



weekly **worker**



**Jairus Banaji and his denial
of historical directionality**

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Mubarak has gone but mass protests continue



LETTERS



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

Fucking lies

In response to Matthew Caygill's letter (February 10), I'd like to dispel any pretensions anyone holds that anti-Semitic slogans were shouted at Aaron Porter on the Manchester demonstration of January 29.

I was personally present on the demonstration that day, although admittedly not part of the mob that quite rightly chased Porter into my students union building, and felt outraged by what I consider to be the libellous allegations that the *Daily Mail*, assorted rightwing news sources and now even the student paper of Manchester University have made about the supposed racist nature of the chants. I can see, just as I'm sure that comrade Caygill can as well, how a reactionary tabloid newspaper such as the *Daily Mail* could take the chant, "Aaron Porter, we know you - you're a fucking Tory too!", and turn it into a story to slander people it hates - the same people who desecrated the statue of Churchill and gave the heir to the throne a bit of scare the same day - with a little bit of lying, and I assert that that is exactly what the *Daily Mail* has done in this instance.

As to the evidence of racism comrade Caygill claims to have found, I'm afraid I couldn't locate *The Guardian* video myself, but I have seen the one on YouTube titled, 'Rebel students target Aaron Porter (NUS president)'. Not once in its 10-minute entirety, which covers the crowd chasing him away from start to finish, could I find any evidence of racist chants.

Admittedly, some of the "You're a fucking Tory too" chants were muffled and unclear. Yet, given the fact that the crowd was made up predominantly of people from the Alliance for Workers' Liberty, Socialist Workers Party, Revo and many from the occupation of the University of Manchester whom I know for a fact are violently opposed to racism in all its forms, I myself am more inclined to believe their version of what was said than the *Daily Mail*'s.

Alfred Stevens
email

Not convinced

Comrade Matthew Caygill is correct to highlight the worrying phenomenon of the pejorative use of the word 'Jew' in popular discourse. The left should have no truck with such rhetoric.

When a comrade texted me from Manchester to tell me that the spineless Aaron Porter had been angrily barracked for his shoddy, inexcusable record as National Union of Students president, I could not help but smile. Yet if, as comrade Caygill claims, Porter was hounded by racially motivated chants of "You're a fucking Tory Jew" and "You're a filthy Tory Jew" then this should be forthrightly and unreservedly condemned.

Having now watched the video comrade Caygill refers to (<http://tinyurl.com/5tvjmxu>), I did not hear any racial abuse. Indeed, whilst the distortion of the megaphone and the chorus of voices of the crowd make it difficult to properly make out each chant, it strikes me that the chants emanating from the megaphone were part of a fairly standard list drawn up beforehand: "You're a fucking Tory too", "Porter out!", "Scum!", etc. For what it is worth, *Guardian* reporter Judy Friedberg does not deem the

footage to be conclusive either way, simply introducing the video with: "Here's the footage. You decide" (<http://tinyurl.com/69ymdmf>).

The Mule, a non-profit, independent media project, casts further doubt on Porter's claims of being the victim of anti-Semitic abuse (<http://tinyurl.com/5tbv4fp>). Its journalists contacted *The Sunday Telegraph* and established that there were only two sources for the story the paper ran the following day: an (unnamed) photographer and the NUS itself.

What's more, Aaron Porter's account of what happened is far from consistent. Whilst the day after the demonstration he tweeted that he "would not back down, and certainly not to racial abuse", in a recent statement quoted by *The Mule* he has changed tack, claiming not to have heard anything himself: "I was not certain what was said by those shouting abuse at me. However, I was informed by others present that amongst other things anti-Semitic comments were made."

Nick Schwartz
London

Ageism

Let me assure comrade Ian Birchall (February 10), that I am no ageist and that I value the input of comrades who, like himself can certainly equip younger generations of revolutionaries with valuable weapons: experience and knowledge.

Comrade Birchall takes issue with my reference to "even old women and men waving their encouragement to demonstrators". ('Keeping up the pressure', February 3). I had not intended to emphasise the word 'even', as comrade Birchall does. I was simply reporting something that struck me as particularly salient when describing the wider support the student movement enjoys.

As Communist Students comrades marched along The Strand with a big banner ('Fight capitalist austerity! For a mass communist student movement!) I recall them cheering and waving. When I and other comrades raised our fists in salute, they waved again, this time with both hands. It was inspiring as an example of solidarity with the protests and between the generations.

Ben Lewis
London

Advance notice

Ted Talbot responds to Chris Knight's letter (January 27) with a few proposals of his own (Letters, February 3). Taking inspiration from Sun Tzu in *The art of war*, Ted Talbot suggests that to get "stuck in" any anarchist action on March 26 should be cloaked in deception, thus avoiding the stupidity of telling your enemy what you intend to do.

However, anyone who was involved in the G20 protests will know that it was exactly by announcing in advance what was going to happen - a convergence on the Bank of England led by the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse and the possibility of hanging bankers - that led to the successful action. Admittedly the kettling operation by the police was not anticipated. Another example of announcing a plan in advance was the occupation of Parliament Square, creating Democracy Village - another success. Tactics have moved on since then, with the development of Sukey, an early warning anti-kettling device for smart phones, first tested on the January 29 student demonstration.

Going back to the main point, I don't believe Ted Talbot is naive, but there must be an expectation that anarchist groups have already

been infiltrated by undercover police officers, such as Mark Kennedy. However, with the type of actions proposed, it would be foolhardy for the police to wade in, as Talbot suggests, following the reaction of the police to the G20 protests and the continuing payouts. Although the media's success at undercover work is less thorough than the police and exposing those individuals is an easy job, why not give them a step up - the more exposure, the better - including inviting the media to meetings to give them a flavour of potential actions and make them work for us, rather than the media infiltrating meetings to report scare stories?

The only simple way to be successful is to signal your intentions beforehand. How you carry out the action is a question of tactics.

Simon Wells
Hackney

Kurdish camp

After driving for half an hour from Sulaimani, one of the major cities in the semi-autonomous Kurdistan region of Iraq, we arrived at Zirgwez village, where the "military and refugee" camp of the Komala faction of Iranian Communist Party (Komala-CPI), is situated. The party is a major force amongst the Kurdish opposition to the Islamic Republic of Iran and is the only Kurdish party in Iran that fights for the right of the Kurds to form their own separate state.

A red flag was flying over a surveillance post looking over the front gate of the village. A Peshmarga woman (Kurdish guerrilla fighter) opened the gate for us. This was quite extraordinary, especially since gender inequality in this semi-autonomous region is rife, due to traditional and religious values. She was wearing a Kurdish Peshmarga uniform and was holding an AK47.

Our contact was a leftwing Iranian exiled writer and film director who was living in the camp, but was not an affiliate to the party. After a short while, he came down from the hill and took us to his house. "This is a Peshmarga home, even if you are not Peshmarga. Here you have to live the lifestyle," he said with a smile, indicating the house was primitive.

The neighbourhood where all the Peshmargas lived was located in the heart of the village (Peshmargas could be seen at the top of those mountains surrounding the camp). Here the roads were primitive, compared to the main road of the village. "All these roads and everything else you see in this camp are built by us," said our Peshmarga driver. "The area was almost completely destroyed when we came after Operation Anfal [ethnic cleansing of the Kurds in 1988]. People were no longer living here - we reconstructed the entire area."

Outside the houses, some Peshmargas, men and women, were busy planting trees and building new houses for their recently arrived comrades. "We receive dozens of young people from all over Iran joining our forces every month," Hassan Rahman Panah, spokesperson and leading figure of the Komala faction, told me.

Hassan Panah said there is a good relationship between themselves and the villagers. Despite the threats to their families from the Iranian secret services.

We visited the party's medical centre, where portraits of its martyrs, along with those of Marx and Engels, were on the walls. As well as treating their own Peshmargas, the medical centre was open to the people of Zirgwez. It provides medicine and medical treatment free of charge.

The shelves in the party's large library, as well as Marxist literature, had a diverse range of books by European writers and novelists, and archives from leftwing newspapers. A Peshmarga woman in charge of the library explained that students, journalists and writers from Iraqi Kurdistan visit the library to access Farsi sources for their work and studies.

The discipline of the Peshmargas was unbelievable. The main commander, who was accompanying us, explained that, as well as carrying out their daily military routine, other roles include working for the party's media - ie, the international satellite TV and radio stations broadcasting from this camp to the world: "Anyone joining us not only becomes a Peshmarga: they have to work in other areas too. They learn how to use our computers, and perhaps work in one of our media outlets."

The TV station was modern with high-tech equipment. In one of the news rooms, 'Akam', a 21-year-old Peshmarga, was busy uploading fresh news to the party's website. He said he had joined the party four months ago. Next to him, a woman wearing the Peshmarga uniform was translating articles from Farsi to Kurdish on her computer for the party newspaper, *Peshraw*.

The party claims it is not carrying out an armed struggle, but is "forced to carry guns to defend the organisation's civil and political struggle". Hassan Panah told me: "We believe in civil and mass struggle, but we have to protect ourselves from the notorious Islamic regime."

Rozh Ahmad
email

Limitations

While we can all sympathise with Dave Vincent, I believe his argument is flawed ('Should we all join Labour?', February 10). I always derive wry amusement from people who want to overthrow British imperialism, but for some reason aren't up to overthrowing the rightwing leadership in the Labour Party.

Those who ignore the bigger picture can argue, like comrade Vincent, that "The Labour right have learnt enough to ensure the left will get nowhere near gaining control." This would no doubt be true if it was up to the right wing. Fortunately for us there are greater forces at work than the rights who have traditionally controlled Labour. The Labour rights aren't just clever control-freaks who are able to control the Party and the working class under all conditions. Certain ideological and objective conditions must exist to facilitate this control. Developments are already undermining this.

The point is, as long as British imperialism was able to buy off the working class and protect the middle classes, the chances of defeating the rightwing leadership remained minimal. This was certainly the case when capitalism was on a long-term upswing. Now that capitalism is faced with a permanent decline, bleating on about the impossibility of ousting the right is simply defeatism.

We have now entered the time when capitalist regimes will no longer be able to buy off the working class and protect the middle classes, and all attempts at engineering an economic recovery will come up against the barrier of the global peak in oil production. Economic 'recovery' simply means sending oil prices soaring into triple-digit figures, thus precipitating a double-dip recession.

The Labour right has no solutions

to this crisis and there are none on the basis of capitalism which would guarantee their dominant influence within the party. The only real question is, what's the left going to do? There are those who believe that it is necessary to win Labour over to 'Marxism', or their version of it. I would argue that what we need to do is to win the Labour Party over to the idea of an ecologically sustainable, democratic socialist society. This can certainly be done without recourse to dogmas, Marxist or otherwise. This does not mean I am entirely dismissive of Marxism, but I am aware of its limitations in explaining the present crisis.

Tony Clark
email

Climate hysteria

The notion of a static, unchanging climate is foreign to the history of the earth. The fact that the developed world went into hysterics over changes in global mean temperature anomaly of a few tenths of a degree will astound future generations. Such hysteria simply represents the scientific illiteracy of much of the public, the susceptibility of the public to the substitution of repetition for truth and the exploitation of these weaknesses by politicians, environmental promoters, and, after 20 years of media drum beating, many others as well.

Climate is always changing. Ice ages have occurred in a 100,000-year cycle for the last 700,000 years, and there have been previous periods that appear to have been warmer than the present despite CO₂ levels being lower than they are now. More recently, we have had the medieval warm period and the little ice age.

For small changes in climate associated with tenths of a degree, there is no need for any external cause. The earth is never exactly in equilibrium. The motions of the massive oceans where heat is moved between deep layers and the surface provides variability on time scales from years to centuries. Recent work (Tsonis *et al*, 2007) suggests that this variability is enough to account for all climate change since the 19th century.

Climate alarmists say that some of the hottest years on record have occurred during the past decade. Given that we are in a relatively warm period, this is not surprising, but it says nothing about trends. Given that the evidence strongly implies that anthropogenic warming has been greatly exaggerated, the basis for alarm due to such warming is similarly diminished.

Polar bears, arctic summer sea ice, regional droughts and floods, coral bleaching, hurricanes, alpine glaciers, malaria, etc, etc all depend not on some global average of surface temperature anomaly, but on a huge number of regional variables, including temperature, humidity, cloud cover, precipitation, and direction and magnitude of wind. The state of the ocean is also often crucial. Our ability to forecast any of these over periods beyond a few days is minimal. Yet, each catastrophic forecast depends on each of these being in a specific range. The odds of any specific catastrophe actually occurring are almost zero. This was equally true for earlier forecasts of famine for the 1980s, and global cooling in the 1970s.

Regionally, year to year fluctuations in temperature are over four times larger than fluctuations in the global mean. Much of this variation has to be independent of the global mean; otherwise the global mean

would vary much more. This is simply to note that factors other than global warming are more important to any specific situation. This is not to say that disasters will not occur; they always have occurred and this will not change in the future. Fighting global warming with symbolic gestures will certainly not change this. However, history tells us that greater wealth and development can profoundly increase our resilience.

In view of the above, one may reasonably ask why there is the current alarm, and, in particular, why the astounding upsurge in alarmism of the past four years. When an issue like global warming is around for over 20 years, numerous agendas are developed to exploit the issue. The interests of the environmental movement in acquiring more power, influence and donations are reasonably clear. So too are the interests of bureaucrats, for whom control of CO₂ is a dream come true. After all, CO₂ is a product of breathing itself. Politicians can see the possibility of taxation that will be cheerfully accepted because it is necessary for ‘saving’ the earth.

With all this at stake, one can readily suspect that there might be a sense of urgency provoked by the possibility that warming may have ceased and that the case for such warming being due in significant measure to man is disintegrating. For those committed to the more venal agendas, the need to act soon, before the public appreciates the situation, is real indeed. However, for more serious leaders, the need to courageously resist hysteria is clear. Wasting resources on symbolically fighting ever present climate change is no substitute for prudence. Nor is the assumption that the earth’s climate reached a point of perfection in the middle of the 20th century a sign of intelligence.

Richard Lindzen
email

Excluded

A government roundtable to develop “policy on prostitution” was held on February 14, but the English Collective of Prostitutes was excluded. When asked why, home office spokesman Alistair Noble replied that “organisations have been selected to reflect a range of experience and perspectives and to lead to a balanced discussion”.

Can there be a “balanced discussion” without input from the longest running, independent and most outspoken sex worker organisation in the UK? To exclude the ECP from talks on “developing an effective policy on prostitution” is equivalent to excluding the protestors in Tahrir Square from talks on democratic change in Egypt.

Since it was founded in 1975, the ECP has campaigned for decriminalisation so that sex workers’ safety can be central. After the Ipswich murders, we launched the Safety First Coalition, which includes highly respected organisations such as the Royal College of Nursing and Women Against Rape. The work of this coalition, including with MPs and peers (most recently in relation to the Policing and Crime Act) and with the media, ensured that public concern about criminalisation undermining safety was put on the national agenda.

The need for change is urgent. There have been two sets of horrific murders of sex workers in the most recent period and many other women working in the sex industry have lost their lives, but have never hit the headlines. Rape and other violence are widespread. Most sex workers cannot report to the police for fear of arrest, exposure and, if

they are immigrants, deportation. When they do, they are arrested for prostitution offences, while their attackers go free. That’s how serial rapists and murderers are enabled and encouraged. Hanna Morris, who is being charged for brothel keeping after reporting a threatened arson attack, is one example of this.

With a network of women in most towns and cities in the UK, we are the first port of call for women who are being raided and prosecuted for working together in the relative safety of premises. Many are losing their homes and savings under proceeds of crime law. Women working on the street speak of being pushed through punitive compulsory rehabilitation schemes which offer no concrete resources to address the poverty, debt, homelessness, domestic violence and drug use acknowledged as the key factors forcing women into prostitution. In towns and cities around the country, increasing numbers of women, mostly mothers, are having to look for sex work to feed families and keep a roof over their head. Women criminalised under the laws find themselves blocked from any other kind of employment - in effect institutionalised in prostitution. These women are our constituency and those whose voices will not be heard if we are excluded.

Aware of this, the president of GMB sex worker branch, Thierry Schaffauser, wrote asking for the ECP to be included, but so far his request has been ignored. Is this a consultation or a cover-up?

English Collective of Prostitutes
www.prostitutescollective.net

No behaviourist

Contrary to Bob Potter’s imaginings, I am not a behaviourist, do believe that children have a language instinct and am not hostile to Newton or Chomsky. But Newton’s theological writings are another matter - as are Chomsky’s.

Chris Knight
South London

Real alternative

We need to complete the democratic

revolution. Not just the right to vote. Full democracy is the original *social* democracy.

In 1946 Labour minister Stafford Cripps rubbished the idea of workers running industries (as well as operating them) by making up the majority on the boards of nationalised coal and railways. The former owners and shareholders were fully compensated and thus escaped the prospect of having to pay for modernisation and renewal. Rail and coal bosses had their capital freed up to invest more profitably!

So ‘public ownership’ just alienated the workers - state capitalism was no better from their point of view than private capitalism. The compensation measures enriched the already rich and the lack of democratic management put up a barrier between workers and their work. Later privatisation reared its ugly head above the deindustrialised landscape.

We need to advance policies for forms of ownership and control which are neither private capitalist nor state bureaucratic and the cooperative model is perhaps what we seek. ‘One, member, one share, one vote’ is the basic co-op principle. This empowers the poor and does not allow the rich to take over. But in practice capitalist methods of operation have taken root in the big cooperative retail, banking and insurance companies. Years ago retail co-ops paid big dividends to their members - not based on equal sharing, but on how much was spent. Dividend day every six months was eagerly anticipated.

Another cooperative principle is the election of recallable delegates as managers. But this has been replaced by the *appointment* of bosses with no labour movement background. Meanwhile, co-op workers are mere wage slaves. Yet, by applying real cooperative principles, we could have community co-ops running schools and buses, worker co-ops emptying bins, federations of co-ops providing rail services, and so on.

The strict maintenance of democracy at all levels is the key to achieving a real alternative to capitalism.

Rob York
Sheffield

Fighting fund

A little something

What’s this? A drop of 10,000 *Weekly Worker* readers compared to last week? As I reported then, we had 14,329 online visitors during the previous seven-day period, but this week I see there were only 4,488! However, closer inspection reveals that the web counter seems to have given up some time last Friday. Remind me to let our webmaster know.

But despite that it has been quite a good week for our fighting fund. Admittedly we only got two donations via our website - a tremendous £100 from comrade TDB and a more modest, yet still valued, £5 from KJ. But pride of place this week goes to comrade TM, who walked into our office and handed over three crisp £50 notes, with the self-effacing remark: “A little something for the fund, mate.”

As usual, we had a good number of standing order contributions, amounting to £110 over the week. They include £50 from RMB and a newly increased £25 from GD. Talking about increased

standing orders, I’ve received notification from comrade JS that he’s bumped his up to £45 a month. Brilliant! Mind you, I’ve had three or four pledges for regular donations that haven’t yet materialised. You know who you are!

I also received £75 in the post this week - thank you, comrades DF, CH, NR and WI. All that comes to £490, taking our running total for February up to £951 towards our £1,250 target. It’s amazing what a couple of generous gifts can do, isn’t it? I am confident we can reach that target in the remaining days of this short month. My confidence is based on the commitment of our readers and supporters, who I know won’t let us down - even though our web counter isn’t noticing the online variety at the moment! ●

Robbie Rix

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

ACTION

CPGB podcasts

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

Communist Students

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

London Communist Forum

Sunday March 13, 4pm: ‘The general strike - and then what?’, Artillery Arms, London EC1 (nearest tube: Old Street). Speakers: Mike Macnair (CPGB), David Broder (the Commune).

Radical Anthropology Group

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

February 22: ‘Tower of Babel’. Speaker: Chris Knight.

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.

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.

No cuts

Saturday February 19, 12 noon: March, Somerford Road, London N16. Speakers include: Rob Williams (NSSL).

Organised by Hackney Alliance Against Cuts.

Saturday February 19, 1pm: Catford Town Hall, London SE6.

Called by Lewisham People Before Profit and Lewisham Anti-Cuts Alliance: www.carnivalagaincuts.org.uk.

Wednesday February 23, 6pm: Lobby, Lambeth council, town hall, Brixton.

Organised by Lambeth Save Our Services: <http://lambethsaveourservices.org>.

Labour democracy

Saturday February 19, 11.30am: AGM, Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London WC1. ‘Which way for Labour democracy?’ Speakers include: Mark Seddon (former editor *Tribune*).

Organised by the Campaign for Labour Democracy: info@clpd.org.uk.

Feminism, organisation and class struggle

Sunday February 20, 11am: Conference, LARC, Fieldgate Street, London E1 (nearest tube: Aldgate East).

Organised by the Commune: uncaptiveminds@gmail.com.

Gaza dinner

Wednesday February 23, 7pm: Fundraiser, Cinar restaurant, 18 St James’s Street, Walthamstow, London E17. Speakers include: Neil Garrard (former Walthamstow MP) and Yousef Al-Helou (Palestinian journalist). Full Turkish meal and live music from Afreeka, £20 per person.

Organised by Walthamstow Palestine Solidarity Campaign: wfpssc@yahoo.com.

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.

Save our services

Wednesday March 9, 7.30pm: Meeting, Railway Institute, 2 Romsey Road, Eastleigh, Hampshire. Speakers include: Clare Solomon (ULU president), Megan Dobney (Sertuc) and local union reps.

Organised by Hampshire TUC.

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

Defend health and safety

Wednesday March 2, 12.30pm: Lobby, College Green (opposite parliament). Part of the TUCG health and safety week.

Organised by Trade Union Coordinating Group.

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.

EGYPT

Mubarak has gone but mass protests continue

Egyptian working class needs to arm itself with a programme of extreme democracy, writes **Eddie Ford**

The achievement of the first goal of Egypt's popular uprising - the removal of the hated dictator, Hosni Mubarak, from power - is something we can only welcome. Mubarak was clearly intent on remaining president until September - and then for an indefinite period as the power behind the throne to oversee the "orderly transition" that imperialism craves. Hence his typically arrogant appearance on state TV on February 11, claiming he was "delegating" some of his powers to the vice-president, Omar Suleiman. But within 24 hours Mubarak was gone - forced out by the militant resistance and anger of the masses in Tahrir Square and elsewhere throughout Egypt. Nor did the equally hated Suleiman end up as Mubarak's replacement - he went too, if less dramatically.

Without the crowds demonstrating and protesting day after day, without the display of people power, then Hosni Mubarak would still be president today - have no doubt. His departure is a huge democratic gain that we celebrate along with the vast majority of Egyptians. Even more than that, communists regard recent events - and not just in Egypt - as an *anticipation* of the future, which will see further and greater democratic movements and revolutions in this region of the world. Just look at the protests now breaking out in Bahrain, with thousands setting up camp in the capital, Manama - making their own Tahrir Square and demanding basic democratic rights (some waving placards of Che Guevara), with King Hamad bin Isa al-Khalifa offering each family in the country a cash pay-out of £1,640 in a frantic attempt to buy off discontent. And now Libya too has caught the democratic bug, experiencing an uprising in the eastern city of Benghazi, hundreds clashing with the police to demand the release of a prominent democracy campaigner and Gaddafi critic.¹ The Arab masses are hungry for democracy, like their Iranian counterparts - who, inspired by the ousting of Mubarak, have once again taken to the streets in the largest anti-government protests for more than a year.²

However, having said that, despite the initial victory of the Egyptian people the army is still in control and is issuing warnings against continued protests and strikes. Maybe Egyptian history repeating itself. So immediately upon Mubarak's resignation the military high command suspended the constitution and dissolved parliament - with field marshal Mohammed Tantawi installed as acting dictator. Indeed, it was the army - coming under massive pressure from the Obama administration - that finally gave Mubarak his marching orders. Both US imperialism and the Egyptian military were horrified by Mubarak's strutting TV performance and feared that his continued presence could plunge the country into "chaos and disorder" - that is, a continuation of the revolutionary upheaval. By telling Mubarak to go, the army top brass acted to defend

its privileged position and preserve the *regime* as a whole. Mubarakism without Mubarak.

The ruling military council has declared that it intends to stay for six months or longer until the elections are held, and has imposed martial law. There will be no "swift transfer" of power to a civilian-led government nor an end to the 30-year state of emergency laws nor the release of political prisoners - and the military has retained Mubarak's cabinet in its entirety. A committee, we are told by the military, will draw up "amendments" to the constitution which at some so far unspecified date will be put to a referendum. Albeit in a relatively non-violent way, the military removed virtually all protestors from Tahrir Square (though large demonstrations have once again begun there).

To provide camouflage army tops are holding meetings with assorted high-profile individuals - such as the Google executive Wael Ghonim, and the founder of the April 6 Youth Movement, Ahmed Maher - so as to give the appearance of being interested in alternative political views and meaningful democratic change. A fig-leaf. In reality the military, not unreasonably, hopes that US imperialism will prize such stability above all else and endorse a post-Mubarak Egypt that remains dominated from top to bottom by the old, military-backed order - albeit with a cosmetic constitutional change, and some new faces here or there. Or, in the words of prime minister Ahmed Shafiq, "there is no change in the form, method or process of work" - in fact, he added, "matters are completely stable" and the main task is to "bring a sense of security to the Egyptian citizen". To this

end, the military has issued a series of terse communiqués threatening retribution against the spreading "subversion" and "anarchy".

Strike wave

In the brief few weeks of the uprising we have seen the working class begin to flex its muscles - finding a democratic space within which to operate. Hence the wave of strikes sweeping the country, as workers demand trade union rights, an end to corruption, anti-pollution measures and pay increases.

It is estimated that 40% or more of Egypt's 80 million-strong population lives on less than £1 a day and are heavily reliant on subsidised foods - particularly bread, given that the price of staples such as rice and pasta have gone through the roof in recent years, plunging millions into poverty and desperation. The beginning of the week saw hundreds of thousands of workers go on strike from several industries and sectors - the (state-run) oil and gas industries, ambulance drivers, healthworkers, textile and steel workers, tourism, post office employees - even some police officers joined the strikes. Significantly, hundreds

of Bank of Alexandria workers demonstrated outside its branch in central Cairo, urging their bosses to "leave, leave" - the same slogan used in the mass protests against Mubarak. The Central Bank of Egypt ordered all banks to remain shut following industrial action by staff at the largest, the National Bank.

Doubtless to the alarm of the regime, the officially recognised Egyptian Trade Union Federation and its bureaucratic apparatus is increasingly being side-stepped. Until last month, it was the sole trade union federation in Egypt, representing 2.5 million workers in 23 unions. But on January 30 a meeting convened in Tahrir Square led to the formation of the Federation of Egyptian Trade Unions, as an alternative pole of attraction to the state-run ETUF - which actually called on workers to support Mubarak, evacuate Tahrir Square, roll back the revolution and so on.³ The FETU's first act was to call for a general strike in support of the opposition movement and to publish a list of demands on wages, welfare reform, workers' rights, the release of opposition detainees, etc.

So Egypt is convulsed by massive protests against poverty pay and autocratic, bullying bosses - the mini-Mubarak. With more certainly to come. As Kamal Abbas, head of the Independent Centre for Trade Union and Worker Services, put it, "the question today isn't 'Who's strik-

ing?' The question is, 'Who's not striking?'" Abbas further remarked that the "success of the revolution" has "given everyone confidence to come out" and that "people are uncovering the scale of corruption" - which in turn breeds more anger and as a consequence more strikes and demonstrations. Yes, the Egyptian prime minister could not be more wrong - the situation is not "completely stable" - far from it.

Clearly taken aback by the scale of the strikes, the military council has balked so far at an outright ban - after all, that would rather ruin its attempts to present a democratic face to the world. Particularly given its talk about recognising the "legitimate aspirations" of the Egyptian people, etc. However, the military has called on "noble Egyptians" to see that these strikes lead to "negative results" and "damage the security of the country". A violent response from the military to the strike wave is a distinct possibility, and thus the strikers - just like the Egyptian masses as a whole - should arm themselves in any way possible so as to defend themselves from the regime. Form workers' self-defence units, as part of the wider struggle for a popular militia that will defend - and seek to advance - the democratic gains that have been made during the uprising. History and logic teaches us that the regime, whether in the shape of the military ruling council or a tame 'civilian' administration, will by one method or another do everything to claw back all the revolutionary and democratic advances we have seen thus far ●

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Notes

1. www.guardian.co.uk/news/blog/2011/feb/16/middle-east-protests-live-updates.
2. www.nytimes.com/2011/02/16/world/middleeast/16iran.html?_r=1&src=mv.
3. www.solidaritycenter.org/content.asp?contentid=1144.



Protestor and soldier: fraternisation

CONFERENCE

Make unity a reality

Differences over tactics are no reason to keep the anti-cuts movement divided, argues **Peter Manson**

The February 12 People's Convention to Build Resistance to Cuts and Austerity, despite the pretentiousness of its title, marked another small step forward for the anti-cuts movement.

Organised by the Socialist Workers Party's front, Right to Work, and supported by the Labour Representation Committee, Disabled People Against the Cuts, Black Activists Rising Against Cuts and the Unite union, the convention mobilised around half the numbers seen at November's conference of the Coalition of Resistance. RTW claims that 800 activists attended, but the main hall at Friends Meeting House holds less than 600 people and it was not quite full. That capacity can be doubled when the balcony is used, but only a couple of dozen people were upstairs during the plenary sessions.

I had been expecting the attendance to be made up overwhelmingly of SWP comrades, but I would estimate that only around half were members of that organisation. In other words, the turnout from the SWP membership must have been a disappointment to the leadership. Nevertheless, the prominence of disabled activists in particular gave the event a different dimension from similar rallying events and, more importantly, the convention featured that rarity for occasions such as these - a genuine debate, primarily between comrades from the SWP and Socialist Party in England and Wales, over the relationship of the movement against the government's cuts to Labour councillors who decide to implement them.

The differences over this question are used as one of the justifications for the existence of separate anti-cuts campaigns, so it was pleasing that a comparatively large amount of time was set aside to discuss it (in fact the chair of this session, John McDonnell of the LRC, extended it by half an hour or so). Of course, all three rivals - RTW, COR and SPEW's baby, the National Shop Stewards Network Anti-Cuts Campaign - were set up on a sectarian basis, their main aim being to boost the respective parent organisations (in the case of COR it is the John Rees breakaway from the SWP, Counterfire).

By the way, the SPEW leadership of the newly formed NSSN grouping appears to have thought better of the originally proposed grandiose name, where 'Anti-Cuts Campaign' was preceded by 'All-Britain' (see www.stopcuts.net). All three rivals are very much aware of the general sentiment for unity in the anti-cuts fight and all three attempt to blame the division on the others.

Unity featured strongly in the opening remarks of RTW chair Paul Brandon - "We have to find a way to work together." But his "how we got here" introduction was misleading, to say the least. He reminded us that RTW was the first of the current anti-cuts campaigns to be formed and recalled the 7,000-strong march it organised last October. And then "We held a unity forum in December - that's why we're here today." This gave the strong impression that the convention was somehow the product of a coming together of the rivals, not RTW's own, separate initiative.

Council of despair

The debate between the SWP and SPEW was entitled 'How can our



Chris Bambery: debating with SPEW

councils resist the cuts?" As well as SPEW's long-time Coventry councillor, Dave Nellist, and the SWP's Michael Lavalette (Preston), it featured two Labour lefts, Charlynn Pullen (Islington) and Barry Buitekant (Hackney).

Comrade Pullen - a Labour Representation Committee member who disagrees with the LRC line that Labour councillors should refuse to implement the cuts - tried to explain the futility of doing so. After all, government grants accounted for 85% of the council's funding and Islington, for example, had no alternative but to slash spending by £52 million in the next financial year alone. But "we are protecting free school meals" and introducing a citizens' advice bureau (residents will need it), not to mention a "Fairness Commission". And did you know that Islington had been the first Labour group to sign up to the TUC demonstration on March 26?

While she admitted that the coalition cuts will still "have an impact", comrade Pullen felt the Labour council "has done as much as we can". The voters "didn't elect us to hand over the budget to Eric Pickles", the Tory communities and local government secretary. She summed up by stating that the council's position was to "build a fight against the cuts, but protect people as best as we can". The Labour council could "make a difference". Of course, this was "not perfect" and "I wish we didn't have to do it".

Both Michael Lavalette and Dave Nellist answered this effectively. Comrade Lavalette wondered, "In what sense are Labour cuts less unpleasant?" We "don't get elected to become experts in finance, but to represent the people". For his part, comrade Nellist stated that if just one council refused to set a cuts budget that would "electrify the movement". Ironically comrade Nellist reminded us of Neil Kinnock's famous remark in relation to the Militant Tendency-run Liverpool council in 1984 - "a Labour council issuing redundancy notices?" - and added: "Where's Neil Kinnock now when we need him?"

Comrade Nellist asked: "What if Pickles comes in? Not a council worker would cooperate with him!" It was at this point that I noticed comrade Pullen's expression - a combination of scepticism and incre-

dulity. That is the problem: she and hundreds like her just do not believe the workers are up for a fight. So why should they stick their neck out?

Comrade Buitekant, also LRC, said next to nothing, except to confirm that "a small number" of Hackney councillors will not vote for the cuts. But at this point he could not say whether they would vote against or abstain. Clearly he has decided to accept the discipline of this rebel group and would only say that, the more pressure there is, the greater the chance of a vote against.

The SPEW comrades, as well as forever holding up the example of Liverpool and Lambeth in the 80s, stressed the 'principle' of refusing to allow councillors not committed to opposing all cuts onto anti-cuts platforms. It did not seem to occur to them that here they were sharing a platform at a very large anti-cuts meeting with one such councillor. Hannah Sell, who spoke from the floor, as did Clive Heemskerk, referred to the "mistake" of Right to Work in doing so - and then went on to "welcome today's debate".

In response Candy Udwin of the SWP said that, on the contrary, it was a good idea to put on meetings with vacillating or even pro-cuts councillors - "then they feel the pressure". Comrade Lavalette had previously stressed the importance of "working with people to our right".

Principle or tactic?

Pete Firmin of the LRC repeated the strong point he had made on previous occasions - it is no use just bemoaning the lack of fight in the Labour Party: what about the bodies that finance Labour, the unions? Not one has so far urged Labour councillors to vote against the cuts. Unite, for instance, is doing precisely the opposite (he made no comment on the fact that Unite had been invited to organise one of the afternoon workshops on the threat to legal aid), and neither did any SPEW speakers. Yet Unite is actually urging its sponsored councillors to vote for locally decided Labour cuts packages, so should we say that a union whose members will be on the receiving end of the cuts cannot be part of the anti-cuts movement?

Paul Brandon left the chair to

address the convention as the final speaker from the floor in this debate. He assured SPEW that the RTW wanted to "work with you" and it is "not soft on Labour" - the steering committee was now recommending that a lobby of the March 5 Labour local government conference be added to the list of forthcoming events in the convention resolution (SPEW/NSSN had called the lobby unilaterally).

Replying to the debate, once more comrade Buitekant said very little, while Nellist and Lavalette concentrated on the main division. Comrade Nellist complained that the SWP's insistence on keeping Labour councillors who refuse to vote against the cuts on board was like having "a strategy that works at the speed of the slowest wagon". Instead we need the unity of the *opposition* to cuts. Comrade Lavalette said he would keep on telling Charlynn she is wrong, but would still have her in the anti-cuts movement after she votes for the cuts package.

Comrade Pullen herself stated that she had found the debate "interesting and helpful", but announced: "I won't be changing my mind."

The SWP and SPEW may have thought that this debate would help justify the existence of their two rival campaigns, but to my mind it did the opposite. On the main question - opposition to all cuts - there is unanimity (later Andrew Burgin, speaking on behalf of COR, said that his organisation was also opposed to all cuts, but, like RTW, "believed in working with people who don't hold that view"). On the difference in question, they were not so far apart either - as shown by the way SPEW had engaged in practice with comrade Pullen.

In any case, the truth is that our precise attitude to individual Labour councillors ought to be a matter of *tactics*, not principle. I agree with the assertion made by both comrades Nellist and Sell that it had been a serious mistake to give then Liberal Democrat leader Charles Kennedy a platform on the huge demonstration against the invasion of Iraq in February 2003. But it was a *tactical* mistake, in that it allowed the Lib Dems to pose as anti-war, and win votes on that basis in subsequent elections.

It is not a mistake to host debates with councillors such as comrade Pullen - far from it. What is unacceptable is to give a platform to Labour councillors prepared to implement the cuts and *refuse to criticise them* as they wield the axe. Comrade Pullen is no Charles Kennedy - she is a working class politician who can be persuaded and hopefully will be, as resistance to the Con-Lib Dem assault builds up over 2011 and subsequent years.

Learn from Egypt

A recurring theme of the convention was admiration for the Egyptian protest movement and their success in having got rid of Hosni Mubarak. In his opening speech comrade Brandon had said of the TUC demonstration: "Perhaps we can turn Hyde Park or Trafalgar Square into our own Tahrir Square." And John McDonnell got the biggest roar of all when he concluded his speech, the final of the day, with the remark: "When we turn up on March 26, we have to decide whether or not we go home that day."

According to the SWP's main man in RTW, Chris Bambery, the principal aim of the anti-cuts movement must be to break the government - "just like Egypt". A Scottish-Egyptian student - clearly an SWP member - reported from his recent visit to Cairo, where he had been arrested and tortured. His judgement was: "The workers pushed the movement to economic demands - that's when Mubarak knew he had to go." For him, everything is simple: "The people in Tahrir Square have won!" From which he concluded: "Soon we will bring others down too - the ruling class of the world is very weak."

Of course, it is correct to salute the heroism of the Egyptian movement, but we should certainly not view their partial victory through unrealistically optimistic, red-tinted spectacles. The Egyptian regime is still in place and only one speaker (not from the SWP) made that point amid all the similar remarks. Far from the ruling class being weak, it is the forces of the working class whose organisations are in a dismal state - in Egypt, as elsewhere.

I cannot end this report without commenting on those useless talking shops known as 'workshops', into which the left insists on splitting up those attending its conferences. In this case the idea was that one 'rapporteur' from each of the 12 workshops would report to the final plenary session on the 'recommendations' emerging from them.

In the workshop I attended, entitled 'Alternatives to austerity', every suggestion coming from either the platform or speakers from the floor was noted and read out at the end for the workshop to be endorsed as a totality - take it or leave it. While Andrew Fisher of the LRC proposed, amongst other things, a wealth tax and measures to end tax evasion, a speaker from the floor stated that the main source of state revenue ought to come in the shape of a land value tax. Leaving aside the fact that all these measures amounted, as comrade Fisher put it, to "radical social democracy", there was no thought as to whether they were all compatible with each other.

When it came to the plenary, the rapporteurs were called three at a time to present their list of recommendations - they had one minute each - and this time the chair put them to the whole convention in a single bloc. Everything was agreed with no votes against, as far as I could see - how united we were! Around 50 'policies' were adopted without having been written down, moved or debated. Obviously the steering committee will be free to do exactly as it pleases with these 'decisions', but this whole fiasco allowed it to pretend to be paying copious attention to bottom-up democracy.

In fact, this was not a Right to Work policy-making conference in any case, since it was officially called jointly with other bodies. The idea was for the SWP's anti-cuts front to claim its slice of the action as at least an equal alongside its two rivals. All very well, comrades, but why not put your fine words about "unity" into practice - and take urgent steps to unite your three separate organisations into one single campaign? ●

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REVIEW

The direction of historical development

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

This is the third part of my review of Jairus Banaji's *History as theory*. In the first part I set up the book's political and theoretical context and made some general comments about what Banaji has, I think, established by his work, and some criticisms of the shape of his arguments. In the second part I addressed the objection to 'teleology' which Banaji throws around without much explanation in his essays; and I discussed the part of the foundations of historical materialism which is not in itself historical.¹

In this third part I come in the first place to the reasons for believing that history has some degree of directionality. These reasons will shape the second question, which is what *sort* of historical periodisation we should be attempting ('modes of production', etc). I argue that the best approach is that what is involved is the *rise* of certain social forms and dynamics; their creation of state and religious forms corresponding to their dynamic; their further rise to apogee; and their subsequent *decline* in which a variety of attempts are made to hold onto them while managing the effects of decline, or to replace them. Not all attempts at a new order succeed; selection both among them and relative to the declining old order eventually produces a new order and dynamic, which actually succeeds in replacing the old.

In this approach, there *are* periods of transition and forms transitional between one social order and its successor. It therefore *could* be that the forms of agrarian relations found in modern India have this character. It follows that Banaji does not in the end succeed in demolishing on the basis of the historical evidence the conceptual foundations of 'official communism' and peasant-centric Maoism. Reasons for rejecting these policies will therefore have to be at a level closer to the political concrete. Once we look at this level, simple labour organising at the base will not represent a real strategic alternative to either the 'official communist' strategy or that of the Maoists.

Directionality

Does history have a direction? Marx and Engels certainly thought so; part of Popper's and similar objections to 'teleology' was to deny it did, and to claim that Marxism imposed an imagined direction on history in the hope of a perfect future. I said earlier that to reject the charge of 'teleology' is not to prove or even affirm that history has a direction.

There are essentially two reasons given by Marxists for supposing that history has a direction - and they are both based *primarily* on inferences from the past and present, rather than on hope for the future.

The first, which has been treated elaborately by Gerry Cohen in *Karl Marx's Theory of history: a defence* (1978) is that the historical evidence should lead us to suppose that the technology of production tends over



Random?

the long term to improve. There may be significant periods of stagnation and there may even be local periods of regression in relation to certain technologies (as, for example, in western Europe after the fall of the Roman empire in relation to building and ceramics); but at the end of the day technical improvement tends to be cumulative.

Marx and Engels wrote that "The hand-mill gives you society with the feudal lord; the steam-mill, society with the industrial capitalist."² The tag is striking, but violently inaccurate (feudal, medieval Europe was a society in which water-mills were ubiquitous) and both over-deterministic (a society may have the water-mill without being properly called feudal, as in the case of Tang-dynasty China) and over-specific.

The truth it captures, however, is that the overall productivity of labour and certain specific technologies *limit* the sorts of social order that are possible. On the one hand, the productivity of food production limits both the absolute population that can be supported, and the proportion of this population that can do anything except agriculture, pastoralism or fishing and their immediate support activities. On the other, the widespread diffusion of the water-mill (retaining the present example) frees up very large amounts of labour time.

These are merely examples, and beyond this point lie complex historical debates both about the evidence for diffusion of technologies, and about cause and effect relations between the adoption of new technologies (in Marxist terms development of the forces of production) and incentive effects of the social order (in Marxist terms the relations of production). For example, did the existence of the institution of slavery (or perhaps the availability of cheap slaves) disincentivise the adoption of labour-saving technology, whether because cheap labour made it economically irrational or because slave-owning aristocrats are not economic 'rational maximisers'? This is

a significant issue in the debate between 'primitivists' and 'modernists' about the ancient economy.

For Marxists of the schools of Gerry Cohen, or of Chris Harman, such questions are critically important. For these schools it is the human character as *homo faber*, humans as toolmakers and technical innovators, which in the last analysis is the sole driver of historical change. On this approach, new forces of production *on their own* demand new relations of production, and it is this contradiction which forces social revolutions. There is clear evidence that this was Marx's view, in the *Preface to the contribution to the critique of political economy*. Cohen admitted to difficulty in explaining *how* new forces of production demand new relations of production.³ It seems simpler to accept that the extra-European evidence, particularly from premodern China and India, is against such a *demand*. New forces of production *make possible* new relations of production. The *demand* comes from elsewhere in human nature.

This 'elsewhere' is *primitive communism*. Marx's and Engels' concern for this category is perfectly clear both in the early work, and in the late work reflected in Marx's *Ethnological notebooks* and Engels' *Origin of the family*. What they assert - with very varying degrees of explicitness - is that primitive communism grows out of or is a feature of the underlying nature of humans; that class stratification is therefore in a sense *unnatural* to humans.

The language of Marx and Engels' early arguments on this issue is Young-Hegelian. The late work is primarily empirical rather than expressed as systematic theory. But the point can be perfectly well made in the terms of evolutionary biology. We have given substantial space in this paper to some of the most systematic arguments of this sort, those of Chris Knight and his co-thinkers. It is unnecessary, however, to agree with the exact detail of these arguments in order to accept the basic

point.

Physical evolution by natural selection takes place over very long time-spans: even the rapid-change punctuations of 'punctuated equilibrium' last millennia.⁴ Humans evolved as scavenger-gatherers and hunter-gatherers and lived in social groups of this sort for at least 98% of the existence of the species. The *human* social order in question involves low levels of inequality between persons and substantial commitments to cooperation and sharing, in very marked contrast to our nearest genetic relatives, common chimpanzees.

These aspects are observable in present and recent hunter-gatherer societies, so that we are not wholly dependent on the interpretation of the archaeological evidence for early humans. We also have present (recent) evidence in relation to health and other outcomes that humans are ill-adapted to high levels of social inequality, conveniently collected by Richard Wilson and Kate Pickett in *The spirit level* (2009). We have no reason, therefore, to suppose that humans will *physically* adapt to class society without either another 200,000 years (or more) of social hierarchy, or the class elite finding some way to genetically engineer deference into the lower orders.

In the historical evidence, this 'contradiction', or more broadly 'conflict',⁵ between human nature and class hierarchy probably underlies the phenomena of episodic slave uprisings, peasant *jacqueries*, maroon runaway slave communities and other aspects of 'the art of not being governed',⁶ religious and other forms of utopian communist critique of the existing order, and forms of partial egalitarianism *within ruling elites*.

The conflict also sets up a profound incentive for individuals and family groups to hope to join, or at least to live like, the class elite: to climb the greasy pole of social stratification (or, at least, not to slide down it). This in turn logically implies an incentive to introduce forms of technical and division-of-labour innovation. In their early stages, until generalised, such innovations can improve the relative position of the introducer within the society.

These incentives in turn imply that class forms of society - however they originally came into existence - will support denser populations, technical superiority, and hence superior military potential to forms of pre-class society. Meanwhile, both individual/family aspirations and the internal collective conflicts of class forms of society, which flow directly from the conflict between class inequality and the evolved character of the species, drive class societies to expand at the expense of neighbouring - or, in capitalism, distant - social groups having lower population density and/or military capability. By doing so internal class conflict within the conquering society is mitigated at the expense of the conquered, whether by exporting population, by taking and redistributing forms of tribute, or by both.

There is therefore an underlying tendency for class societies to displace pre-class societies. This tendency is also and necessarily a tendency for forms both of technology and of social division of labour (class orderings) which support higher population densities and superior military potential to displace 'lower' forms.

All the while, internal conflicts are not overcome but merely mitigated. When taken together with growing forces of production, the social dynamics therefore imply a long-term dynamic or directionality *within societies* towards *less onerous forms* of the subjection of subordinate classes to ruling classes.

This, too, is a selective product. Within class society as such, less onerous forms of the subjection of subordinate classes imply more potential for the aspiration among these classes to live like the elite to drive innovation. They probably, though this has to be more tentative, also imply more military capability. For a single example, slaves are, apart from their productive work, a pure military liability; medieval villeins could be employed as (low-status) soldiers.⁷

It is legitimate to infer - with appropriate caution - that this long-term tendency towards less onerous forms of subjection ultimately points towards the *potential* overcoming of the social institution of class.

This *potential* is presently posed as a short-term political problem because all forms of class society involve a necessary dynamic towards randomly selected innovation ('growth') with some bias towards military technique; and, whether war or class society came first (a chicken and egg problem), all forms of class society certainly involve a tendency towards war. As of the 21st century, the destructive powers both of weaponry (nukes) and of the necessary dynamic towards 'growth' (global warming), have the potential to destroy the biosphere and the human species in the short term. We need to bring the destructive powers of our collective productive powers under conscious collective control; and to do so we need to overcome the antagonism between human nature and social hierarchy which drives both 'growth' and war.

Periodisation

The logic of this argument *does* imply a sequence of - in broad outline - slavery, feudalism, capitalism. Slavery - in very diverse forms - is present almost as soon as we have written records, and what lies behind it is very obscure.

The 'Asiatic mode' which Marx and Engels placed as the first form of class society has recently been renamed the 'tributary mode' and in that guise offered to swallow up feudalism. The idea of the 'Asiatic mode' suffers from dependence, through tralatian transmissions of categories, from classical Greek,

proto-racist characterisation of their big and episodically antagonistic neighbour, the Iranian Achaemenid empire.⁸ It also suffers (as Perry Anderson argued) from assimilating to one another a wide range of very different societies widely separated in time. This second objection is even stronger to the “tributary mode”, which tends to swallow up feudalism and represent an evolution towards Weberian and similar concepts of “pre-modern” societies as all much of a muchness.

Archaeologists have in the past written of redistributive “temple states” in early Mesopotamia, an idea which is out of fashion, more recently of “palace states” in the Bronze Age Near East. Though we have now a lot more archaeological information about very early urban societies than was available in the 19th century, we still probably do not know enough to make firm characterisations of the social orders which produced the archaeology. And what *written records* show us is societies where land could be privately sold and conveyed (even if it was characterised as state-owned in order to legitimise taxes and other state takings)⁹ and slavery was practised.

I emphasised *very diverse forms* of slavery. Notoriously (to simplify grossly) Athens practised private ownership of land and slaves (who were not supposed to be Hellenes), while Sparta ran a system which could be described as collective appropriation of a conquered Hellene people, the Messenians or ‘helots’, and their land. Systems of the Spartan sort have been commonly said not to be ‘really’ slavery. This idea depends on reading off the concept of slavery as a social form from its specific concept in Roman private law. Treating helots or similar ancient peasants tied to the land as - as it were - ‘villeins’ has similar converse problems. Helots were not members of Spartan society in the sense that medieval villeins were members of English or French society or of ‘Christendom’, or even in the sense that medieval peasants in Islamic lands were members of the *umma*. Orlando Paterson is, I think, right to argue in *Slavery and social death* (1982) that at the core of slavery is social exclusion.

In this sense some ‘Asiatic mode’ regimes were arguably in their origins and in substance slave social orders. Mesopotamian empires, and following them both the Achaemenids and the Sasanians, transplanted large groups of war captives to dislocate them from their social context. The same practice of transplantation was found in Chin and Han dynasty China. The latter also displayed large-scale use of state penal slavery as a means of extracting surplus. The Hindu sources represent early proto-Hindu northern India as a variant on a slave system of the ‘Spartan’ type, with the twice-born castes as the only real members of the society.¹⁰

To return to a point made at the end of the second article in this series. To say what I have just said is to say that ‘slavery’ and ‘villeinage’ have to be distinguished by relations to the social order and social division of labour *as a whole* and not merely by the immediate ‘relations of production’ as they appear by analogy with the employment relation in capitalism. The difference is the *downward obligations* owed by lords to their villeins (and, similarly, whichever way the causation might run, by lords and by kings to their free *fideles*). Even if this has little or no representation in secular law, it is present in most of the universalistic religions (catholic, though not orthodox, Christianity, Islam, Buddhism) and has operative effects insofar as landlords and clerisy compete with one another for social surplus drawn from the lower orders and peasants

and artisans can, consequently, appeal to parson against squire (or the equivalents) and *vice versa*.

Hence a ‘slave social order’ in the sense that must be used for historical periodisation does not mean a social order in which the only primary producers are slaves, or the numerically dominant primary producers are slaves. Nor even one in which - as de Ste Croix argued - the primary form of extraction of the surplus which supported the elite was slave production.¹¹ The point is that the institution of slavery - extracting labour through control by ‘social death’ - shapes the general institutions of the society, the form of the vertical aspect of the division of labour (between those who decide and those who obey) *in general*.

A slave is not just a slave because of a ‘purely economic’ relation to his or her master. The relation is necessarily juridical, in relation to the society as a whole. It is also necessarily religious: in slave *social orders* in the sense used here, there are slave cults separate from the cults of the free, and ancient redistributive ‘euergetism’ is linked to the cults of the free and redistributes to the free, not the slaves.¹² A villein, equally, stands in a different relation to his or her lord to a slave not just because of an ‘economic’ relation, but because of a juridical relation given by the society as a whole (here ‘relative subordination’) and a religious relation (here, participation in the common universalistic cult and institutions of redistribution). A proletarian in modern capitalism is not a proletarian in the sense used in Marx’s political strategy (of proletarian self-organisation for political action leading to workers’ power) just because of the wage relation. Rather, she or he is ‘freed’ precisely because the other aspects of slavery and villeinage have been stripped away by capital’s action in its own interests to create its own freedom from the claims of pre-capitalist exploiters and clerisies, and of peasants and artisans, alike. This stripping away is a change in the *public* institutions.

Public institutions

As I said in the second article, the material division of labour in society, which is the ‘economic base’, *cannot* only consist of the private-choice or family-based institutions (private property, including slavery and villeinage, private jurisdictions, and so on) and forms of competition between families or firms (market competition, competition for a ‘following’, electoral competition in republican Rome, court factionalism wherever there is a real monarchy). It *must* also involve public institutions - which we can put very roughly into two classes: the state, and the (commonly religious) institutions of redistribution.

I concluded the second article with the point that, whatever their particular forms, private property, the family, and class division set up competition between families and reasons to aspire to you or your family climbing rather than sliding down the greasy pole. This set-up is therefore *prima facie* competitive and therefore a *dynamic* element in social order.

Private-choice economic practices can be experimented with on a small scale and copied, so that we see, as Banaji points out, forms of employment of wage-labour in classical antiquity and other pre-capitalist societies. As those on the other side from Banaji in the debates on antiquity have pointed out, we also see in classical antiquity forms both of attenuated slavery and of semi-free agricultural tenancy, which look like precursors of villeinage.

The state, and religious redistri-

bution, are in contrast *prima facie conservative* institutions. This is necessary to their character: they are *institutions of the whole society*. They exist precisely to preserve the society as a whole from the fact that the free play of private-choice institutions will produce distributional changes which end in social collapse. Hence they cannot be subject to small-scale experimentation, but on the contrary have to attempt to preserve the social order from which they were born. This means that they are not merely passive: on the contrary, state and ‘established’ religious-redistributive actors *actively resist* social, economic, political and religious change.

Transitions

It is for this reason that a full transition from one general class order (‘mode of production’) to another entails the actual overthrow of the state and the institutions of religious redistribution of the old order; and the construction of new state and redistributive institutions - or, at least, the disarticulation of the old institutions as a coherent entity and the rearticulation of some elements drawn from them into a new form. The creation of feudalism in Europe (over a prolonged period of false starts and transitional forms) required *both* the overthrow of paganism and urban euergetism (within the late Roman empire) *and* the overthrow of the state itself (in the western empire: Byzantium, clinging to the old state forms, hung on and shrank until the Turks delivered the *coup de grâce* in 1453) *and* the creation of separation of the clerisy from the state and the landlord class (a series of steps down to the Gregorian reform, without clear equivalents in eastern orthodoxy or Islam outside Ottoman Turkey). The creation of feudalism in Japan analogously required *both* the creation of warrior rule *and* the triumph of Buddhist monastic and redistributive organisations as dominant religious forms.

The transition to capitalism as something more than interstitial merchant-capitalism analogously required *both* the subordination of the clerisy and its redistributive activities to the state (Venetian state-controlled local patriarch, Dutch and British Protestantism, French secularism, Meiji state-controlled Shinto) *and* the overthrow of the legitimate monarchs, heads of the legitimate landlord classes, in favour of subordinated ‘constitutional monarchs’ (true even of the Meiji emperor, if what he was subordinated to was military-industrial-bureaucratic cabals) or republics.

Both the experimental-pragmatic or ‘selective’ quality of changes in the private-choice relations *and* the resistance of the public-choice institutions to change necessarily mean that there will be long periods of transition before a new class order becomes recognisable. First there will be experimentation within or at the boundaries of the old order; then, as these become more widespread and the old order becomes more problematic, attempts to maintain the old order by strengthening the state, resisting innovation and restoring an imagined image of the past.

The state and the religious-redistributive forms can *long* outlast the general class order that gave them their form. The later Roman empire and Byzantium forms the classic example of this point. When the state and religious forms were created, slave-taking, slave-trading and slave-holding were commonplace and extended well down the social spectrum. By the later empire, a variety of other forms had displaced this ‘classic slavery’; but it was not clear what would replace it. But equally, European absolutism and

the Tokugawa regime, though they actively promoted feudal social hierarchies, were *survivals* of the feudal social regime, not actually grounded on *currently dominant* feudal relations of exploitation in the private-choice sphere.

Then the state and religious-redistributive carapace of the old order is broken, and experimentation with new private-choice relations can proceed more rapidly; but much still persists from the old order. Some experiments may prove to be blind alleys, like the Arian Gothic, Vandal and Burgundian kingdoms, the medieval city-states in general (Venice perhaps excepted) or Stalinism. Others are more fruitful, and we gradually begin to see the shape of a new social order emerge; but aspects of the old social order persist within the new, and it is only (as I suggested in the first part) at ‘apogee’ that the social order is fully visibly, distinctively and obviously ‘slave’, ‘feudal’ or ‘capitalist’.

Concrete politics

It is finally now hopefully possible to return very briefly from this high level of abstraction and (as it were) satellite’s eye view of human history, to the concrete political.

Banaji’s argument, as I said in the first part of the review, denies transitions - at least prolonged ones - and transitional forms. It rejects ‘teleology’ without arguing the point, it seems (as far as I can tell from the work) because a theory which gives directionality to history would imply transitions and transitional forms. The political function of this theoretical analysis is to analyse India as fully capitalist without significant pre-capitalist survivals and thereby demolish *a priori* the ‘official communist’ stages theory and the Maoist theory of peasant war.

Banaji’s alternative approach is labour organising: as he says towards the end of ‘The ironies of Indian Maoism’, “The bulk of the Indian labour force remains unorganised into unions, and it is stupefying to imagine that a revolution against capitalism can succeed while the mass of the workers are in a state of near-complete atomisation.”¹³

But suppose that there *is* directionality in history and there *are* transitions and transitional forms. It is then perfectly possible that the phenomena of the putting-out system or ‘formal subsumption of labour to capital’, debt-bondage, indentured labour and so on, which are found in late medieval through to 19th century Europe, and the reinvention of slavery as a colonial institution in the Americas, are indeed transitional forms: certainly, these forms have, in fact, been overthrown - and in countries which remained subordinate (as in Latin America and the Caribbean) as well as in imperialist countries like the UK and USA. Assume, then, that these forms are transitional. We then have to ask what their political implications are?

The first issue is the putting-out system and similar systems of ‘formal subsumption of labour to capital’. In this system, the producers remain *formally* owners of their means of production, but are in fact controlled by capitalist control of materials supplies, credit, and outlets for their products. The question posed in whether this regime produces what Marc Mulholland has called the proletarian ‘imaginaire’ which led Marx to suppose that the proletariat would tend towards collectivism.¹⁴ The answer is fairly clearly that it does not; and, in fact, it is pretty clear from Marx and Engels’ comments on the urban ‘Straubinger’ of their own day that they did not think it would. The case is *a fortiori* of sharecroppers and similar strata in the countryside,

who have some partial access to petty household cultivation.

Second is the other side of the rural coin: the persistence of pre-capitalist religious forms (in Hindu India, that of *antique*, pre-feudal, religious forms) and of landlord classes which struggle to maintain *some form* of juridical subordination of their workforce over and above the ‘dull compulsion of everyday life’ and self-identify as members of one or another sort of religious or martial elite. Where in world history have claims of this sort been overthrown without a *jacquerie*, peasants’ revolt, Bauernkrieg, or forcible suppression of the old order by external conquerors (as in US-imposed land reform in southern Korea)?

To say this is not to endorse the Naxalites against Banaji’s criticisms - or, for the reasons I gave in the first article, to endorse the ‘official communist’ policy of class alliance with ‘progressive’ capitalists. Banaji is undoubtedly correct that communist policy in India needs to begin with the organisation of the urban proletariat proper: in parties, unions, co-operatives, and so on. But precisely the difficulties of *union* organising imply - as they did for workers in many countries in the late 19th century - the centrality of *political party* organisation. And a *political party* cannot speak only to the concerns of the urban workers, but has to have things to say about ‘agrarian questions’. Banaji’s arguments seem to construct the conclusion that the problems of agrarian labour are simply identical to those of urban labour. It seems unlikely ●

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Notes

1. Except insofar as every report of an experiment or observation is a report of something which happened in the past and, contrary to Popper, all reasoning from such events is a species of induction. The elementary principles of historical source criticism (assessing biases of the witness, closeness to the event described, consistency of evidence, corroboration, antecedent probability of the narrative, and so on) are originally derived from legal approaches to evidence used in court of *recent* events, and the same approaches also form a substratum of the assessment of observational and experimental evidence in the physical sciences (see B Shapiro *A culture of fact* New York 2000, and my review of this book, 44 *American Journal of Legal History* pp445-46). This caveat should be understood wherever I refer to there being ‘non-historical’ evidence or arguments for historical materialism. In doing so my point is simply that this evidence comes from outside the usual purview of the historical profession.
2. *Poverty of philosophy* second observation: www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1847/poverty-philosophy/ch02.htm.
3. There is already considerable artificiality in the argument of Karl Marx’s *theory of history*, chapters 9 and 10; admissions in *History, labour and freedom* (Oxford 1988) at various points.
4. S Jay Gould *The structure of evolutionary theory* (2002).
5. ‘Contradiction’ is to use Hegelian language, but perhaps to overextend it.
6. JC Scott *The art of not being governed: an anarchist history of upland south-east Asia* New Haven 2009.
7. PR Hyams *King, lords and peasants in medieval England* Oxford 1980, pp157-59. Note also that Britton (c1290) ed Nichols, i, 195, says that the lord may not kill or maim his villein (unlike slaves in classical Athenian or Roman law) because the king has a competing property right in the villein’s person; Hyams pp135-43 finds 13th century judicial rulings at least in theory consistent with this.
8. ‘Proto-racist’: B Isaac *The invention of racism in classical antiquity* (Princeton 2004) is admirably but almost tediously cautious in analysing the sources.
9. Examples of later ideological claims to state ownership of land in JG Manning *Land and power in Ptolemaic Egypt* Cambridge 2003; Gaius *Institutes* Book 2 §§ 7, 14, 21 (on provincial land in the Roman empire); C Imber *Ebu Su’ud* (Edinburgh 1997) chapter 5 (on Ottoman land tenure as interpreted in Hanafi-school Islamic law).
10. Whether or how far the representation is accurate is, for present purposes, immaterial.
11. *The class struggle in the ancient Greek world* New York 1981, chapter 2.
12. P Veyne *Bread and circuses* London 1990.
13. (2010) *IS*/No128 129-148, at 145.
14. ‘Marx, the proletariat and the will to socialism’ (2009) 37 *Critique* 319-343; “‘Its patrimony, its unique wealth!’ Labour-power, working class consciousness and crises’ (2010) 38 *Critique* 375-417.

HOPi

Renewing solidarity

James Turley reports on the annual conference of Hands Off the People of Iran

The recent revolts in Egypt, Tunisia and many other parts of the Arab world have had a profound effect on global politics. Given the enormous strategic importance of the region, all manner of political forces will try to turn events to their advantage. The need for principled anti-war and solidarity work has never been greater.

It was thus a good time for Hands Off the People of Iran to hold its annual general meeting - there is the possibility of the 'north African contagion' reaching Iran, with the explosive popular movement against Ahmadinejad that sprung up in 2009 standing as a portent.

Discussions on the day were wide-ranging. Hopi secretary Mark Fischer started proceedings with a report on our work over the last year. Comrade Fischer pointed out that we had not been the only ones to salute the 2009 protests - we welcomed the apparent overnight conversions of Campaign Iran, the Socialist Workers Party and others from slavish support for the regime to some degree of solidarity. Nonetheless, we had warned against tailing the 'reformist' leaders of the green movement; a perspective confirmed by the "dissipation and betrayals" of 2010. With the regime divided, the US and its allies have pounced, imposing ever tougher sanctions - and open warfare, perhaps waged by the US's Israeli proxy, should not be ruled out.

Hopi has responded to these developments. Comrade Fischer noted that, in the past year, the focus of our solidarity work has shifted from student protestors to workers. The working class in Iran is increasingly militant, and economic demands have begun to interweave with political ones. All this confirmed our basic perspectives of opposing war, opposing the theocracy and supporting the working class and its allies as the only consistently anti-imperialist force in society.

Comrade Fischer noted the increasing desperation of the Stop the War Coalition in its efforts to prevent Hopi affiliating, and suggested we draw up a "balance sheet" of our involvement with it. He noted the impact made by our solidarity campaign with the imprisoned filmmaker, Jafar Panahi, stating that we should make him into a symbol for all political prisoners in Iran.

Much discussion from the floor focused on the question of Stop the War. Charlie Pottins said that we had tended to identify the politics of the coalition with that of the SWP - but now it was more dominated by the Communist Party of Britain. However, Andrew Coates noted that the latter had been affected to an extent by the Iranian protest movement.

Another comrade suggested that we should try to see things from Stop the War's point of view - since its aim was to build broad opposition to the war, open criticisms of the Iranian regime may not be appropriate. Moshé Machover replied to this, saying that we have not attempted to commit the STWC to any such position - it was the fact that Hopi was openly critical of the regime which seemed to animate their hostility. John Bridge went further - the fact that we had been turned down for affiliation gave the lie to the coalition's claims of inclusiveness. He noted that the rejection of our application had been filmed



Ali Khamenei

by Press TV, the English-language channel owned by the Iranian state.

International context

The second session of the day was on 'Wikileaks, whistleblowers, revolution and war'. Comrade Machover opened the session by talking about the recent series of leaks relating to the Middle East - most prominently, the Wikileaks-released batch of American diplomatic cables, but also the work of whistleblowers in both the Israeli military and the Palestinian Authority. He claimed that these revelations were a case of "the dog that didn't bark" - they merely clarified what we already knew.

Crucially, these leaks confirmed that Israel has been involved in a sustained, guerrilla-style campaign against Iran, encompassing espionage, sabotage and outright assassinations. Several scientists working on Iran's nuclear programme have been killed - so, possibly, has former deputy defence minister Ali-Reza Asgari, who disappeared in Turkey under mysterious circumstances.

An equally significant feature of the Wikileaks cables was what was *not* revealed - most importantly, there is no more evidence that Iran actually plans to produce nuclear weapons. Comrade Machover considered it more likely that Iran was aiming for nuclear *capability* - ie, the infrastructure required to produce weapons at some later date - than an arms programme proper.

Moving on to the question of revolution, comrade Machover indicated the momentous significance of the upheavals in Egypt and elsewhere, placing them in the context of the decline of the US, which is already losing control in Latin America. The Middle East is a critically important region in the world, due to its oil reserves and shipping routes. Egypt has been the key country in the Arab world in recent history - not only is it the most populous country in the region, but it controls the Suez Canal. Not for nothing was the 1956 Suez crisis a key turning point in relations between the major imperialist powers.

The US has been caught off guard,

and can hope to recoup some of its control, but not the overwhelming influence it enjoyed with Mubarak in the top job. For Israel, meanwhile, Mubarak's overthrow is a very dangerous proposition. It has already lost a key ally in Turkey, which was finally confirmed by the Mavi Marmara massacre last year. Now Egypt may go too - and Egyptian acquiescence has been critically important for maintaining the siege on the Gaza Strip. The Israel Defence Force has benefited from troop redeployments away from the Egyptian border; should Egypt present a less friendly face in the future, even the already bloated military budget will prove insufficient.

Comrade Machover concluded by pointing out that the losers in international reconfigurations can behave in unpredictable ways, and that we should not rule out even the most counterproductive and irrational of military adventures on Israel's part. We must remain vigilant.

The second speaker in this session, the CPGB's Mike Macnair, focused more on the American angle. The events in Egypt and Tunisia are best characterised as a "revolutionary crisis" rather than a revolution - though the dictators have fallen, the general feeling is that "this is just the start". The US therefore still has some room for manoeuvre. It has gone into this crisis underprepared, rather than unprepared - it is not like the fall of the shah in 1979, which by all accounts came as a complete surprise to the US.

The US has some reason to suppose that it will succeed in restoring its influence in these countries. Under Jimmy Carter, it successfully dropped most of the military dictators it supported in Latin America, with the result that the new 'democracies' were even more reliant on international capital than the tyrants they replaced - the state department simply bought off those parties that had a chance of power.

This is why, despite the lack of smoking-gun revelations, it was the release of diplomatic cables that provoked the US into its full-scale attacks on Wikileaks. In order for bourgeois democracy to function in this way, it is necessary for governments to lie - and to lie, it is necessary to

maintain secrecy.

Comrade Macnair argued that the policy of the United States towards Israel has always been irrational. The US relies on Iran to provide any workable regime in Iraq; more generally, the disruption caused by constant sabre-rattling and sanctions is much greater than the disruption which would be caused by a deal with the Islamic regime. Taking into account the *inherent* irrationality of a superpower in decline, there were "irrational reasons" for us to expect war - but revolutionary crisis in the Middle East has at least had the effect of throwing all these tendencies temporarily up in the air.

After some debate, the conference passed - with minor amendments - a resolution reaffirming our opposition to imperialist intervention in Iran and support for the democratic struggles of the Iranian people.

Workers in Iran

The next session was centred on workers' struggles in Iran. Ruben Markarian of the Iranian group, Rahe Kargar, began his contribution by pointing out two anniversaries - the overthrow of the shah on February 11 1979, and the formation of the Fedayeen guerrilla organisation in early 1971. The 1979 revolution had ultimately been a loss for the left, and the protestors in Egypt must learn the lessons of that defeat.

The protests in 2009 had ushered in a new era in the Iranian revolution, but it has not reduced the Iranian state's repression. In particular, there is an execution every eight hours in Iran - some resulting from openly political charges, some for 'crimes against Islam', and others simple frame-ups. The regime's desperation is heightened by the crippling effects of sanctions, and the popular unrest at its own policies, such as the end of 'targeted subsidies' and mass layoffs.

Street demonstrations, he argued, cannot win alone. Demonstrators must be backed up by the workers' movement, which can organise strikes against the regime - crucially, a general strike. Strikes can materially disrupt the repressive actions of the state, as well as causing the security forces to overreach in attempting to respond to all threats. Creating such a movement is easier said than done, but it is necessary. The job of the Iranian left is to organise the mass of workers on a socialist and internationalist basis. The comrade was confident that the Egyptian masses would learn from the Iranians - and vice versa.

Hopi chair Yassamine Mather highlighted the similarities between the Egyptian unrest and the protests in Iran two years ago. Both had been preceded by significant outbursts of labour unrest. Prior to 2009, however, Iranian workers had concentrated on narrower economic issues, concerning working conditions at particular factories. The organised working class was late to the party in 2009 - and this, combined with the misleadership of the green 'reformists' and organised battalions of counterrevolutionary thugs, emboldened by religious ideology, meant that the protests ended in defeat.

Since then, however, the workers have been raising more political demands, including the issue of political prisoners, and even organising the first political strikes since 1979-

81. Workers at the Iran Khodro car manufacturing concern, as well as the traditionally militant oil workers, had been engaging in serious discussion about the value of strikes, the nature of the green movement and the *shora* (workers' councils). Comrade Mather concluded by echoing Markarian's point on the significance of the Fedayeen - it was the first time in the Middle East that a section of the left had rejected the peaceful road to socialism, as well as highlighting the importance of internationalism.

Debate was largely centred on the international response to the 2009 protest movement, with comrades commenting on the support offered to Ahmadinejad by Venezuelan president Hugo Chávez, British anti-war figurehead George Galloway and the American leftist journal, *Monthly Review*. The importance of Islam in the protest movement was also highlighted. Summing up, comrade Mather noted that Chávez's support had led to splits on the left, notably in the International Marxist Tendency, whose Iranian section had departed over the issue. Comrade Markarian also criticised Chávez for his support for the Islamic Republic. The meeting then unanimously passed a motion calling for solidarity with Iranian workers.

Political prisoners

Then followed the launch of Hopi's campaign in defence of political prisoners. Lisa Goldman introduced the session by talking about her experience in Iran, and her contact during the visit with Panahi, concluding by reading from a letter he sent to the Berlin International Film Festival - an eloquent plea for an end to tyranny and testimony to the power of artistic imagination in opposing it.

Leftwing Labour MP John McDonnell launched the campaign formally, applauding the success of Hopi in engaging people on its basic message. The threat to Iran continues - sanctions and the Stuxnet cyber-attack being the most visible manifestations of it at the moment - though the imperialist world has been less forthcoming in bellicose rhetoric. Acts of barbarity, it seems, are fine, as long as the west is unthreatened.

He echoed Mark Fischer's call to make Panahi a symbol for all political prisoners, and argued that we should canvass for support in every sphere of life - in parliament, of course, but also in the trade unions (where Hopi has already had some success, with unions like PCS and Aslef affiliating). The stature of Panahi allows us also to reach out to wider civil society, and argue for its greater involvement with the workers' movement. The upsurge in Egypt symbolises what is possible in Iran - meanwhile, if our campaign secures even one release of one political prisoner, comrade McDonnell argued, it will be worth it.

In the following discussion, Victoria Thompson argued that we should add a call for an end to executions to the statement, which was accepted by the meeting. We also resolved to challenge Jeremy Corbyn to end his involvement with Press TV.

Though relatively small, the meeting was high-spirited. We left optimistic that our work can be stepped up, and that more people can be engaged in support of our message ●

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IRAN

Thirty years of reaction

Ruben Markarian of the Organisation of Revolutionary Workers of Iran addressed the Hopi AGM

Firstly, thanks very much for inviting me. As an Iranian leftist it is a pleasure to speak at the Hands Off the People of Iran annual general meeting. Hopi is a principled and consistent campaign, internationally supporting the Iranian labour movement and democratic movement with a clear stance against US imperialism.

As you know, after the Iranian revolution the coming to power of the Islamic movement spread huge confusion amongst the left both inside Iran and internationally. Some parts of the left saw the Islamic movement as an anti-imperialist one and 'forgot' the tyranny of the theocratic regime. Others drew the conclusion that the Islamic regime is the logical conclusion of the politics of 'anti-imperialism'. So, when we Iranian leftists see a campaign like Hopi which opposes both tyranny and any imperialist intervention against Iran, this gives us much hope and inspiration in our struggle for democracy and socialism in Iran, whilst challenging imperialist rule in the Middle East.

Before discussing recent political events in Iran, please allow me to commemorate a very significant event in modern Iranian history - the Siahkhal uprising, which took place 40 years ago. This event produced the Fedayeen movement after two decades of stagnation and reformism on the left. The Fedayeen initiated armed struggle against the shah's regime. In so doing they revived the Iranian left and turned it into the main force in the struggle against the shah and against imperialism in Iran. We should commemorate our fallen comrades and their memory - they died for socialism and freedom and passed on militant traditions to the next generation of Iranians.

Yesterday also saw the 32nd anniversary of the Iranian revolution. The revolution started eight years after the Fedayeen organisation began. In commemorating this movement I must also add a very important self-criticism. We were very committed activists who thought that we could 'break the wall of fear' with our armed actions against the regime: ie, empower people and convince them that they should also take part in the struggle against the forces of the regime and bring it down. But this did not happen. The regime only fell later with the rising tide of revolutionary upsurge. We were marginalised. Yet the mullahs, who were tolerated by the shah regime and had the power of the mosques, were able to organise the people and then hijack the revolution. So on the very day of the revolution's victory it was dead and defeated. Hijacked by the mullahs, it turned into theocratic tyranny - a fascist-religious regime which undid all the gains of the revolutionary, democratic movement of the Iranian people.

June 2009 and today

In order to set the scene for the movement today I must also go back to another great event in Iran's revolutionary history - the June 2009 mass demonstrations against the ayatollah's regime. It heralded a new era in the Iranian revolution. After three decades of tyranny and suppression, the people exploited factional contra-

dictions in the regime by coming out onto the streets on a mass scale. The message was clear: the masses did not want this regime any more and were chanting slogans of freedom, independence and the overthrow of the Islamic regime. This is important because the Iranians were the first people to bring an Islamic government to power, and after three decades they are clearly standing against it. As Moshé Machover explained earlier on, we are entering an extremely important era of revolution in the Middle East. These revolutions have so much to learn from our revolution of 1979, because they are asking about the result of a revolution which brings Islamist forces to power. In 1979 the Islamic Republic was supported by the people, but they now oppose it.

Looking at today's political situation, I must note that the Islamic Republic is not dependent on imperialism like other tyrannies in the Middle East. It is a semi-independent, reactionary regime. Thus imperialism cannot dictate the regime to do this or that. This is different from the situation under the shah in 1979, when new US president Jimmy Carter told the shah that the political atmosphere in Iran should be relaxed in order to avoid a revolution from below. Prisoners of the shah immediately felt the effects. This contradiction between the rulers in the US and those in Iran could be traced back to the role of the comprador bourgeoisie.

In 2009 the regime used massive repression against the demonstrators all across the country. There now seems to be a very shaky stability amongst the Islamic rulers, but the roots of political crisis are unresolved. The people who came out onto the streets were subjected to enormous repression: arrests, shoot-

ings, rape and executions. Today, executions have reached such a scale that somebody is being executed every eight hours. Iran has now overtaken China in executing the most people. The Iranian regime wants to preserve its rule by spreading fear.

The demonstrations alone have not been able to bring down the government - the regime simply sends in the military onto the streets and represses them. This means that the price of demonstrating becomes very high. Either the anti-regime movement can go out into the workplaces and neighbourhoods to draw in further forces and increase support or street demonstrations will cease to be effective. In 1979, for example, it was the general strike which supported the mass demonstrations in the streets, and these demonstrations in turn gave new energy to the mass strike. This also served to disperse the security forces, making the government unable to do away with all of these different protests at once across the country. This is why it is necessary to build the entire labour movement in Iran. The Iranian left can and must play a very important role in this work, linking up the backbone of workers' struggles with three other important movements in Iran.

The youth and students have always been very active against both the shah and the Islamic Republic, irrespective of the repression they have faced. The Iranian women's movement is one of the most powerful in the Middle East, combating as it does gender apartheid. The women's movement is an excellent ally for the workers' movement. The third other important movement is that of the nationalities. Iran is a multinational society in which 40%-50% of the people are not Persians, but Kurds, Baluchs, Arabs, Turks and others.

Throughout the 20th century they have been deprived of their national rights. Again, these movements have always challenged the shah and the Islamic Republic.

There must be a network comprised of these four movements - workers, students and youth, women, nationalities. All four are very active, but separated from each other. Saying that they should get together is easy: actually facilitating such co-operation is less so. Nonetheless, these are the tasks we have set ourselves: the Iranian left must unite on the basis of a democratic, socialist, rank-and-file workers' movement. In my opinion this movement must be feminist, ecological and committed to peace - it must argue for the Iranian people to live alongside others in the Middle East without war, nuclear weapons and so on.

Sanctions and austerity

I also want to talk about the economic situation in Iran. On the one hand, Iran's oil income ensures that it is one of the region's richest countries. On the other hand, its industries are in free fall. Every day we see companies going bankrupt, causing huge lay-offs. It is estimated that 500,000 people have lost their jobs in the last couple of months alone. The economic situation is getting worse by the day, and one of the reasons for this is the sanctions regime imposed by US imperialism. The effects are particularly harsh because the EU, Japan, China and Russia are all co-operating with the Obama administration. The brunt of these reactionary sanctions is being taken by the Iranian people themselves, not the government. The sanctions are partly

responsible for the disintegration of Iranian society and the worsening situation of the working class.

Internationally, the Islamic Republic is one of the most isolated regimes, with few friends. In this regard it is up there with North Korea or Burma. This is in marked contrast to Iran under the shah's regime, which had many allies around the world - not least the US itself.

The Islamic Republic is also planning a harsh austerity programme based on proposals from the International Monetary Fund. The removal of subsidies on food and energy is proof of this. One has to wonder why they are doing this - playing with fire when the people are so opposed to it. Under siege from sanctions and facing a worsening economic climate, is this not just madness on the part of the mullahs? No. They have no other option. The US is currently planning a new round of petroleum sanctions, and the Iranian rulers now see that they must get money from the Iranian people. This is reason behind the austerity measures: the \$40 billion they hope to save. This will be paid for by the subordinate classes in Iranian society - including the middle classes.

Wind of change

But, as we have seen in the last week or so, things are changing in the Middle East and we are entering a new period. The uprisings we have seen started with the youth. There are about seven million unemployed in Iran, 78% of which are young people. A large number of them have a university education. We can therefore see what links Iran, Tunisia and Egypt.

Egypt is the centre of Arabic culture and is of key geo-strategic importance to *Pax Americana*. Dictators may have gone, but the dictatorships are still in place. But we are just at the beginning. It took us six months to force the shah from power, but only 18 days in Egypt! The fall of the shah was the most important day in modern Iranian history, so you can understand the emotions and hope we see amongst the Egyptians.

I think the movements in the Arab world have learnt from us. They saw that we installed an Islamic Republic and what that has meant: not only silencing dissent, but forcing people to cut their hair or dress in a certain way. I think it is for this reason that in Tunisia Rachid Ghannouchi of the Islamist Ennahda movement is insisting he is not Khomeini. Similarly, when Iran's supreme leader, Ali Khamenei, welcomed the protests in Egypt, the Muslim Brotherhood issued a statement distancing itself from Khamenei and his project. Up until now these revolutions have not been Islamic, but popular revolutions against tyranny.

The recent demonstrations have also had huge effects on Iranian political consciousness. Some in 2009 had forgotten about the need for anti-imperialism and opposition to the US, but now they are seeing how the US supported these hated regimes. We can thus see how revolutionary movements learn from each other and interact. I am looking forward optimistically to the revolutionary future in both Iran and the Middle East. The people are writing history and we must support them ●



Shah and family

AGGREGATE

The phoney war has ended

Alex John describes the opening round in the CPGB discussion on perspectives

Perspectives for communist work during the coming period of crisis was the discussion theme of the CPGB's membership aggregate on February 13. Describing the perspectives document which the Provisional Central Committee put before the membership as "rough notes", comrade John Bridge expanded on each section, emphasising that it was not limited to 2011. Rather it took stock of the ongoing crisis of capitalism which will colour, drive and shape world politics for many years to come.

The financial crisis has moved from subprime mortgages to sovereign debt, and is conjoined with the decline of capitalism as a system, and of the US hegemon state and the species-threatening ecological crisis, showing what seem to be the "absolute limits" of capitalism.

US decline is displayed in its repeated failures at G8 and G20 meetings, in the nationalist, radical and reformist political developments in South America, formerly regarded as the US back yard - and most recently in the beginnings of the Arab revolution. While the US is still dominant, it can no longer automatically impose its will. But "there is no viable replacement" hegemon in waiting - a view rejected by comrade Chris Strafford, arguing that "all current indicators point towards China becoming the new hegemon".

However, the dollar remains the reserve world currency, backed up by unrivalled military power and "an elaborate system of military and political alliances" encompassing most of its rivals. Consequently the US is able to use Keynesian money printing to offload its crisis onto Japan, the EU, India, China, Brazil - and Britain - a remedy which these subordinates cannot use. "Decoupling" of developing economies from the crisis-ridden world economy is "a myth", said comrade Bridge.

Japan, with 125 million people, is smaller and stagnant for two decades. The EU, with 500 million, compared to the 300 million in the US, has a bigger economy than America, but is economically uneven and deeply divided politically. It cannot act in unity, as a state. India and China are prone to "spontaneous regionalist and class revolts" and their current rapid growth should not be extrapolated. Communists must strive to ensure that the world's working class organises itself into the viable alternative hegemon, argued comrade Bridge.

Unable to grant substantial concessions, sections of the ruling class elite promote irrational chauvinism and xenophobia. Sadly this is echoed in left nationalist demands for withdrawal from the EU and 'non-racist' immigration controls - expressed in the 'No to the European Union' 2009 electoral coalition uniting the *Morning Star's* Communist Party of Britain and the Socialist Party in England and Wales.

The coming period promises acute instability. While the US has no need for a major war against developing powers like India, China or Brazil, "proxy wars" against disobedient states like North Korea, Iran or Venezuela are a very real possibility. If there is revolution in Arab countries, then revolutionary wars and counterrevolutionary wars should be expected.

Iran has "an outstanding revolutionary tradition", continued comrade Bridge, and our work in the



America: in decline but far from finished

principled solidarity campaign, Hands Off the People of Iran, has been "a qualified success". Although Hopi gained the affiliation of the Public and Commercial Services union (among others), SPEW, which leads it, has not come on board. And although leading members of Permanent Revolution and the Commune have formally joined the steering committee, they have played little or no part so far.

After the collapse of both 'official communism' and social democracy, the left is "ideologically at sea", trying to reinvent them, or dreaming nostalgically of the defeat of 1968 and managed capitalism. But Keynesianism is an ideology of capitalism, not communism. The limited perspective of strikes and demos can produce concessions, but not victory. And without the vision of overcoming capitalism through working class-led socialism, reactionary projects will flourish.

Quoting the document, comrade Bridge pointed to other tasks. We must expose reactionary forms

of anti-capitalism and Keynesian illusions, and spread the ideas of Marxism in its broad sense. We must seek new contacts to extend our politically principled international coverage in the *Weekly Worker*. We must continue to promote the idea of a pan-Arab revolution led by the working class, and a Communist Party of the EU. The EU can become the world revolutionary centre, where the class struggle is most advanced.

British politics

The 'phoney war' on cuts was ended by student movement, which must be widened and deepened, with a student assembly on every campus, so that the vanguard, which has been active so far, mobilises the mass of students, as the cuts bite deeper.

As the working class enters the fray with the March 26 demo, said comrade Bridge, we must argue against "stuntism" (as opposed to stunts); and against "general strikism" (as opposed to general strikes). In other words, there is no substitute

for mass communist consciousness - the working class cannot be tricked into revolution and socialism.

A combination of being in opposition and the rising class struggle "will push the Labour Party to the left", he went on. But "the class character of Labour still exhibits considerable instability". The perspectives document notes the "outside possibility" that the Blairite wing may bail out and join the Con Dem coalition government. However, comrade Yassamine Mather thought a rightwing split unlikely, and pointed out that the SDP 'Gang of Four' are thinking about leaving the Lib Dems and rejoining Labour.

"Speculation aside," the document states, "Labour remains a bourgeois workers' party, and therefore a vital site of struggle for Marxists. Those who dismiss Labour make an elementary mistake. Ditto those who counterpose fighting the coalition's cuts and fighting inside the Labour Party."

"Marxists in the Labour Party need to be organised on the basis of

Marxism. That means a perspective of winning Labour - and the trade unions - to Marxism. Bans and prescriptions must be removed and the party transformed into a permanent united front of the working class. Towards that end the pro-capitalist right must be driven out and the trade unions thoroughly democratised ...

"Fighting to transform the Labour Party in no way contradicts the fight to organise the Marxist left into a single Communist Party and over time building that organisation into a mass party. Communists support the organisation of the working class at every conceivable level: ie, co-ops, trade unions, trades councils, workers' militias, sports clubs, temporary and permanent united fronts (eg, soviets)."

Some comrades expressed disagreements with this and aspects of the CPGB's recently adopted theses on the Labour Party (see *Weekly Worker* October 21 2010). Comrade Strafford challenged the aim of transforming Labour into a *permanent* united front which can coexist with a reformed Communist Party. United fronts are temporary, he argued: "If we win the Labour Party, why keep it alive? The purpose of the united front tactic is to break the base from Labour to the Communist Party." These and other differences had been aired during the run-up to the meeting, and may give rise to amendments or alternative perspectives proposals before the March 27 aggregate, when it is planned to bring the perspectives discussion to a vote.

March 26

A motion urging the PCC to produce a "popular" anti-cuts pamphlet for sale at the March 26 mass demo was amended after discussion, and the amended motion was carried overwhelmingly, with one abstention. Comrade Tina Becker moved the motion "to equip our comrades in anti-cuts meetings and campaigns". Comrade Andy Hannah said this would help our student activists deal with rehearsed Keynesianism and comrade Strafford, who claimed we had not been focussing sufficiently on the anti-cuts movement, said the pamphlet should be "accessible".

However, PCC members argued successfully against producing a "popular" pamphlet. "True, we need to recruit intelligent activists and advanced workers," said comrade Peter Manson, "but our priority remains winning the existing left to Marxist unity, not the transformation of the CPGB into the party through the recruitment of raw activists". Comrade Mike Macnair said we cannot compete with larger organisations such as the Socialist Workers Party in recruiting newly radicalising people. Until the trade unions move, he said, there will be no "seething mass" which we must engage with.

Likewise, comrade Bridge argued that we cannot outcompete all the left groups, but "we have strategy; they don't". Comrade Dave Isaacson, accepting the point, suggested that we produce a *Weekly Worker* anti-cuts special issue, to be given away on March 26. The adopted motion agreed to this, as well as commissioning the PCC to produce "a production plan for an anti-cuts pamphlet" to be printed by May Day ●

WALES

Vote 'no' on March 3

Next month will see a referendum on proposals to give the Welsh assembly a limited number of law-making powers. **Gareth Evans** gives his opinion

Marxists always take the rights of nations and nationalities seriously. Issues relating to the question of self-determination in particular give us the opportunity to discuss concepts of democracy and their relevance and meaning in class society.

The 1990s saw important developments associated with Welsh self-determination. In 1997, New Labour's constitutional arrangements for the UK managed to secure (by a whisker) a new settlement for Wales and in 1999 the national assembly was established in Cardiff Bay. Given its limit powers, it is unsurprising that discontent rumbled on and, thanks in part to the likes of the Richard Commission, the Government of Wales Act 2006 and the 2007 Labour/Plaid Cymru 'One Wales' coalition government, the question was still very much alive. Next month's referendum represents an attempt to get more powers for the assembly.

What exactly is up for grabs when people in Wales go to the polls on March 3 is relatively straightforward. Currently, the Welsh assembly government has the responsibility for the management and 'development' of policy in 20 'subject areas' devolved to it from the UK central government. These include, for example, issues relating to economic development, fire and rescue services and the promotion of fire safety, health, housing, tourism, social welfare and the Welsh language.¹ But, whilst it can 'develop' current policy within these areas, it cannot propose primary legislation - that requires approval from the Westminster parliament. The referendum next month could change that. If people in Wales respond positively to the question - "Do you want the assembly now to be able to make laws on *all* matters in the 20 subject areas it has powers for?" - those limited powers will be increased.

Rival camps

Since the referendum was decided upon last year, two clear opposing camps have evolved. In the 'yes' camp are organisations such as Tomorrow's Wales - a "cross-party, cross-sector, multi-faith body" supported by members of all four main parties.² In January this year, the coalition government also launched the Yes for Wales! campaign. Dominating the 'no' camp is True Wales, which describes itself as a grassroots organisation containing within its ranks individuals from "all walks of life and from over the whole of Wales".³

Yes for Wales! argues that a 'yes' vote would enhance the growth "in stature and confidence" of the Welsh assembly government and enable it to "make crucial decisions about life in Wales quickly and efficiently".⁴ For its part, True Wales argues that a 'no' is necessary to prevent a "slippery slope to separation and independence" and an assembly "devoid of democratic scrutiny".

Yes for Wales! bases its arguments on two factors. Firstly, it claims that a 'yes' will help the assembly to continue to defend people living in Wales from the central government's economic cutbacks - an institution with law-making powers would be even better placed than the current Welsh assembly government, so the argument goes. True, the assembly has introduced a (limited) number of reforms within the fields of education and health, for example, and neither the introduction of free prescriptions nor the absence of school Sats or league tables in Wales are to be baulked at. But when the 2009 Programme for International Student Assessment (Pisa) ranked Wales the least efficient country within the UK - and its performance was actually worse compared to

Pisa's 2006 study - this argument is far from convincing.⁵ Indeed, the 2011-12 settlement imposed by Westminster is the equivalent of an £800 million reduction in real terms, so the idea that the Welsh assembly government would somehow be able to protect people in Wales from the cuts simply cannot be sustained.

Secondly, there is the efficiency argument. Clearly, not having to go to central government in order to implement legal change has its advantages. But the Yes for Wales! campaign has been at pains to suggest that next month's vote is about little else - it is a "clean-up" exercise, Labour's former first minister, Rhodri Morgan, has argued.⁶ It represents "nothing dramatic", proclaimed the coalition's current education minister, (Labour's) Leighton Andrews.⁷ Given the limited choice facing voters come March 3, there is good deal of truth to these statements. This is not to say that the very fact of a referendum does not have important implications for democracy and self-determination (now or in the future).

It is this aspect that the 'no' campaign has latched onto. True Wales has spent an inordinate amount of time (correctly) highlighting that the referendum represents something more than a mere tidying-up exercise. Leave aside the argument that a 'yes' vote would place Wales on a "slippery slope to separation": it points to the expense of the Welsh assembly government (assembly members' salaries are currently over £50,000) and its failure to "deliver for Wales". However, the main thrust of the 'no' campaign relates to the question of democracy and how, according to one of its leading lights, Rachael Banner (a Labour Party member herself) this issue has been sidelined, given that next month's vote represents a "huge constitutional change".⁸

But therein lies a problem for True Wales. Its *Devolution charter* proclaims the need for a "root and branch change to Britain's political system" and outlines a whole raft of reforms which it argues would give people in Wales (and in the UK generally) the opportunity to have a meaningful input about important democratic questions, but True Wales's agenda for change is one that is far from adequate.⁹ For example, it claims that the democratic scrutiny of the Welsh assembly should be undertaken by Westminster and the House of Lords! It goes so far as to suggest that Welsh elections are not genuinely democratic ... because they are conducted under proportional representation: "... some AMs represent no constituency and earn the same as those with a constituency." Interestingly the charter refers to the merits of annual parliaments, yet rejects them in the here and now as "impractical" and "costly". For True Wales "root and branch" democratic change depends on Wales having "a safe future as part of the UK" and its anti-democratic constitutional-monarchical system.

Workers' perspective

How should Marxists respond to all of this? For those operating in Wales in particular, having a perspective on the referendum that places the interests of the working class (and thus the majority of people generally) at its centre must be paramount. With this in mind, whilst addressing the arguments that the 'yes' and 'no' campaigns have promoted, Marxists should strive for a position that is *independent* of both these camps. Unfortunately, this has not been done - at least not in any serious or consistent manner.

Of the three most prominent left organisations operating in Wales - the Socialist Workers Party, the *Morning Star's* Com-

munist Party of Britain and the Socialist Party in England and Wales - as I write, only the latter has commented on March 3. Although not supporting Yes for Wales!, SPEW takes up some of its arguments in calling for a critical 'yes' vote. Claiming that "further powers to the assembly would prevent the Westminster government and Whitehall from obstructing or delaying assembly discussions and thus enable the assembly to pass laws in Wales", its position also taps into the notion of 'progressive' changes implemented by the Welsh assembly government. It claims, as no doubt the CPB will too, that a Welsh assembly with enhanced powers - under pressure from the working class, of course - would be in a position "not to pass on the Con-Dem cuts, but to fight the cuts".¹⁰

As has been noted, leaving aside the argument that the current Welsh assembly government has produced a budget that drastically threatens jobs and services in Wales, this stance hardly gives radical politics here a much needed cutting edge. The proposed change represents nothing more than a minor tinkering with the current constitutional arrangement. Indeed, all four assembly parties support a 'yes' and have done so since Yes for Wales! was first launched.

A 'no' vote at least has the potential to take the debate to a much deeper level. Although there is an argument that a call for an active boycott of the referendum would also achieve that objective, the effects of this approach would be limited. Granted, calling for the spoiling of the ballot paper with, for example, appropriate slogans that highlight other options would decrease the 'yes' return. However, given that the *reasons* for spoilt ballot papers are not recorded, this stance would be unlikely to produce the desired result.

This is why agitating for a 'no' is tactically important. Essentially, the consequences of such a result would create opportunities for Marxists to place the whole question of the assembly in perspective. A 'no' campaign should emphasise the importance of republican democracy, specifically advocating the case for proportional representation, fixed (one-year) parliaments, party-list recallability and for political representatives to be paid no more than the average skilled worker's wage. It would also, however, enable us to raise other matters of equal importance. As well as defending the right of nations to self-determination, up to and including the right of secession, Marxists would be able to highlight the potential divisive outcome of this right, should it be chosen, whilst arguing for the maximum unity of people in Britain, around the demand for a federal republic.

Militantly agitating for the abolition of the crown and the royal prerogative, the House of Lords, the privy council and the presidential prime minister, as well as the replacement of the standing army with a people's militia, would provide a vision that goes beyond that advanced by many within the 'no' campaign and would challenge, rather than maintain, the whole basis upon which the British union is maintained. This reason alone is good enough for voting 'no' on March 3. Combined with the other arguments I have outlined, however, it makes such an option a necessity ●

Notes

1. For the full list of subject areas, see www.wales.gov.uk.
2. www.tomorrow-wales.co.uk.
3. www.truewales.org.uk.
4. www.yesforwales.com.
5. www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-wales-11930257.
6. www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-wales-12330435.
7. *Westminster hour* BBC Radio 4, January 23.
8. www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-wales-12330435.
9. www.truewales.org.uk/en/True_Devolution_Charter.pdf.
10. www.socialistparty.org.uk/articles/10970.

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.**

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Iranian masses call for end of regime

Contamination spreads

Yassamine Mather reports on the effects of the Egyptian upsurge

As early as Sunday February 13 riot police and the bassiji militia took up positions in the main streets of Tehran in preparation for the demonstration called for the following day. 'Reformist' leaders Mir-Hossein Moussavi and Mehdi Karroubi were put under house arrest and internet connection to many sites was blocked.

Then, as darkness fell, all over Tehran people went onto their rooftops, shouting, "Allah-o-akbar" (God is great) and "Marg bar dictator" (Down with the dictator).

Videos of the night-time demonstration appeared quickly online and by the morning of Monday February 14 many Iranian were aware that anti-government protests were taking place. Tehran residents were surprised to find that mobile phones were working (they had been blocked at around 4pm the previous day) and protestors could organise routes, points of assembly ...

However, even taking into account all these positive signs, no-one could have predicted the size and extent of the demonstrations - the most significant anti-government protest since security forces cracked down on a series of massive events in 2009. Indeed, a leaked document from the pro-Khamenei Islamic parliament security committee puts the number of Monday's protestors in Tehran at one million.

Revolutionary guards used tear gas, wielded batons and opened fire to disperse protestors, yet large numbers gathered, particularly in central and poorer districts of Tehran. The majority of the demonstrators were young working class men and women. There were clashes between police and demonstrators, and dozens of arrests, in Isfahan, Tabriz, Shiraz, Mashad and Rasht.

Iranians had been frustrated for weeks, as they witnessed demonstrations in Tunisia, Egypt and elsewhere in the Middle East. Young Iranians were convinced their protests of summer of 2009 had inspired these demonstrations. Many were arguing why, in comparison with Egypt, their own larger demonstrations then (three million in Tehran alone) had failed to overthrow the regime, when smaller protests led to Hosni Mubarak's departure. There had been an element of despair, although the events in Tunisia and Egypt had certainly put to rest claims made throughout 2009 and early 2010 by leaders of the green movement, as well as by the reformists of the 'official communist' Tudeh Party and Fedayeen Majority, that the 'era of revolutions is over', that one should be realistic and demand the 'possible': ie, reform within the regime.

Other apologists for the Iranian regime, such as the Socialist Workers Party's Elaheh Rostami-Povey, must also feel embarrassed by recent events in Arab capitals, as well as in Tehran. Her recent book, entitled *Iran's in-*

fluence across the Middle East and the world, is described by her SWP comrade, Alex Callinicos, as a "fascinating study of the evolution of the Islamic Republican regime in Iran, of its complex and increasingly conflictual relationship with popular and social movements, and of its impact on the wider Middle East. This fine product of Elaheh Rostami-Povey's critical scholarship is essential reading for anyone who refuses to settle for mythological and demonising representations of post-revolutionary Iran." The author claimed that Iran's clerical regime and its president has considerable support in the "Arab street".

Amongst the many protests in Egypt and Tunisia not only were there no signs of support for the Islamic Republic, but protestors in Tahrir Square called on Iranians to follow *their* example and continue their protests for democracy. Indeed every time Iran's rulers tried to imply that Arab protestors were following in the traditions of the revolution led by ayatollah

Ruhollah Khomeini, secular and religious protestors united to denounce such comparisons. The reaction of Iran's Islamic rulers was predictable: they jammed Al Jazeera TV's broadcasts to avoid 'revolutionary contamination'.

Last week Iran's Islamist hardliners' desperate efforts to downplay the democratic thrust of the Egyptian revolution and present it as an Islamic, Iran-inspired uprising backfired, when even the Muslim Brotherhood protested at this falsification. By February 14 worse was to follow (for the regime). Tens of thousands of Iranians were shouting: "Mubarak, Ben Ali - Seyed Ali - it's your turn" (referring, of course, to supreme leader Seyed Ali Khamenei alongside the departed rulers of Egypt and Tunisia). Other prominent slogans were "Khamenei - buy a one-way ticket out of Iran"; and "Poor Seyed Ali - the movement is still alive" (referring to Khamenei's claims that the opposition had now gone away).

In central Tehran large posters of

Khomeini and Khamenei were torn down and set on fire. As night fell, youths gathered in many neighbourhoods and set fire to bins. Despite the fears of the days preceding February 14, the protests were a huge success. According to eyewitness Hamid Farokhnia, a staff writer at *Iran Labour Report*, "People were smiling with joy for the first time in a long while. Likewise, many bassiji and [police] officers looked positively confused and crestfallen."

A day after the street protests members of the Iranian parliament called for opposition leaders Karroubi and Moussavi to be prosecuted and sentenced to death for stirring unrest. Despite this, Moussavi's spokesperson called the protests a major success and did not condemn the anti-Khamenei slogans, as was the case on previous occasions. While the 'reformists' have evidently not joined the revolution, this shows just how far the movement has been radicalised. Unlike in 2009, there is now a clear and unambiguous call for the overthrow

of the entire regime.

After months of despondency, optimism has returned. Students and workers we contacted were enthused by this week's events, even though some opposition groups believe up to 1,500 people have been arrested during the protests. In fact two were killed and in a Kafkaesque attempt at falsification the regime claimed 26-year-old Sane Jaleh, killed on February 14, was a member of the bassiji. Sane's friends have posted photos of him alongside the dissident ayatollah, Hussein-Ali Montazeri, who died in 2009, to prove that he was in fact a Moussavi supporter.

Acting police commander general Ahmad Reza Radan said dozens of people, including nine members of the security forces, had been injured. It is true that in a show of confidence protestors attacked a number of bassiji - Radan might yet regret exaggerating the protestors' success in confronting security forces ●

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Death to the Islamic Republic

Report posted by the leftwing Bazr student group

The Arab spring has reached Tehran. It is the morning of February 14 and crowds are already gathering. People are exchanging smiles even if they don't know each other. Security forces are trying to stop shopkeepers shutting their businesses, but most don't pay any attention.

Vassl Square: I am on a bus travelling towards Eman Hossein square. However, the main street is blocked and traffic is at standstill, so I get off the bus at Vassl. A young girl is shout-

ing at plain-clothes police and crowds gather around to defend her. The bassiji move away, scared of the crowd.

Tehran University: The presence of large crowds has rattled the regime. A club-wielding plain-clothes policeman tries to attack a young woman who is protesting by showing the victory sign. Passengers get off a bus to ward off the bassiji. He is forced to retreat. Slogans are chanted: "Death to dictator, free all political prisoners."

At the top of Ghodss Street it is clear that security forces have used

tear gas. Crowds help each other to recover, shopkeepers allow passers-by into their premises to escape the fumes. The bassiji are attacking the crowd again and the university janitors, who are supposed to keep people off the campus, are on the side of the protestors, allowing people to take refuge in the university gardens. No-one seems to be with the security forces any more.

Despite the tear gas, the street is full of protestors. Drivers blow their horns in support of demonstrators.

Revolution Square: Another plain-clothes bassiji is ordering a bus driver to force passengers to get off. He refuses. The bus is really overcrowded and an old woman complains about the disturbances. Young girls around me reply to her: "Today is Valentines' Day and this is how we are celebrating. We want to create havoc everywhere."

The crowd is chanting: "We'll kill those who have killed our brothers" and, of course, the obligatory "Death to the Islamic Republic" ●

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