'social democratic' wing of Zionism has now all but disappeared. But for Arabs there was never a great difference between Labour and Likud. It was the left-Zionist faction, Ahdut Ha'avodah, within the ILP, as represented by Yisrael Galili, Yigal Allon and Yitzhak Tabenkin, that was prominent in promoting the establishment of settlements from 1967 onwards.

### Real similarities

It is fashionable to make comparisons between Zionism and Nazism. And real similarities exist between German fascism 1933-39 and Zionism. Worship of the state, militarism, definition of a nation by the concept of *Volk* or blood relations, the rendering of minorities as strangers in their own land, as well as the labelling of political opponents as 'traitors' and 'self-haters'.

But there was one clear difference between Nazism and Zionism. Whereas the former exterminated the Jewish people of Europe between 1941 and 1945 and would have gone on to do the same with the Slavic peoples, Zionism has never been exterminatory. Although there were massacres in 1947-48 of up to 10,000 Palestinians, what happened was not extermination primarily but expulsion (although, of course, the Nazi programme for the Jews up till 1941 was also for emigration, not extermination). But the memory of the holocaust, to say nothing of modern-day political realities, ensured that, whatever its attitude to the Palestinians, Zionism was unlikely to exterminate them.

But now there are signs amongst the religious orthodox wing of Zionism of the advocacy of genocide. On Christmas day 2010 an Israeli Jewish orthodox magazine *Ma'ayanei*

*Hayeshua* (Fountains of Salvation), which is distributed freely in hundreds of synagogues across the country, called in its editorial for the concentration of Arabs in extermination camps. In the article, the editors accuse rabbis who refuse to support the call not to rent apartments to Palestinians (see below) of cowardice for refusing to follow the biblical command to wipe out the people of "Amalek" - which in the case of the article clearly meant Palestinians. The editors concluded: "It will be interesting to see whether they [the moderate rabbis] leave the concentration of the Amalekites in extermination camps to others, or whether they will declare that wiping out Amalek is no longer relevant."<sup>4</sup>

As Yossi Barta of the Alternative Information Centre wrote, "This blunt call for genocide against Palestinians is not new in publications of the Israeli extreme right, but this is the first time it appears in a 'family' magazine with prominent advertisers."<sup>5</sup>

Previously calls for the extermination of the Palestinians have come from marginal figures such as rabbi Yousef Falay, who in an article entitled 'Ways of war', called for the killing of all Palestinian males refusing to flee their country: "We have to make sure that no Palestinian individual remains under our occupation. If they escape then it is good; but if any one of them remains then he should be exterminated."<sup>6</sup>

Companies advertising on the website of *Ma'ayanei Hayeshua* include three major banks in Israel: Bank Hapoalim, the Workers' Bank formerly owned by the trade union federation, Histadrut (!), Bank Leumi and Bank Discount, along with the Isracard Group that works with Visa, Europay and Mastercard. The national phone company, Bezeq, also advertises on the website, as does the Jerusalem College of Technology, has an advertisement inside the print version of the magazine too.<sup>7</sup>

*Ma'ayanei Hayeshua* may be a rightwing orthodox religious magazine, closely associated with the messianic Jewish Chabad-Lubavitch movement,<sup>8</sup> but in its attitude to the Palestinians it is neither unique nor exceptional amongst the Zionist religious orthodox. On the contrary, the belief that the Palestinians are the representation of the Amalekites, whom it is a *mitzvah* (commandment) to wipe out, is widely accepted.

According to Richard Silverstein, *Ma'ayanei Hayeshua* represents "the cream of the crop of the radical rightwing Israeli orthodox rabbinate". Founded by the former Sephardic chief rabbi, Mordechai Eliyahu, whose son currently holds that position, it is run by a triumvirate - rabbis Shmuel Eliyahu of Safed, Shlomo Aviner of Beit El and Yaakov Ariel of Ramat Gan. Aviner is strongly suspected of sexually abusing a troubled woman who approached him for spiritual advice.<sup>9</sup> Aviner heads the Ateret Cohanim *yeshiva* (religious school) in the Muslim quarter of Jerusalem, a rabid settler group which wants to establish a third temple over the ruins of the Mosque of Omar, Islam's third most important religious site.

### Military rabbinate

The belief that the Palestinians represent Amalek and are therefore deserving of extermination has been spearheaded by the Israeli military

rabbinate and the settlers' Yesha Rabbinical Council. Former military chief rabbi brigadier general Avichai Rontzki has been particularly active in this regard, telling students that soldiers who "show mercy" toward the enemy in wartime would be "damned".<sup>10</sup> He cited Moses Maimonides's discourse on the laws of war and the Book of Jeremiah: "Cursed be he that doeth the work of the lord with a slack hand, and cursed be he that keepeth back his sword from blood."<sup>11</sup>

When Israel attacked Gaza in December 2008-January 2009, the Israeli military rabbinate, led by their chief rabbi, issued a pamphlet and other material urging the soldiers to put to one side any thought of sparing civilian lives. As Amos Harel noted, "During the fighting in the Gaza Strip, the religious media - and on two occasions, the Israel Defence Force's weekly journal *Bamahane* - were full of praise for the army rabbinate", whose members did not merely issue their injunctions from on high, but came into the field. As they explained, their role was not "to distribute wine and challah [bread] for Shabbat to the troops", but "to fill them with *Yiddishkeit* and a fighting spirit".<sup>12</sup>

And what was their role? It was to discourage the idea that Palestinian civilians were not the enemy. Breaking the Silence, a group of former soldiers who are under attack by the Israeli government, collated some of this material including "Daily Torah studies for the soldier and the commander in Operation Cast Lead", which, citing rabbi Aviner, forbids handing over even a millimetre of 'holy land'.

In one publication the following question is posed: "Is it possible to compare today's Palestinians to the Philistines of the past? And if so, is it possible to apply lessons today from the military tactics of Samson and David?" Rabbi Aviner is quoted by way of response: "A comparison is possible because the Philistines of the past were not natives and had invaded from a foreign land ... They invaded the Land of Israel, a land that did not belong to them and claimed political ownership over our country ... Today the problem is the same." The IDF rabbinate, still quoting Aviner, explained the appropriate code of conduct in the field: "When you show mercy to a cruel enemy, you are being cruel to pure and honest soldiers. This is terribly immoral."

In addition to the official publications, other religious tracts were distributed in Israeli army bases. One such praised Baruch Goldstein, who massacred 29 unarmed Palestinians in Hebron, and called on "soldiers of Israel to spare your lives and the lives of your friends and not to show concern for a population that surrounds us and harms us. We call on you ... to function according to the law, 'Kill the one who comes to kill you'. As for the population, it is not innocent ... We call on you to ignore any strange doctrines and orders that confuse the logical way of fighting the enemy."

It is important to emphasise that such calls are not exceptional, or the product of a few religious cranks, but now represent mainstream orthodoxy in Israel. Chabad-Lubavitch is a prominent messianic Hasidic sect, not dissimilar to Christian evangelism. It has prominent rab-

bis amongst British Jewish orthodox rabbis, such as rabbi Yitzhak Shochet of Mill Hill Synagogue and principal of the Rosh Pinah Jewish Primary School in Edgware, who has chosen to remain silent.

In Israel last year a book, *Torat HaMelech* (the king's Torah), was published by rabbi Yitzchak Shapira and Yossi Elitzur.<sup>13</sup> According to Norman Cohn, Shapira claims that "There is justification for killing babies if it is clear that they will grow up to harm us, and in such a situation they may be harmed deliberately - and not only during combat with adults."<sup>14</sup> Shapira has also written: "There is a reason to kill babies even if they have not transgressed the seven Noahide Laws [to believe in god, not to commit idolatry, murder, theft or adultery, to set up a legal system, and not to tear a limb from a live animal] because of the future danger they may present, since it is assumed that they will grow up to be evil like their parents ..."<sup>15</sup>

Which was exactly how the Nazis justified the murder of Jewish children. This is the fruit of Zionism.

Another prominent member of the rabbinate in Israel is Dov Lior, chief rabbi of Hebron and Kiryat Arba. Lior is chairman of the Yesha rabbinical council and reportedly the favourite student of the late rabbi Zvi Yehuda Kook, who is revered by the whole religious camp in Israel and acknowledged as the founder of religious Zionism. In the late 1980s the attorney general barred Lior's election to the Supreme Rabbinical Council following statements he made suggesting that medical experiments could be conducted on captured Arab "terrorists".<sup>16</sup> This Jewish Mengele, along with other rabbis, issued a *halakhic* (oral religious) ruling that Israel must shoot civilian populations in areas from whence attacks on Jewish communities originate.<sup>16</sup> ●

### Notes

1. D Steward *Herzl* p322. Drumont was the most prominent French anti-Semite of the Dreyfus era. He admired the early Zionists and wrote a flattering review of Herzl's *Der Judenstaat*, the bible of the fledgling Zionist movement.
2. www.marxists.org/archive/borochov/index.htm. Borochov ended his life as a supporter of Britain and America in World War I. He was expelled from the RSDLP in 1903.
3. See S Sand *Myth of a Jewish nation* London 2009.
4. 'Editorial calling for death camps for "Amalekites" raises storm among religious' *Ha'aretz* January 23.
5. 'Israeli banks finance newspaper calling for genocide': www.alternativenews.org/english/index.php/topics/israeli-society/3194-israeli-banks-finance-newspaper-calling-for-genocide.
6. International Middle East Media Center, 'Jewish rabbi calls for extermination of all Palestinian males', September 18 2006: www.imemc.org/content/view/full/21527/1; and http://cgi.stanford.edu/group/wais/cgi-bin/?p=5578.
7. www.alternativenews.org/english/index.php/topics/israeli-society/3194-israeli-banks-finance-newspaper-calling-for-genocide.
8. www.enotes.com/topic/Chabad\_messianism.
9. 'Israel's orthodox rabbis: "Palestinians to the ovens!"': www.israeli-occupation.org/2011-01-12/israeli-orthodox-rabbis-palestinians-to-the-ovens.
10. 'IDF chief rabbi: troops who show mercy to enemy will be "damned"' *Ha'aretz* November 15 2009.
11. 'IDF rabbinate publication during Gaza war: we will show no mercy on the cruel' *Ha'aretz* January 26 2009.
12. http://azvsas.blogspot.com/2011/01/highlights-of-2010-in-word-and-pictures.html.
13. N Cohn *Warrant for genocide* London 2005. Cohn was talking about the anti-semitic *Protocols of the elders of Zion*, but he could equally have been referring to this and similar works.
14. 'Shapira's distinction between Jewish, gentile blood' *The Jerusalem Post* January 2 2010.
15. http://azvsas.blogspot.com/2011/01/arabs-to-ovens.html.
16. www.worldlingo.com/ma/enwiki/en/Dov\_Lior.



## DEBATE

# The pope and the Pentagon

How is it that Noam Chomsky's latest linguistic theories can acquire such a devoted following? **Chris Knight** of the Radical Anthropology Group continues his examination of Chomsky's life and work<sup>1</sup>

In 1966, Noam Chomsky published his *Cartesian linguistics*. The book was a survey of rationalist conceptions of language and mind, focusing heavily on the French mathematician and philosopher, René Descartes (1596-1650). In his early years, Chomsky had been working within the structuralist tradition of Ferdinand de Saussure, Roman Jakobson, Leonard Bloomfield and his own teacher, Zellig Harris. Chomsky wrote *Cartesian linguistics* in order to signal to the world his change of mind. His distinctively 'Cartesian' approach, he now clarified, was a rebellion against the entire 20th century tradition of structural linguistics.

By 'Cartesian', Chomsky meant 'scientific' in the *natural science* sense. Anything else - anything social or political - would be repugnant and *politically* dangerous. As he explains, referring to the atmosphere he encountered on arriving in Boston in 1951, "Computers, electronics, acoustics, mathematical theory of communication, cybernetics, all the technological approaches to human behaviour enjoyed an extraordinary vogue. The human sciences were being reconstructed on the basis of these concepts. It was all connected ... Some people, myself included, were rather concerned about these developments, in part for political reasons, at least as far as my motivations were concerned ... because this whole complex of ideas seemed linked to potentially quite dangerous political currents: manipulative, and connected with behaviourist concepts of human nature."<sup>2</sup>

For linguistics to qualify as a genuine science, it would have to be 'Cartesian' - pure in the sense that mathematics is pure.

Science should be completely free of reactionary politics and, indeed, free of political contamination of any kind.

## 'Cognitive revolution'

It was this impulse which led Chomsky to celebrate Galileo and the scientific revolution of the 17th century. In principle, natural science should be pursued in complete freedom from political pressure. The secrets it uncovers are those of nature, not society. Unlike society or politics, the puzzles of nature promote intellectual honesty and cooperation. Natural science can embrace the study of language - realising the full promise of the 17th century 'cognitive revolution' - but only on one condition. The term 'language' must refer to nature,

not culture. Chomsky redefined 'language' as an object in the head. Linguistics was redefined as the study of that object and nothing else.

The human soul, according to Descartes, has its "principal seat" in the pineal gland, buried in the centre of the brain.<sup>3</sup> From here, it connects with the tongue and lips, as we express our thoughts. When we speak, thanks to this gland, we can proceed unaware of the complex tongue and lip movements involved:

"... when we speak, we think only of the meaning of what we want to say, and this makes us move our tongue and lips much more readily and effectively than if we thought of moving them in all the ways required for uttering the same words. For the habits acquired in learning to speak have made us join the action of the soul (which, by means of the gland, can move the tongue and lips) with

the meaning of the words which follow upon these movements, rather than with the movements themselves."<sup>4</sup>

Language depends, then, on that little gland through which the soul - spontaneously, efficiently and independently of conscious effort - activates the organs of speech. For Descartes, this doctrine was *theologically* required:

"For after the error of those who deny god ... there is none that leads weak minds further from the straight path of virtue than that of imagining that the souls of beasts are of the same nature as ours, and hence that after this present life we have nothing to fear or to hope for, any more than flies or ants. But, when we know how much the beasts differ from us, we understand much better the arguments which prove that our soul is of a nature entirely independent of the body, and consequently that it is not bound to die with it. And since we cannot see any other causes which destroy the soul, we are naturally led to conclude that it is immortal."<sup>5</sup>

Since body and soul are so utterly distinct, they should be investigated in quite different ways: the body on the basis of experimentation and careful measurement; the soul on the basis of devout, but informed introspection.

What makes the soul so utterly different from the body? Descartes offers a thought experiment. Imagine mechanical dolls replicating the appearance and behaviour of various beasts. In principle, he says, they might be constructed so cleverly that no-one could tell that they were fakes. This is because animals really *are* just machines, their movements mere responses to stimuli from outside. But what of mechanical men?

No matter how cleverly these were designed, writes Descartes, "we should still have two very certain means of recognising that they were not real men. The first is that they could never use words, or put together other signs, as we do in order to declare our thoughts to others. For we can certainly conceive of a machine so constructed that it utters words, and even utters words which correspond to bodily actions causing a change in its organs (eg, if you touch it in one spot it asks you what you want of it; if you touch it in another it cries out that you are hurting it; and so on). But it is not conceivable that such a machine should produce different arrangements of words so as to give an appropriately meaningful answer to whatever is said in its presence, as the dullest of men can do."<sup>6</sup>

While a mechanical doll might be equipped to respond to specific situations, Descartes continued, none could be equipped with reason - defined as a *universal* instrument for responding appropriately to *all possible* situations. Unlike a machine, then, man is both linguistic and rational.

"Now in just these two ways," continues Descartes, "we can also know the difference between man and beast. For it is quite remarkable that there are no men so dull-witted or stupid - and this includes even madmen - that they are incapable of arranging various words together and forming an ut-

terance from them in order to make their thoughts understood; whereas there is no other animal, however perfect and well-endowed it may be, that can do the like."

Are animals dumb merely because they lack the requisite external organs of speech? Do they have rational minds, lacking only the physical means to express them? Descartes considers this possibility, but dismisses it: magpies and parrots, after all, can imitate speech but evidently without actually thinking what they are saying. Meanwhile, physically impaired humans, deprived of the ability to hear or to produce speech sounds, can readily resort to manual signing in order to express themselves. "This shows," concludes Descartes, "not merely that the beasts have less reason than men, but that they have no reason at all."<sup>7</sup> Animals show no trace of speech for the simple reason that they do not have a soul.

## Descartes

After much agonising, René Descartes concluded that the soul lies beyond the legitimate remit of science. Its complexities, he decided, should be left to the theologians. What exactly prompted this momentous conclusion, destined to shape the development of western intellectual life for three centuries? Let Descartes explain in his own words. In November 1633, he had been "quite determined" to send his friend, Mersenne, a copy of his latest *Treatise on man*:

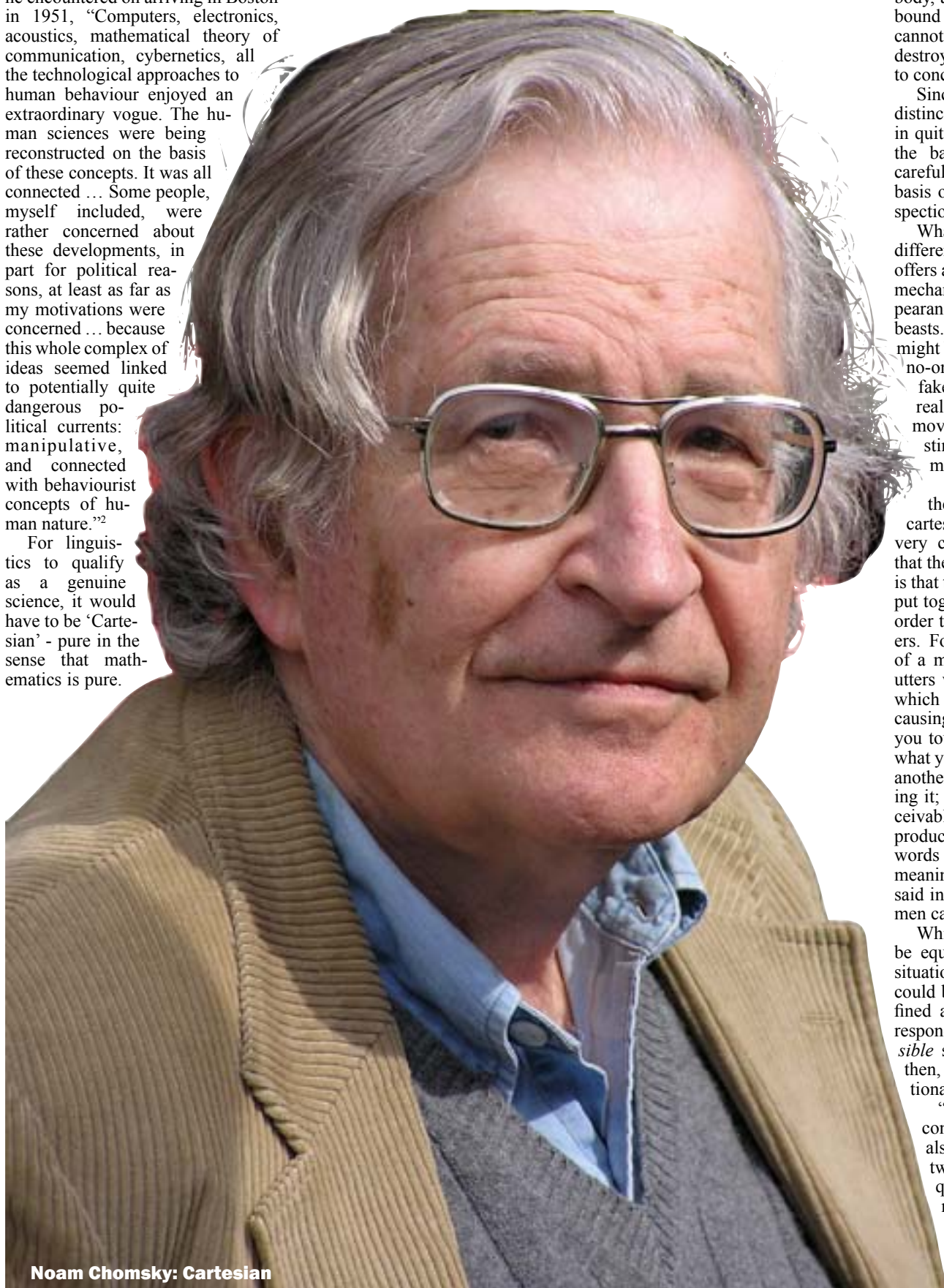
"But I have to say that in the meantime I took the trouble to inquire in Leiden and Amsterdam whether Galileo's *World system* was available, for I thought I had heard that it was published in Italy last year. I was told that it had indeed been published, but that all copies had immediately been burnt at Rome, and that Galileo had been convicted and fined. I was so astonished at this that I almost decided to burn all my papers or at least to let no-one see them. For I could not imagine that he - an Italian and, as I understand, in the good graces of the pope - could have been made a criminal for any other reason that he tried, as he no doubt did, to establish that the earth moves."

If a moving earth was punishable heresy, the consequences for Descartes were frightening:

"I must admit that if the view is false, so too are the entire foundations of my philosophy, for it can be demonstrated from them quite clearly. And it is so closely interwoven in every part of my treatise that I could not remove it without rendering the whole work defective. But for all the world I did not want to publish a discourse in which a single word could be found that the church would have disapproved of; so I preferred to suppress it rather than to publish it in a mutilated form."<sup>8</sup>

In any list of topics liable to get Descartes into trouble, independent thinking about the soul must have come close to the top. But he had no appetite for personal martyrdom. Excusing himself for reneging on his promise to send Mersenne his treatise, he wrote that if his views "cannot be approved of without controversy, I have no desire ever to publish them".

In the event, despite this, sections of Descartes' *Treatise on man*



Noam Chomsky: Cartesian



have come down to us. “First,” announces the author at the outset, “I must describe the body on its own; then the soul, again on its own; and finally I must show how these two natures would have to be joined and united in order to constitute men who resemble us.”<sup>9</sup> But in the sections of the treatise to have survived, Descartes says almost nothing about the soul. In the light of what happened to Galileo, it is not difficult to understand why.

## A second substance

Historians of science tend to view Descartes’ invention of a ‘second substance’ as a transparently political manoeuvre. Was he not just offering the Vatican a face-saving formula? It smacked of a carve-up: he would allow them exclusive rights over man’s soul, if only science could be left undisturbed with the body. The arrangement might work if the two were so utterly separate and unconnected as to render mutual interference unthinkable. Viewed from this perspective, Cartesian dualism makes good sense. As Descartes put it, “... the soul is of such a nature that it has no relation to extension, or to the dimensions or other properties of the matter of which the body is composed.”

This is obvious, he continued, “from our inability to conceive of a half or a third of a soul, or of the extension which a soul occupies. Nor does the soul become any smaller if we cut off some part of the body, but it becomes completely separate from the body when we break up the assemblage of the body’s organs.”<sup>10</sup>

Soul is not subject to bodily interference. It does not obey *any* of the laws of natural science. The bishops and cardinals should therefore stop worrying and relax.

In *Cartesian linguistics*, Chomsky celebrated Descartes’ line of reasoning, while reformulating it in supposedly more up-to-date terms.<sup>11</sup> The mind in its activities, Chomsky insisted, is ‘stimulus-free’ - autonomous with respect to bodily action and experience in the world. This is most strikingly evident in the case of language. Since grammar is autonomous with respect to other cognitive domains, it makes sense to restrict linguistics to the study of ‘competence’ - what the speaker *knows* - without having to complicate the picture by including the use of that knowledge in ‘performance’.

This was presented as fidelity to Descartes and, in a sense, it was. More profoundly, though, Chomsky’s was the fidelity of a *camera obscura*, turning the French philosopher upside-down. As a sympathetic biographer comments on Chomsky’s book title, *Cartesian linguistics*, “The term ‘Cartesian’ is not used here according to its generally accepted definition; Chomsky extends that definition to encompass, as he puts it, ‘a certain collection of ideas which were not expressed by Descartes, [were] rejected by followers of Descartes, and many first expressed by anti-Cartesians’.”<sup>12</sup>

When Chomsky tells us that ‘competence’ can be studied to the exclusion of ‘performance’, he is echoing Descartes’ distinction between body and soul. But what for Descartes was a concession to the religious authorities becomes, for Chomsky, science itself. “Now I believe,” as he explains, “and here I would differ a lot from my colleagues, that the move of Descartes to the postulation of a second substance was a very scientific move; it was not a metaphysical or an unscientific move.”<sup>13</sup> Descartes’ ‘second substance’ idea, he continues, was ‘scientific’ in that it anticipated Newton:

“In fact, in many ways it was very much like Newton’s intellectual

move when he postulated action at a distance; he was moving into the domain of the occult, if you like. He was moving into the domain of something that went beyond well-established science, and was trying to integrate it with well-established science by developing a theory in which these notions could be properly clarified and explained.”<sup>14</sup>

In the event, Descartes spectacularly failed - a point which Chomsky concedes. “But then,” he continues, “that poses for us, I think, the task of carrying on and developing this, if you like, mathematical theory of mind ...”<sup>15</sup>

In contrast to Chomsky, Descartes in his scientific role was a materialist. By assuming the body to be a machine, as he put it, we can explain “the digestion of food, the beating of the heart and arteries, the nourishment and growth of the limbs, respiration, waking and sleeping, the reception by the external sense organs of light, sounds, smells, tastes, heat and other such qualities, the imprinting of the ideas of these qualities in the organ of the ‘common’ sense and the imagination, the retention or stamping of these ideas in the memory, the internal movements of the appetites and passions, and finally the external movements of all the limbs ...”<sup>16</sup>

Previous scholars had sought to explain such things by invoking the soul. Descartes proudly announced that he did not need ‘soul’ at all. It is not necessary, he insisted, “to conceive of this machine as having any vegetative or sensitive soul or other principle of movement and life, apart from its blood and its spirits, which are agitated by the heat of the fire burning continuously in its heart - a fire which has the same nature as all the fires that occur in inanimate bodies.”<sup>17</sup>

The only thing Descartes could not explain in this way was man’s soul. He could specify the pineal gland as the *seat* of this strange entity, but quite how it interacted or could possibly interact with the body remained - despite his efforts - an insoluble mystery.

Chomsky’s audacity in reversing Descartes is breathtaking. He accuses the Frenchman of fabricating this ‘mind-body’ problem by assuming that the body exists. Once you realise the true significance of Newton’s discovery of gravity - namely that it explodes materialist philosophy - the problem disappears:

“Newton demonstrated, to his dismay, that nothing in nature falls within the mechanical model of intelligibility that seemed to be the merest common sense to the creators of modern science. Newton regarded his discovery of action at a distance, in violation of the basic principles of the mechanical philosophy, as “so great an absurdity that I believe no man who has in philosophical matters a competent faculty of thinking can ever fall into it”. Nonetheless, he was forced to conclude that the absurdity “does really exist”.<sup>18</sup>

Chomsky continues: “The implications for the theory of mind were immediate, and immediately recognised. Mind-body dualism is no longer tenable, because there is no notion of body. It is common in recent years to ridicule Descartes’ ‘ghost in the machine’, and to speak of ‘Descartes’ error’ in postulating a second substance: mind, distinct from body. It is true that Descartes was proven wrong, but not for those reasons. Newton exorcised the machine; he left the ghost intact. It was the first substance, extended matter, that dissolved into mysteries.”<sup>19</sup>

Or, to quote Chomsky again, “... it is important to recall that what collapsed was the Cartesian theory of matter; the theory of mind, such as it was, has undergone no fundamental

critique.”<sup>20</sup>

In these words, Chomsky sums up his entire agenda. The Cartesian “theory of mind, such as it was”, is the hallowed doctrine of the soul. Descartes decided to leave such mysteries to the theologians, meanwhile getting on with real science. Three centuries later, working in a laboratory funded by the Pentagon,<sup>21</sup> Chomsky resolved to turn the clock back. Rewinding history, he would choose the opposite path. Torn between reason and caution, Descartes presented man as a machine driven by a ghost beyond the comprehension of science. For Chomsky, man’s ghostly and mysterious body - a complex entity no scientist can claim to understand - is raised above the animal level by a scientifically comprehensible machine.

## Rebranding the soul

The puzzle as to how a child can master a grammar is, for Chomsky, an instance of ‘Plato’s problem’ - “the problem of explaining how we can know so much, given that we have such limited evidence”.<sup>22</sup>

“Plato’s answer,” says Chomsky, “was that the knowledge is ‘remembered’ from an earlier existence. The answer calls for a mechanism: perhaps the immortal soul. That may strike us as not very satisfactory, but it is worth bearing in mind that it is a more reasonable answer than those assumed as doctrine during the dark ages of Anglo-American empiricism and behavioural science - to put the matter tendentiously, but accurately.”<sup>23</sup>

So we should not associate the doctrine of the soul with the dark ages: on the contrary, it is the opponents of Plato’s theory who are in the dark ages. But there is a problem: talk of man’s ‘immortal soul’ sounds like antiquated *language*. For the doctrine to appear more acceptable, it needs to be rephrased:

“Pursuing this course, and rephrasing Plato’s answer in terms more congenial to us today, we will say that the basic properties of cognitive systems are innate to the mind, part of human biological endowment ...”<sup>24</sup>

Recruited by Chomsky to serve his special purposes, then, formulations such as “innate to the mind” or “part of human biological endowment” do not necessarily retain the meanings they might have in modern genetic science. Rather they have a specific job to do. Within linguistics, their task is to help render “more congenial” the doctrine that man’s immortal soul needs no external help in getting transmitted from one generation to the next.

## A perfect system

Nowhere is this clearer than in Chomsky’s latest approach, the so-called “minimalist programme”. To explain the underlying thinking, Chomsky presents us with a thought-experiment. Imagine “a divine architect” entrusted with the task of designing and installing language in the very first human brain. If you were god, how might you set about this task?

This is the mirror-image reverse of Descartes’ thought experiment with mechanical dolls. Descartes put himself in the shoes of a human clockmaker, concluding that not even in principle could one construct a mechanical soul. Imagining himself in god’s shoes, Chomsky reaches the opposite conclusion. A ‘language machine’ must be possible in principle. The question is: how would god design and install such a thing?

“Language,” Chomsky reminds us, “is, at its core, a system that is both digital and infinite.” Why language should be so different from other biological systems “is a prob-

lem, possibly even a mystery”. Since “there is no other biological system with these properties”, he continues, we are left “with the problem of how this capacity developed in humans and how a messy system such as the brain could have developed an infinite digital system in the first place”.<sup>25</sup> Echoing Descartes, Chomsky insists that the new system could not have evolved from the old: it must have been separately created. He suggests a genetic mutation triggered by a cosmic ray shower.<sup>26</sup> However, this might have installed the new organ only to encounter a problem. If the old brain was analogue - “messy” - whereas the novel installation was digital, why should the old and new bits match up? Did the components on each side neatly snap into place? If so, how and why?

Scientists these days tend to follow Darwin rather than Plato, so questions of this kind do not normally arise. To explain his thinking, therefore, Chomsky must make a special effort. He invites us to imagine an ancestor of today’s gorillas getting hit by just the right kind of cosmic ray shower - only to be equipped with a language organ which did not properly fit. What if the “legibility conditions” proved wrong? What if the mutant’s old brain could not communicate with its newly installed component? Chomsky’s axiomatic assumption was that the mutation must be a random event - an intervention from outer space, utterly unconnected with prior evolutionary developments on Earth. On statistical grounds, then, we would hardly expect a good fit - or indeed *any* fit:

“In fact it is conceivable, it is an empirical possibility, though extremely unlikely, that higher primates, say, gorillas or whatever, actually have something like a human language faculty, but they just have no access to it. So, too bad, the legibility conditions are not satisfied.”<sup>27</sup>

Given Chomsky’s initial assumption - that the complete organ must be assembled and installed by a random event - it is the wild improbability of *any fit at all* which makes the human condition so surprising. In our own case, quite extraordinarily, he discerns not just a satisfactory fit, but a *perfect* one!

Among monkeys and apes, according to Chomsky, nothing remotely resembling language exists, “which means that the language faculty appears to be biologically isolated in a curious and unexpected sense”.

He continues: “To tell a fairy story about it, it is almost as if there was some higher primate wandering around a long time ago and some random mutation took place - maybe after some strange cosmic ray shower - and it reorganised the brain, implanting a language organ in an otherwise primate brain.”<sup>28</sup>

Imagine a burst of radiation doing this to a wandering ape. While the mutant can now speak perfectly, no-one else can speak or comprehend a word. Is that not a problem for the theory? No, says Chomsky, the topic of communication is irrelevant:

“The reason is that ... language is not properly regarded as a system of communication. It is a system for expressing thought: something quite different. It can, of course, be used for communication, as can anything people do - manner of walking or style of clothes or hair, for example. But in any useful sense of the term, communication is not the function of language, and may even be of no unique significance for understanding the functions and nature of language.”<sup>29</sup>

Admittedly, the new organ must be “functional”. But this just means functional for different *parts* of the same brain:

“The language faculty interfaces

with other components of the mind/brain. The interface properties, imposed by the systems among which language is embedded, set constraints on what this faculty must be if it is to function within the mind/brain.”<sup>30</sup>

So, although the newly installed digital organ must interface properly with the rest of its owner’s mind/brain, interfacing with *other* brains is not an issue at all. Language, after all, is primarily for talking to *yourself*.<sup>30</sup>

“Actually you can use language even if you are the only person in the universe with language, and in fact it would even have adaptive advantage. If one person suddenly got the language faculty, that person would have great advantages: the person could think, could articulate to itself its thoughts, could plan, could sharpen and develop thinking, as we do in inner speech, which has a big effect on our lives. Inner speech is most of speech. Almost all the use of language is to oneself ... So, if one organism just happens to gain a language capacity, it might have reproductive advantages - enormous ones. And if it happened to proliferate in a further generation, they all would have it.”<sup>31</sup>

In the light of all this, Chomsky asks just *how* useful the new organ is to the individual. In the following passage, the letter ‘P’ stands for “general properties of the systems with which language interacts at the interface”:

“We can now ask a question that is not precise, but is not vacuous either. How good a solution is language to the conditions P? How perfectly does language satisfy the general conditions imposed at the interface? If a divine architect were faced with the problem of designing something to satisfy these conditions, would actual human language be one of the candidates, or close to it?”

Chomsky then announces his astounding conclusion. “Recent work,” he informs us, “suggests that language is surprisingly ‘perfect’ in this sense ...”<sup>32</sup> The formulation faithfully echoes Descartes: “The substance which we understand to be supremely perfect, and in which we conceive absolutely nothing that implies any defect or limitation in that perfection, is called *god*.”<sup>33</sup>

Language, it would seem, is the presence of god in man.

## On telepathy

A brief round-up of Chomsky’s most celebrated ideas will confirm that his point of departure is invariably the soul, with the corollary that this strange entity, being perfect, is autonomous with respect to man’s intrinsically *imperfect* body.

Take Chomsky’s admission that, superficially, language does not look perfect at all: “One massive case,” he notes, “is the phonological system: the whole phonological system looks like a huge imperfection; it has every bad property you can think of.”<sup>34</sup> Phonology makes languages sound different. This is obviously anomalous: “strong minimalism”, after all, would predict just one language spoken by everyone. Does this mean that the theory is falsified by the data? Not at all, claims Chomsky. Humans really do speak just one common language. Yes, he admits, they *sound* different. Variations exist in choice of sounds and also in arbitrary sound-meaning associations. “These,” he says, “are straightforward and need not detain us.”

More interesting is the fact that languages differ in inflectional systems. Take case systems, for example: “We find that these are fairly rich in Latin, even more so in Sanskrit or Finnish, but minimal in English and invisible in Chinese.”<sup>35</sup>



# DEBATE

Chinese does not have a case system, unlike Sanskrit or Latin. But what if these and other languages across the world all have *one and the same case system* - a fact which no-one ever noticed before because none of it is audible at all?

Recent work, according to Chomsky, “indicates that these systems vary much less than the surface forms suggest. Chinese and English, for example, may have the same case system as Latin, but a different phonetic realisation, though the effects show up in other ways.”<sup>36</sup>

If the variations emerge only when speakers make audible sounds, then no kind of evidence can possibly disprove Chomsky’s theory that silently all languages have exactly the same case system. Provided everyone keeps quiet, no-one will be able to tell the difference. The fact that languages *sound* different in various respects is, in short, an obvious imperfection. But as Chomsky reassuringly explains, “a large range of imperfections may have to do with the need to ‘externalise’ language. If we could communicate by telepathy, they would not arise.”<sup>37</sup>

Language, then, is perfect, universal and invariant - on the assumption that telepathy works.

## Mysteries

Over the years, many of Chomsky’s colleagues and former students have expressed increasing astonishment at his pursuit of such ideas. Why would anyone expect a biological organ to be “perfect”? Why does Chomsky compare language to the work of a “divine architect”? Why does he claim that it could not possibly have evolved - that it was installed in one step? Why does he insist that “digital” and “infinite” cognition is not “for” anything outside itself - that it has no communicative function? Finally, why does he pass over actual languages and their grammars in search of something only the mind can see - an inaudible language common to all humanity? At first sight, Chomsky’s reasoning can seem very strange.

The mysteries clear once we respect and take seriously Chomsky’s own claims of intellectual ancestry. His aim from the outset has been to “rephrase” Plato’s formulations, treading in places where Descartes - out of fear of the Inquisition - feared to tread. Unlike the inevitably blemished body, man’s soul is perfect. It transcends the laws of physics and materialist science. It occupies no position in space or time. It cannot be cut up or divided. You cannot imagine a fragment of soul. No baby can set out with a suggestion of soul and subsequently develop the rest: either it’s got a soul or it hasn’t.

Neither does it make sense to imagine the soul emerging incrementally during the evolution of *Homo sapiens*. If soul exists at all, it must exist in perfect form. Whether in ontogeny (the development of the individual) or phylogeny (the evolution of the species), the installation of immortality must be instantaneous. Nothing in the realm of Descartes’ “corporeal substance” can prefigure it or give rise to it. Note also that immortality is not “for” anything. Being independent of physical substance, it has no bodily purpose. You cannot say that evolving humans gained a soul to enable, say, social communication or cooperation. Immortality is not like that. It is independent of any bodily function. Who installed it? When? How? Why? There can be no intelligible answer to such questions.

## Revolution?

According to his supporters, Chomsky is “the world-renowned leader of an intellectual revolution in the field of linguistics”.<sup>38</sup> Almost single-

handedly, he established linguistics on a scientific basis, triggering an intellectual earthquake - the “second cognitive revolution” - recalling the immense scientific revolution led by Galileo, Descartes and Newton three centuries earlier. Although Chomsky himself tends to be more modest, he does little to discourage such claims:

“The discovery of empty categories and the principles that govern them and that determine the nature of mental representations and computations in general may be compared with the discovery of waves, particles, genes and so on ... The same is true of the principles of phrase structure, binding theory and other subsystems of universal grammar. We are beginning to see into the hidden nature of the mind and to understand how it works, really for the first time in history, though the topics have been studied for literally thousands of years, often intensively and productively. It is possible that in the study of the mind/brain we are approaching a situation that is comparable with the physical sciences in the 17th century, when the great scientific revolution took place that laid the basis for the extraordinary accomplishments of subsequent years and determined much of the course of civilisation since.”<sup>39</sup>

But, as it turned out, not a single one of Chomsky’s earth-shattering discoveries has proved remotely on a par with “the discovery of waves, particles, genes and so on” in the physical sciences. Even the basic notion of “deep structure” was discarded long ago and is nowadays not mentioned. The Empty Category Principle (ECP), X-bar theory, binding theory and so on and so forth - virtually the entire corpus of Chomskyan technical concepts and terms - got thrown overboard a few years after the above passage was written. “Minimalism” meant exploring Chomsky’s personal “intuition” that language is “perfect”, which in turn meant calling into question just about everything:

“My own view is that almost everything is subject to question, especially if you look at it from a minimalist perspective; about everything you look at, the question is: why is it there? So, if you had asked me 10 years ago, I would have said government is a unifying concept, X-bar theory is a unifying concept, the head parameter is an obvious parameter, ECP, etc, but now none of these looks obvious. X-bar theory, I think, is probably wrong, government maybe does not exist.”<sup>40</sup>

In an attempt to salvage his credibility, Chomsky argues that failure and self-repudiation on this scale is normal in science. When Einstein intervened, Newton’s more limited conceptions were overthrown. But the difference - as Chomsky well knows - is that physics underwent a genuine scientific revolution, whereas linguistics did not. There is no evidence that Galileo kept changing his mind on fundamentals during his own lifetime, as Chomsky has done. The fact that no Chomskyan claim seems to survive more than a few years suggests that something is wrong.

Chomsky sometimes admits this: “... my own sense of the field is that, contrary to what is often said, it has not undergone any intellectual or conceptual revolution.”<sup>41</sup>

Or again, linguistics “has not even reached anything like a Galilean revolution”.<sup>42</sup> At best, according to Chomsky, his own work may have been “preliminary to a future conceptual revolution which I think we can begin to speculate the vague outlines of”.<sup>43</sup>

In a 1983 interview, the following exchange occurred:

**How would you assess your**

**own contribution to linguistics?**

They seem sort of pre-Galilean.

**Like physics before the scientific revolution in the 17th century?**

Yes. In the pre-Galilean period, people were beginning to formulate problems in physics in the right way. The answers weren’t there, but the problems were finally being framed in a way that in retrospect we can see was right.

**How “pre-” do you mean? Are you saying that linguistics is about where physics was in the 16th century? Or are we going back still further, to Aristotle and to other Greek ideas about physics?**

We don’t know. It depends, you see, on when the breakthrough comes. But my feeling is that someday someone is going to come along and say, ‘Look, you guys, you’re on the right track, but you went wrong here. It should have been done this way.’ Well, that will be it. Suddenly things will fall into place.<sup>44</sup>

To be fair, this interview was recorded 10 years before Chomsky’s announcement of his “minimalist programme”. But not even his most ardent supporters would describe the “perfect organ” now supposed to have been discovered as remotely comparable to Galileo’s moving earth or Newton’s discovery of gravitational force.

Chomsky survives by keeping hope alive. His former student, Paul Postal, likens him to a charismatic preacher who promises the end of the world:

“Then the day would come, the world would not end, and one might figure that the movement would collapse, right? But no, quite the contrary. The fervour of the group members became even greater. They would go out and proselytise, passionately trying to get more members. A new date would be set. When that date would arrive, the prediction would again obviously be falsified and one would assume that the movement would this time surely collapse. No. Again, there was increased proselytising, increased fervour ...”

Chomsky defends the doctrine which is currently his favourite with extraordinary conviction, equalled only by the conviction that his own former doctrines were erroneous. Since his most articulate opponents may well be followers of his former self or selves, he often seems excessively defensive.

“But on the other hand,” Postal continues, “he has good reasons for being insecure because he cannot have failed to notice that he has few substantive results in the sense that these are understood in more serious fields, such as logic, mathematics, computer science or physics. And it is striking how elements of his position which were once considered to be profound contributions now have vanished or become enormously marginalised. Where are syntactic rule ordering, the principle of cyclic application, the A-over-A principle, etc? Many of the principles and accomplishments touted in recent years are almost embarrassing in their inadequacy and shoddiness.”<sup>45</sup>

Would a genuine science allow itself to be governed by the meanderings of a single individual who keeps changing his mind? “I don’t think it is good,” comments Steven Pinker:

“Because Chomsky has such an outside influence in the field of linguistics, when he has an intuition as to what a theory ought to look like, an army of people go out and reanalyse everything to conform to that intuition. To have a whole field turn on its heels every time one person wakes up with a revelation can’t be

healthy. It leads to a lack of cumulativeness, and an unhealthy fractiousness. It’s an Orwellian situation where today Oceania is the ally and Eurasia is the enemy, and tomorrow it’s the other way around.”<sup>46</sup>

At one point, Chomsky is explaining how the meaning of a sentence is determined by its “deep structure”; shortly afterwards, he is denouncing those still committed to this view, explaining how “surface structure” is decisive in determining the meaning of a sentence. The underlying complaint, expressed by Pinker as by so many of Chomsky’s former students and admirers, is that the spiritual leader apparently claims infallibility, his zigzags too often recalling those of a 17th century pope or 20th century Orwellian head of state.

## Pentagon

But if the entire project was unworkable and misconceived, why did it gain such extraordinary institutional support? If Chomsky’s aim was to work out the mathematical structure of the soul - failing to discover its secret because the project was doomed from the outset - why would corporate America have wanted to sponsor such nonsense?

Here is one possible explanation. The Pentagon is the Vatican of our times. It is a state-within-a-state, an apparatus wielding vast resources, shaping the sponsorship and funding of research projects in virtually every branch of science and technology, enforcing a regime of censorship and patronage sanctioned by loss of income or worse - and cloaking its self-serving activities under a veneer of piety and concern for the welfare of all. The following exchange is from an interview conducted in 1995:

**“One of the questions you are often asked after your talks is the one about, How can you work at the [Massachusetts Institute of Technology, funded by the US military]? You’ve never had any interference with your work, have you?”**

Quite the contrary. MIT has been very supportive. I don’t know the figures now, but in 1969, when the only serious faculty/student inquiry was undertaken, into funding, there was a commission set up at the time of local ferment about military labs, and I was on it, and at that time MIT funding was almost entirely the Pentagon. About half the institute’s budget was coming from two major military laboratories that they administered and of the rest, the academic side, it would have been something like 90% or so from the Pentagon. Something like that. Very high. So it was a Pentagon-based university. And I was at a military-funded lab.”

“But,” added Chomsky, “I never had the slightest interference with anything I did.”<sup>47</sup>

Chomsky’s activist supporters invariably express bafflement at this. In fact, however, there is a simple explanation. Chomsky’s freedom from “the slightest interference” indicates that his linguistics - unlike his politics - did not trouble the authorities at all. In the wider scheme of things, even his leftwing politics may not have seemed much of a problem. The contradiction is resolved when we remember that institutions like the Vatican require not only sinners, but also a sprinkling of saints. They need genuinely idealistic individuals to act as their public face - their displays of moral conscience and political dissidence striking a chord with key sectors of the public, which might otherwise lead revolts from below.

Behind the scenes, the string-pullers and fixers need real science - the Vatican’s instruments of torture

must actually work, its gunpowder properly explode - but equally they need stained glass windows and painted ceilings, comforting hymns and saintly myths. It is not enough merely to conceal the truth: the masses are more effectively duped when the secrets of power are reversed ●

## Notes

1. For previous parts of this study, see ‘The Chomsky enigma’ *Weekly Worker* January 11 2007; ‘Chomsky’s parallel lives’, January 25 2007; and ‘Extraordinary double act of Noam Chomsky’ March 11 2010.
2. N Chomsky *Language and politics* Montreal 1988, p44.
3. R Descartes, ‘The passions of the soul’ (1649) in J Cottingham, R Stoothoff, D Murdoch *The philosophical writings of Descartes* Cambridge 1985, Vol 1, pp328-404; the quotation is on p341.
4. *Ibid* p345.
5. R Descartes, ‘Discourse on the method’ (1637) in J Cottingham, R Stoothoff, D Murdoch *The philosophical writings of Descartes* Cambridge 1985, Vol 1, pp111-51, p141.
6. *Ibid* pp139-40.
7. *Ibid* p140.
8. R Descartes, ‘Letter to Mersenne’ (1633) in J Cottingham, R Stoothoff, D Murdoch, A Kenny *The philosophical writings of Descartes* Cambridge 1985, Vol 3. The correspondence, pp40-41.
9. R Descartes, ‘Treatise on man’ (1633) in J Cottingham, R Stoothoff, D Murdoch *The philosophical writings of Descartes* Cambridge 1985, Vol 1, pp99-108, p99.
10. R Descartes, ‘The passions of the soul’ (1649) in J Cottingham, R Stoothoff, D Murdoch *The philosophical writings of Descartes* Cambridge 1985, Vol 1, pp328-404; the quotation is on pp339-40.
11. N Chomsky *Cartesian linguistics: a chapter in the history of rationalist thought* Boston 1966.
12. N Chomsky, letter, March 31 1995, in RF Barsky *Noam Chomsky: a life of dissent* Cambridge MA 1997, p106.
13. N Chomsky, ‘Human nature: justice versus power’ (debate with M Foucault) in AI Davidson (ed) *Foucault and his interlocutors* London 1997, pp107-45. The quotation is on pp112-13.
14. *Ibid* pp113-14.
15. *Ibid* p114.
16. R Descartes, ‘Treatise on man’ (1633) in J Cottingham, R Stoothoff, D Murdoch *The philosophical writings of Descartes* Cambridge 1985, Vol 1, pp99-108, p108.
17. *Ibid* pp99-108, p108.
18. N Chomsky *On nature and language* Cambridge 2002, pp51-52.
19. *Ibid* p53.
20. N Chomsky *Creation and culture* (audiotape) Alternative Radio, recorded November 25 1992. Quoted in RF Barsky *Noam Chomsky: a life of dissent* Cambridge MA 1997, p108.
21. In 1955, Chomsky joined the ‘Research Laboratory of Electronics’ at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT). His work was funded by the US military.
22. N Chomsky *Knowledge of language: its nature, origin and use* Westport 1986, pxxv.
23. N Chomsky, ‘Linguistics and adjacent fields: a personal view’ in A Kasher (ed) *The Chomskyan turn* Oxford 1991, p15.
24. *Ibid*.
25. N Chomsky, ‘Linguistics and cognitive science: problems and mysteries’ in A Kasher (ed) *The Chomskyan turn* Oxford 1991, pp26-53; p50.
26. N Chomsky *The architecture of language* Oxford 200, p4.
27. *Ibid* p18.
28. *Ibid* p4.
29. N Chomsky *On nature and language* Cambridge 2002, p76.
30. N Chomsky *Powers and prospects* London 1999, p29.
31. N Chomsky *On nature and language* Cambridge 2002, p148.
32. N Chomsky *Powers and prospects* London 1999, p30.
33. R Descartes, ‘Objections and replies’ (1641) in J Cottingham, R Stoothoff, D Murdoch *The philosophical writings of Descartes* Cambridge 1985, Vol 2, pp65-383; p114.
34. N Chomsky *On nature and language* Cambridge 2002, p118.
35. N Chomsky *Language and mind* New York 1972, p398.
36. *Ibid* p398.
37. *Ibid* p405.
38. Editor’s note to Noam Chomsky, ‘Things no amount of learning can teach’ (1983) in CP Otero (ed) *Noam Chomsky: language and politics* Montreal 1988, p406-19; p406.
39. N Chomsky *Language and problems of knowledge: the Managua lectures* Cambridge MA 1988, pp91-92.
40. N Chomsky *On nature and language* Cambridge 2002, p151.
41. N Chomsky *The generative enterprise* Dordrecht 1982, p58.
42. *Ibid* p40.
43. *Ibid* p41.
44. Noam Chomsky, ‘Things no amount of learning can teach’ (1983) CP Otero (ed) *Language and politics* Montreal 1988, pp407-19; p418.
45. Conversation with Paul Postal, in G Huck, JA Goldsmith *Ideology and linguistic theory* London 1995, pp140-41.
46. C Kenneally *The first word: the search for the origins of language* London 2007, p271.
47. N Chomsky *Class warfare: interviews with David Barsamian* London 1996, p102.



## REVIEW

# Comedy and tragedy

Jim Moody reviews two RSC productions at the Roundhouse



Mad scene: Greg Hick (Lear) and Geoffry Freshwater (Gloucester)

Sometimes dismissed as unserious, even unworthy of its author, Shakespeare's *As you like it* has been given vibrant life by the Royal Shakespeare Company's current Roundhouse production.

No superficial comedy, as some bourgeois critics have viewed it, *As you like it* exposes many dark corners of Elizabethan society. And in the process a political poverty of riches is revealed.

This production was first seen nearly two years ago, when it was at Stratford upon Avon. It has improved by a slight maturing and fits its current venue exceptionally well.

Young Orlando (Jonjo O'Neill) has to leave home after being persecuted by his older brother, Oliver (Charles Aitken). Previously enamoured of Rosalind (Katy Stephens), who has since been banished from court, Orlando wanders listlessly in the Forest of Arden, and falls into company with a young 'boy'... who just happens to be Rosalind disguised in male clothing as Ganymede.

Cue sharing of thoughts about Rosalind and a degree of gay undertone to add a frisson to the humour. (Deliberately adding to the sexual confusion, in the early 17th century boys played girls and

young women on stage.)

Many are the references to the 'old religion' (aka witchcraft), as opposed to Christianity, with appearance of Hern the Hunter figures. And frequent are the interpolations of music and singing, giving a rambunctious and bawdy flavour to this full-bodied work.

The social context of *As you like it* was an England that was beginning to lose its (imagined) romantic bucolic lustre, as former agricultural labourers migrated to the towns and cities. Formerly open land where commoners could graze their pigs, sheep and cattle was being enclosed apace and immiseration of the majority was the order of the day.

This was the society that the play inhabits. The shepherd, Corin (Geoffrey Freshwater), gives voice to some of the concerns that the economically disenfranchised must have made common in Shakespeare's hearing.

*King Lear* is an altogether different work. It certainly cannot be labelled with the denigration 'crowd-pleasing' that *As you like it* has sometimes been, unfairly, stuck with. Written some years later, it opened only a few months after the 'gunpowder plot'. This Lear (Greg Hicks) is agonisingly in your face and well pro-

vides the play's visceral impact, as the story unfolds.

For those who are unfamiliar with the tale, it turns on the monarch's decision to retire from kingship and divide his kingdom among his three daughters. But Cordelia (Samantha Young), the youngest, fails to deliver an encomium to her father's liking and so is peremptorily cut out of his legacy and banished. It all goes downhill from then on.

Lear's two elder daughters, Goneril (Kelly Hunter) and Regan (Katy Stephens), prove to be ungrateful wretches, humiliating him and refusing to keep to the terms of the settlement. Meanwhile Edmund (Tunji Kasim), illegitimate son of the Earl of Gloucester (Geoffrey Freshwater), conspires against legitimate son Edgar (Charles Aitken), forcing him into a semi-naked, bare existence in the woods.

Betrayals and barbarities multiply. Lear loses the balance of his mind and bonds with the temporarily deranged Edgar when he and his much-reduced party come across him. Edmund proves to be a rake and sets Goneril and Regan against each other for his favours. Cordelia's marriage to the King of France (Brian Doherty) and a subsequent attempt by the French army to invade adds to the disintegration of what was Lear's kingdom.

Finally, Lear's daughters variously commit suicide, are poisoned or hanged, Lear dies of grief, and Edgar stabs Edmund to death and their father, Gloucester, breathes his last.

Reference in the script to a time before Merlin suggests Shakespeare placed the action in the sixth or seventh centuries. Lear's name may have Celtic origins. However, artistic licence bundles history in a confection, helping to shape awareness of what lies beneath the stark surface of a truly dramatic dynastic and ruling class storyline.

Also the use of more modern uniforms and other costumes, as well as props, fits very well with the intention of the playwright to abstract political motivations and display them subtly in the artistic manner to which we have become accustomed. As with others of his plays, of course, the layering of meaning is one of the delights that Shakespeare provides.

The language of the text is, of course, superlative and delivered by both casts in excellent fashion, as is only to be expected. Especial plaudits must go to Geoffrey Freshwater and Katy Stephens, who appear in both plays. Indeed, Michael Boyd (*As you like it*) and David Farr (*King Lear*) masterfully direct stand-out casts in impressive, yet sparsely set stagings.

If you hurry, you just might be able to catch one or other of the RSC performances at the Roundhouse: they are really unmissable ●

## 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.

## Fighting fund

# Confident

While we just failed to reach our £1,250 fighting fund target in January, I am confident we will more than make up for it in February in view of the good start we have made.

The final week of last month saw £123 come in via standing orders, not to mention a £5 PayPal donation received via our website from comrade JL. That took our total to £1,132 - some £90 short of our goal. But in the first two days of February, we have already notched up £256. Despite the fact that this month we have three days less to play with, this does leave us well placed to achieve our target, as the total we need has dipped below the £1,000 mark in double-quick time.

This speedy start can partly be put down to the usual flurry of standing order transfers that arrive in the *Weekly Worker* account on the first of the month - they add up to £171, donated by 11 comrades. But we also received two generous cheques: £50 from RI and £30 from CM. Then there was EJ's monthly fiver made via PayPal.

Now we could do with some more

where that came from - credit or debit card donations made online, that is. After all, every week we register a remarkably consistent 12,000 or so internet readers (there were 12,939 over the last seven days), but the percentage that contribute to our fighting fund is tiny - work it out!

Meanwhile, however, our drive to increase our regular income through increased standing orders is continuing to pay dividends, with three new authorities received in the last few days - thank you, LC, CR and CC, whose contributions will increase our monthly total by £30 overall. Mind you, a number of comrades who have pledged an SO have not yet delivered - or at least they have not informed me if they have arranged it directly with their bank.

I'm waiting to hear from you!

**Robbie Rix**

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

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# weekly worker

## Aaron Porter smears opponents

# Keeping up the pressure

Ben Lewis reports on a promising weekend of student action and plans for the battles ahead

If one image best summarises the radical transformation of the student movement within the last year, it is that of a rather concerned policeman escorting the supine National Union of Students president, Aaron Porter, from last Saturday's demonstration against education and public sector cuts in Manchester. The event had the official backing of the NUS and the Trades Union Congress. Yet the students made it clear that their 'leader' was not welcome. They chanted: "Aaron Porter, we know you, you're a fucking Tory too!" The anger was palpable.

In a last-ditch attempt to cling onto his position, Porter is now claiming he was subject to anti-Semitic abuse. Of course, he is not Jewish and it is possible that "you're a fucking Tory too" could have been mistaken for 'you're a fucking Tory Jew'. But his tactics are clear. Porter wants to smear his opponents and critics in the student movement. And - no surprise - the *Daily Mail*, a publication not exactly renowned for its glowing anti-fascist credentials, has latched onto this line. It quotes an (unnamed) photographer who reports having heard chants of "Jewish Tory scum" coming from the crowd. As with the *Mail's* attempt to smear the *de facto* leader of the student movement, University of London Union president Clare Solomon, the agenda here is obvious: throw as much muck at the militant students as often as possible in the hope that some will stick.

Anyhow, in addition to the 5,000 who marched in Manchester, around 10,000 simultaneously took to the streets of London in a peaceful demonstration that was characterised by its vibrancy. On arrival at Millbank Tower the protestors quickly split up into smaller groups ('civil swarms') to avoid being 'kettled'. These groups continued protesting across the city: on Oxford Street to protest against the tax evasion of Top Shop and Boots; on Trafalgar Square in front of the usual melee of tourists and shoppers; and outside the Egyptian embassy, where several hundred protestors chanted for Egyptian president Hosni Mubarak to go.

It is clear that the mood amongst students is still encouragingly militant. The votes to raise tuition fees (December) and to scrap the Education Maintenance Allowance for Further Education (January) may have gone through, but, as last Saturday shows, this has not stymied the movement. It is in the nature of student politics that there will be ebb and flow - exams, holidays and the need to eke out some sort of existence in a bar or a club are crucial factors here. Yet the Con-Dem government's hopes of heading off student radicalism have clearly not materialised. The question is: what next?

## Network

Getting 15,000 people out on the streets is extremely encouraging. Yet, as I have written before, for the moment we are still dealing with a radicalised *minority* of students, whose commitment is beyond doubt.

This student vanguard obviously articulates something much deeper in society: university lecturers, university cleaning and porter staff, even old women and men waving their encouragement to demonstrators - all have welcomed the lead the students have taken in organising protests, occupying their universities and so on. The question now is to tap into that wider mood, deepen the anti-cuts sentiment and link up with sections of the organised workers' movement that are next in line for the government's axe.

On a rather small scale, the weekly London Student Assembly has shown how it is possible for different campus anti-cuts campaigns, anti-cuts coalitions, school and college students, education workers, etc to come together to discuss the next steps forward, coordinate struggles and strike deeper roots in society. Attendance has varied dramatically, but this body clearly has a lot of potential as a way of organising and educating new activists. In spite of very poor publicity and the absence of a serious plan to build for them amongst FE and HE students, the LSA has drawn in a lot of people. Communist Students will propose that the LSA now make plans to broaden its base by leafleting students, organising meetings in schools and colleges and attempting to set up local assemblies. Such moves are crucial to organisational continuity *between* demonstrations. If the will is there, this could quite quickly be replicated on a national scale, building as much support for the TUC demonstration on March 26 as possible.

On Sunday January 30 around 100 activists came together for the rather oddly titled National Assembly for Education, a Socialist Workers Party-inspired attempt to bring together different students from the numerous occupations and plan for the future. The fact that most of the people in attendance were from London showed that we are quite far from a genuinely 'national' assembly. Yet there were

some encouraging signs coming from the floor: pledges to build support for the University and College Union lecturers' dispute, to organise more student occupations and also to agitate for a general strike. The meeting was actually quite democratically organised, with comrades being able to propose and oppose proposals.

I moved an amendment calling for "the establishment of city-wide student assemblies to bring together the different universities and colleges, anti-cuts groups to facilitate discussion and action". I also added that we could then move towards a second national assembly after the March 26 demo based on these assemblies. This was passed overwhelmingly. But neither this nor the motion it amended is actually reported on the Education Assembly website. This is worrying because the assemblies are an obvious way to step up the fight. Setting them up will then allow us to move towards *genuinely* national assemblies based on delegates from the localities. Our perspectives must be for mass action and participation. The assemblies can facilitate this work.

## NUS machinations

Against the backdrop of these tasks, the question of the NUS is largely of a peripheral nature.

The role of the NUS is to effectively train a new generation of machine politicians in the dark arts of labour bureaucracy manoeuvring and dealing behind closed doors. In normal times, this allows fairly mediocre politicians like previous presidents Gemma Tumelty, Wes Streeter and others to earn their laurels and climb into a cosy job in the bureaucracy or the charity sector. Aaron Porter, perhaps the most mediocre of the mediocre, was destined for the same path. Yet unfortunately for him his time in office has not been normal. The NUS machine is predicated on student inactivity, apathy and demobilisation, so it should come as no surprise that Porter has played the role he has. For



Aaron Porter and friends

him militant action is just not cricket.

Instead of looking to subvert the rules of the NUS game though, the far left has been all too keen to obediently abide by them. Whereas aspirant bureaucrats from Labour Students or the Union of Jewish Students might meet in hotels to carve up electoral slates and positions, the far left has tended to do it away from prying eyes in the cosy confines of Costa coffee outlets.

Indeed, the only way that I actually found out about this year's 'united left slate' (read: disunited right slate) at the forthcoming NUS conference was by going for a beer or two with a Workers Power comrade after a recent LSA planning meeting. Apparently representatives from the various left groups got together on Saturday January 22 to divvy up who would stand for what position. The carve up is between the SWP (Mark Bergfeld for president and Ruby Hirsch for vice-president for further education); Workers Power (Joana Oliveira Pinto for VP union development); Student Broad Left/Socialist Action (Aaron Kiely for VP society and citizenship) and independents like National Campaign Against Fees and Cuts support-

ers Michael Chessum (VP higher education) and Sean Rillo-Raczka (VP welfare). The Alliance for Workers' Liberty's Jade Baker is to contest the women's officer position, but not as part of this slate.

These bureaucratic machinations have gone on for far too long. Not only are they inexorably bound up with the continued disunity of the left and its various bureaucratic regimes, their lowest common denominator politics are quite clearly lagging *behind* the students we have seen entering into struggle in recent times. When students are being subjected to police batons and mass open air imprisonment (kettling) the 'Marxist' left consciously limits its propaganda in NUS elections to 'student trade unionism': fees, cuts and closures. Things like revolutionary politics, the need for a revolutionary party, for radical democracy against the state, etc are limited to the confines of their own *sect* perspectives, not proposed as the basis of unity. Whereas in normal times it might allow this or that group to get a footing in the bureaucracy, today's situation demands something qualitatively better.

If we are to actually harness the anger amongst students, if we are to radicalise and politicise it, then the left must shape up. At present it is not fit for purpose in offering a serious alternative to the Con-Dem government or Ed Miliband's 'nice cuts'. Apart from doing the 'hard yards' of campaigning on the campuses, in the halls of residence and in the student assemblies there should be a fight - an open and protracted struggle - for the unity of the student left on a *pro-partyist*, revolutionary basis. Just as the student movement's boldness has won support in society more generally, so such a daring move could have enormous resonance amongst our class in the colossal battles ahead. Our vision must not be one of sect fishing for recruits, but of mass partyist unity ●

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