

weekly



worker



When all the crap began: six-page supplement. Women's oppression is not natural

- Israeli irrationality
- Kurdish resistance
- Marxist culture
- Reichstag fire

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Towards a Communist Party of the European Union

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GOODBYE GADDAFI



LETTERS



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

Laugh out loud

The natural reaction to the article 'Vote "no" on March 3' - to laugh out loud - must, unfortunately, be tempered with the troubling suspicion that, somewhere in the real world, someone might be under the misapprehension that this article represents a socialist analysis of the Welsh assembly referendum campaign (February 17). Displaying the familiar sectarian's tin ear for the real debate on the issue, one-sided in his analysis and catastrophically wrong in his conclusion, Gareth Evans has served up an unpalatable cocktail of reaction and ultra-leftism.

In calling for a 'no' vote, Evans is in effect supporting the constitutional status quo, which obliges the assembly government to submit draft laws to Westminster for prior approval. The spectacle of peers of the realm and MPs from English constituencies picking over laws made in Wales, for Wales, should make a 'yes' vote a no-brainer for anyone who shares Evans' avowed support for the rights of nations and nationalities. Evans wrongly states that the 'yes' campaign is arguing that an affirmative vote will protect Wales against central government cuts. In fact, Yes for Wales *cannot* and *does not* argue this point, because it is cross-party, confining itself to the arguments for the principle of primary legislation. It is up to socialists and trade unionists who are supporters of the 'yes' campaign to argue this inside their own organisations (as they are doing).

But, while the 'yes' campaign is consensual and therefore politically bland, it at least campaigns on the issues. The same cannot be said for the 'no' campaign, which Evans discusses with far more seriousness than it deserves. Unable to mount a single argument with any merit against primary lawmaking powers, it confines itself to a mischievous campaign of disinformation, sowing confusion as to what the referendum is really about. In declining to constitute itself as the official 'no' campaign and refusing government money, and therefore making sure that the 'yes' campaign gets no money either, True Wales has attempted to shut down the debate, in the hope of keeping the turnout low and therefore robbing the 'yes' campaign of any real mandate in the event of its likely victory.

It is when getting to the 'Marxist' nub of his argument that Evans really loses it. He states, correctly, that the assembly government, in its latest budget, has been forced to make cuts, although avoids the fact that, unlike a local authority, the assembly government cannot borrow money or raise taxes. Nor does he acknowledge that the assembly government has at least preserved universal benefits such as free school breakfasts and free NHS prescriptions. Evans argues that, as the assembly has made cuts, the best response is to prevent it getting any further law-making powers - thereby leaving legislative control with the government that initiated these cuts in the first place.

Skating over the abolition in Wales of the NHS internal market as a "limited" reform, and ignoring the retention of EMA and the subsidy of tuition fees, Evans considers that the correct 'Marxist' approach is to argue against this upstart, would-be parliament having the power to enact legislation more quickly and more efficiently. In so doing he misreads entirely the dynamics of the present situation, in which anyone seriously

involved in trying to protect jobs and services in Wales regards a 'yes' vote not as a be-all and end-all, but as a crucial step forward.

Having manoeuvred himself into the reactionary cul-de-sac of calling for a 'no' vote, Evans then comes up with the bizarre assertion that a 'no' has "the potential to take the debate to a much deeper level": a frankly ludicrous suggestion, when the whole of the serious left - from Welsh Labour and Plaid Cymru to the SWP - and all unions are actively supporting the 'yes' campaign and would regard a 'no' vote as a massive defeat. Evans will therefore be left having his 'deeper debate' with his new-found co-thinkers in the UK Independence Party, the Tory right and the steadily diminishing number of Brit-loyalist old Labourites.

Nick Davies (chair), Darren Williams (secretary)
Welsh Labour Grassroots

How so?

Gareth Evans says that a 'no' vote could take the debate to a much deeper level, but why should that be the case any more than a 'yes' vote?

Devolution in Britain is still very much a work in progress. A 'no' vote will stop it in its tracks and who would that help? I have heard the argument put from extreme nationalists that a 'no' vote will hasten the break-up of the UK by frustrating legitimate aspirations of the Welsh and causing an upsurge in demands for independence. Is that what he is advocating?

Siôn Jones
email

Welsh radicals

I was very interested to read Gareth Evans' article on the Welsh assembly referendum. I'm part of a group that put together the 'Radical Wales' website and we're very keen to run a series of articles that look critically at the referendum from a leftwing perspective.

Please pass my contact details on to Gareth or anyone in Wales who would be interested in such a project.

Tom Fowler
www.radicalwales.org

Waste of time

It is a pity that Stan Keable chose to make a criticism of certain Public and Commercial Services union activists in the Labour Representation Committee than approach us first ('Cuts and rebuilding', January 20). The article centres on a couple of critical motions at the LRC annual conference and I read the interesting response from Dave Vincent ('So we should all join Labour?', February 10).

I only asked the motion moved by Communist Students to be remitted because one of the instructions called for "All trade unions to affiliate to the Labour Party". But there was no mention in the article of the PCS Labour Left motion, 'Opposing the comprehensive spending review'. This motion called for campaigning against the enormous cuts in the civil service and the abolition of many non-departmental public bodies which the Tories label as a 'bonfire of the quangos'. I also mentioned the 142 court closures in the ministry of justice, where Dave Vincent and I work, as well as the £120 billion of uncollected tax each year which could pay off the country's national deficit.

When I moved this particular motion, I warned the LRC conference that all leftwingers, particularly trade union representatives and students, were under attack through this government's cuts agenda and the rise

of the far right. I added that if this country's establishment did not wake up, we could witness a violent political future, which is now beginning on the streets with the student demonstrations. Lessons should be learned from West Germany in the 1960s and 1970s, when many leftwing students were forced to resort to violence by forming the Baader-Meinhoff Gang and the Red Army Faction. The reason was that no effort had been made to crack down on the underground ex-Nazis from World War II who were terrorising the leftwing students that chose to defy fascism.

The fact remains that we will face increasing poverty in this country, along with a rising far right that could drive future generations of leftwingers to violence. Sadly, these political and economic problems were generated by the governments of the last 30 years, regardless of which party was in power. Therefore, it would have been more expedient to write an article about the impact of the massive cuts in public services on society in general than debating trade union affiliation to the Labour Party.

I was criticised for going into a "diatribe" against the Labour Party by listing all the sins of the previous government. It was not stated in the article that I mentioned that more than 60% of PCS members used to be Labour voters. But when Gordon Brown announced the 104,000 job cuts in the civil service in 2004, it was a total Labour vote destroyer. I did not mention the disgraceful attempted coup by a Labour Party member, Barry Reamsbottom, who refused to step down as PCS general secretary after being voted out of office. Instead, we had to waste at least £100,000 of PCS membership subscriptions on legal action against him. Downing Street, under the New Labour government, supported Reamsbottom in this court case. Therefore, who would be brave enough to move a motion to affiliate to the Labour Party at PCS conference?

I was rather amused by the statement that the PCS Labour Left "seem to have been swayed by the Socialist Party in England and Wales, which dominated the leadership of that union". If the Socialist Party were to change their minds and push for affiliation to the Labour Party tomorrow, they would probably be voted out of all the major PCS union positions for the reasons that I have provided.

You misquoted me, stating that I said "unions should not support Labour until Labour changed its tune". In fact, I stated that the Labour Party (which would carry the burden) should change its policies in order to win back the hearts and minds of the average trade union member. The fact that John McDonnell received a hero's welcome at the 2007 PCS conference hours after he failed to make the ballot paper for the leadership election speaks volumes. John was saluted for his sterling work in trying to prevent the civil service job cuts. If only other Labour MPs could do the same, it would make an enormous difference.

Finally, it is regrettable to read remarks such as "How strange that a 'Labour left' organisation does not support affiliation" and "A self-defeating strategy, unfortunately, and contrary to the theme of the conference, which was convened under the slogan 'Resist the cuts, rebuild the party'." These two slogans are not compatible at street and workplace level.

On February 21, I and others will be hosting a branch AGM, where we will be discussing the fact that 177 people could be in danger of accepting compulsory redundancies in

a few months' time. PCS members will want to know how we should resist these cuts. We had a similar situation last year when Labour was in power. To be honest, if I was to move a motion calling for PCS to affiliate to the Labour Party, it would be an enormous waste of time, to say the least.

As for "self-defeating strategy", the PCS and the RMT have had faster growing memberships whilst the Labour Party has shrunk by more than 50% since it took office in 1997!
Austin Harney
Email

Fight sackings

PCS activists rallied on February 15 against the politically motivated sacking of key union officers. The latest victims are Mark Hammond, home office group president, and Sue Kendal, home office south and south-east branch secretary.

The official reason given was a satirical magazine which had been circulating comparing a senior manager to the 'Bride of Chucky'. Neither Mark nor Sue had anything to do with this publication and management have not produced a shred of evidence to suggest they had. The real reason for their sackings was that they were exceptionally effective at both recruiting and mobilising members. Mark Serwotka has accused the home office of trying to decapitate the union.

Speakers at the rally included Mark Hammond, sacked CSA Hastings officer, Sam Buckley and John McDonnell MP, chair of the PCS parliamentary group. Mark denounced the politically motivated cuts as an attack on all working people. Sam railed against the fact that "We are guaranteed free speech by law about anyone - except, seemingly, our employers, who belong to the 'big society' of back-scratchers who think they are above the rules." He urged everyone to mobilise their members to get Sue and Mark their jobs back and prove to the bosses that they are public servants and we are the public to whom they are accountable.

John McDonnell compared Mark and Sue to the Tolpuddle martyrs and pledged full support for their reinstatement. He also called for the reinstatement of the victimised reps at Hastings, where five union officers have been sacked since November 2007 on what the union believes are trumped-up charges.

PCS home office secretary Paul O'Connor then led the rally across the road to an impromptu lobby of the home office, whose officials refused to accept the formal notice of PCS's intention to ballot for action in support of Mark and Sue and against cuts.

Messages of support for Sue Kendal and Mark Hammond can be sent to supportmarkandsue@pcs.org.uk.

Samuel Buckley
email

Good start

The past week has been an important one for the anti-cuts movement in Milton Keynes. Here the left and anti-cuts activists seem to have united around the local Coalition of Resistance group (MK COR) to oppose the cuts. These involved in the group's activities, as well as individuals, include members of Counterfire, the Socialist Workers Party, Communist Party of Great Britain, the Greens and Labour lefts. The group is also supported by a range of trade unionists and the Milton Keynes Trades Council. None of the left groups is

dominant and all seem to be cooperating well so far.

On February 18 MK COR hosting a public meeting attended by a fantastic 400 people. The headline speaker was Tony Benn, who made a nonsense of the coalition government's claim that "We are all in this together". The cuts will hit the poorest and most vulnerable the hardest. He also explained how the mass movements which fought for trade union rights and universal suffrage had at times found it necessary to go against the laws of their day. However, his economic solutions were Keynesian, not revolutionary.

Speakers from rail union Aslef and the Communication Workers Union joined student activist Feyzi Ismail, Dot Gibson of the National Pensioners Convention, Paul Brandon (chair of Right to Work), and Neil Faulkner (Coalition of Resistance steering committee) on the platform. The latter three spoke most militantly and most clearly about the fact that this was a class conflict. While Paul Brandon insisted that we must do more than simply get rid of this government, his vision only extended as far as a movement militant enough to force a *Labour government* to act in our interests.

Neil Faulkner was the clearest in outlining a way forward for the movement. He was not afraid to be clear about the difficulty of the task ahead of us: "Don't be under any illusions ... we are going to have to fight very hard." The TUC protest on March 26 is just a start. We must build a wave of strikes, occupations and further protests on the back of that movement. He was also clear that we needed to challenge the whole system of class rule.

Four days after this meeting, on Tuesday February 22, around 60 people attended a vocal protest organised by MK COR when Milton Keynes voted through its cuts budget. This is clearly only the beginning. As services are wrecked and workers are made redundant, we can expect the anti-cuts movement to deepen its roots. We need to ensure that a clear alternative to the whole capitalist system is articulated within it. So far, particularly for a town like Milton Keynes, which has very little by way of a tradition of protest, we have made a good start.

Dave Isaacson
Milton Keynes

People's history

I'm a bit disappointed, yet puzzled by the conclusion of comrade Mike Macnair's review of Jairus Banaji's *History as theory: essays on modes of production and exploitation* ('The direction of historical development', February 17).

Despite the claim of moving beyond the abstract, there's not much of a move towards the "strategic alternative". I will admit this letter doesn't fully flesh out things programmatically from the foundations in my two previous letters (January 27 and February 3), but it does give a historical background to what *will* flesh out that strategic alternative.

The people's history that Gramsci was perhaps discovering in the fourth political figure I previously alluded to was none other than the political tenure of Julius Caesar himself, starting with his march on Rome. In 2003, Michael Parenti emphasised Caesar's land reform, outright grants to the poor, public works and other employment programmes for directing plebeians toward productive work, luxury taxes, partial debt relief, recognition of minority religions like Judaism as legitimate, and even a maximum on allowable personal wealth of 60,000

sesterces (but not one that was subject to populist adjustment by mass democratic means).

However, it was his two-pronged turn against what would become for bourgeois liberals the concept of a 'republic' that led to Caesar's assassination. As he became *dictator perpetuo*, he was transferring political power from the senate to the tribunal assembly. Although by no means a socialist, had he succeeded, the impact of this and his previous radical reforms would have forced him to go beyond the senatorial elites and extinguish the patrician class as a whole, whose very existence diverted slaves away from the numerous public infrastructure projects he had in mind, not to mention an unintended long-term transition away from the slave system to either some form of feudalism or perhaps directly to some form of capitalism!

Many have said that the class dynamics of Caesar's day have little or no bearing on today's situation. On the contrary, there are lessons for much of the third world, even in the current wave of unrest from Tunisia to Egypt, to parts of India. Just as Lenin coined 'revolutionary-democratic dictatorships of the proletariat and peasantry', just as Parvus and especially Trotsky coined 'permanent revolution', and just as Mao coined both 'new democracy' and 'bloc of four classes', those lessons could be called 'Caesarean socialism'.

Jacob Richter
email

Illusion

Political amnesia? Rob York certainly appears to have forgotten the experience of history with yet another demand for capitalism without capitalists (Letters, February 17).

The essential features of capitalism are retained by any dividend-issuing co-op and it should be obvious that if any enterprise in business is to sell, and pay the bills out of its revenue, it will be subject to the same basic market laws as any other enterprise. Modern productive and distributive methods are dictated by market laws and largely outside the will of the capitalists themselves, or that of their managers (whether recallable or not).

Instead of the ethos of co-ops transforming capitalism, it was the other way round - the ethos of capitalism transformed the cooperative movement. The cooperative movement was out-competed and now survives on the margins as a niche. In everyday terms (with echoes of Dickens' Micawber), it was a matter of income against expenditure. If income exceeds expenditure, then the enterprise can continue to form a part of the whole capitalist structure. Conversely, if expenditure exceeds income then it must disappear from the scene.

If all workers can be drawn into the process of management, and can be given the illusion of an identity of interests between capital and labour, this helps to muffle the trade union struggle and enhance the process of exploitation. Workers collectively administering their own exploitation is not a state of affairs which socialists should aim for, Rob!

Capitalism is a system of production where value accumulation can be managed by workers as easily as by capitalists or state bureaucrats. The particular way in which production is organised makes no difference whatsoever. It can be the usual capitalist company or it can be a so-called 'workers' cooperative under workers' control'. The decision-making procedures can be authoritarian or democratic. It makes no difference to the fact that, whatever the enterprise is, in order to exist it must be economically viable. The idea that

workers' cooperatives under workers' control is socialism or a step towards socialism is an illusion.

Alan Johnstone
SPGB

Identification

In the 1960s and 1970s, the fight of blacks, Asians and anti-racist whites was for integration. After the 'riots' in the early 1980s, the capitalist state launched 'multiculturalism', and many anti-racists fell for the con.

The unspoken agenda was distributing resources through 'community ethnic leaders'. In turn, they were expected to control black and Asian militancy. The upshot was that people began to define themselves on an ethnic basis, rather than a class basis - classic divide and rule.

Now Frankenstein's monster has backfired. Many Asians feel they are on the shit heap because they are Asian, not because they are working class. Their militancy is channelled through religion. This is something the state feels unable to control - hence Cameron's speech against multiculturalism.

Casting identity in ethnic terms has caused some whites on the fringes of the working class to also identify themselves in ethnic terms as 'poor whitey'. What is needed is not opposition to the English Defence League as Nazis - they are not - but the building of a working class opposition to cuts, taxation and war.

That opposition must support the revolutions in Arabia and the Middle East, and fight for the destruction of the Zionist state, to be replaced by a democratic, secular and socialist Palestine for Jews and Arabs.

'Identity politics' was a facet of the retreat into postmodernism that defined the 'left' intelligentsia in the 1980s. In turn, as always, the centrists followed their lead. Adapting to the trends of petty bourgeois ideology is a trade stamp of Pabloite 'Trotskyists'.
Daryl Atkinson
email

End detention

The coalition government has skilfully employed the 'end' to child detention to avoid talking about the brutal and inhumane detention regime in general. Yet, over the years, countless reports and accounts have documented the plight of women locked up at Yarl's Wood in Bedfordshire: indefinite imprisonment without charge or judicial oversight, overcrowded cells, mistreatment and abuse by private security guards, lack of privacy, restrictions on visits and phone calls, inadequate medical provision and a lack of facilities to address healthcare issues.

And it's getting worse. In her 2009 inspection report on Yarl's Wood, HM chief inspector of prisons Anne Owers reported that "the focus on improving the environment and activities for children appeared to have led to a lack of attention to the needs of the majority population of women. Provision of activities for them was among the poorest seen in any removal centre. It had been inadequate at the last inspection, and had declined even further. The absence of activity added to the depression and anxiety of women, many of whom were spending lengthy periods at Yarl's Wood. The average length of stay had increased by 50% since the last inspection, and one in 10 women had been detained for more than six months."

End the detention of migrant women! Close Yarl's Wood now! Join the demonstration on Saturday March 5.
Stop Deportation Network
stopdeportation@riseup.net

Vibrant

Since the Egyptian revolution's first

mass protests exploded throughout the country on January 25, many so-called pundits and analysts have frantically struggled to find a suitable historical parallel in order to make sense of the situation to the outside world: France 1789; Iran 1979; and Tiananmen Square 1989 are just a few of the many analogies that have dominated popular discourse in the west.

Meanwhile, the US government and its allies have predictably continued to emphasise familiar concerns over 'stability' and 'order', the broader regional implications for neighbouring Israel, and the spectre of an 'Islamist' takeover. But it hardly matters to any of these foreign players, of course, that in the end the people of Tahrir Square and all across Egypt do not seem to be thinking about any of these concerns at all, nor do they particularly care about any ongoing speculation surfacing from outside the country at the moment.

For the first time ever, perhaps, Egyptians have seen a genuine opportunity for freedom and refused to let it go, boldly defying a brutal and seemingly immovable 30-year-old dictatorship and commencing to build in its place the foundation of a grassroots democracy that only continues to grow stronger every day. A new and vibrant democracy is being born in Egypt today against all odds, evolving live in front of a captured global audience in a way quite unlike ever before. The Egyptian revolution has to this point flourished as a truly non-violent, inclusive and participatory democracy - and, most importantly, managed to do so without any appointed leaders, dominant ideologies or easy slogans, except to say simply that the dictator must go. The all-important 'fear barrier' has been decisively shattered and shows no sign of returning any time soon.

What final character the Egyptian revolution will ultimately take as of now remains unclear, but, whatever happens, what will follow is at its core of less importance than what Egyptians have already managed to achieve.

The Bullet
Canada

Walk for Iran

On March 5 six members of the Hands Off the People of Iran Manchester branch will be 'doing the Bogle', a 56-mile walk round Manchester.

Last year we did not quite complete it, but we did manage to raise £540 for the charity, Workers Fund Iran. This year we will once again walk to raise money for WFI, which was set up in December 2005 with the aim of aiding Iranian workers (both employed and unemployed) who are victims of the economic policies of the Iranian regime, including mass non-payment of wages. The charity is not aligned to any political organisation.

Funds sent to Iran will be distributed amongst the most needy working class families who are facing destitution. We hope this will help stop the practice of families sending their children out onto the streets as beggars or peddlers - or of selling their body parts, which is a common practice.

Hundreds of thousands of workers are being consigned to poverty by the oppressive Iranian state. Practical solidarity is one of the greatest things we can do for Iranian workers; it helps the revolutionary struggle against the Islamic Republic and in opposition to imperialism. Give generously!

We are hoping to raise over £300 pounds for the charity. You can donate by going to our Charity Choice page: <https://www.charitychoice.co.uk/donation.asp?ref=154051> ●
Chris Strafford
Manchester

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.

Radical Anthropology Group

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

March 1: 'The origins of fire' (Aboriginal Australia). Speaker: Chris Knight.

Solidarity with Arab people

Friday February 25, 4pm: Protest, Bahrain embassy, 30 Belgrave Square, London SW1.

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

Critique conference

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

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

Organised by Critique: www.critiquejournal.net.

No cuts

Monday February 28, 5.30pm: March, Crowndale Centre, Eversholt Street, London NW1.

Called by Camden United Against the Cuts: camdenunitedagainstcuts@gmail.com.

Monday February 28, 6pm: Demonstration, Brent Town Hall, Forty Lane, Wembley.

Wednesday March 2, 5.30pm: Demonstration, Hackney Town Hall, Mare Street, London E8.

Organised by Hackney Alliance to Defend Public Services: <http://hackneyalliance.wordpress.com>.

Egypt's revolution

Wednesday March 2, 7pm: Rally, Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London WC1. 'What next for the Egyptian revolution?' Speakers include: Louise Christian, John Rees, Jeremy Corbyn MP, Youssef Bady (April 6 Committee).

Organised by the Stop the War Coalition and Initiative for the Liberation of Egypt: stopwar.org.uk.

Close Yarl's Wood now

Saturday March 5, 1pm: demonstration, Yarl's Wood Immigration Removal Centre, Twinwoods Road, Clapham, Bedfordshire. End the detention of migrant women.

Enquiries to Stop Deportation Network: stopdeportation@riseup.net.

Lobby Con Dems

Saturday March 5, 11am: Demonstration, march past Tory and Liberal Democrat Welsh conferences, assemble City Hall, Sophia Gardens, Cardiff.

Organised by Cardiff TUC and Cardiff Against Cuts: cardiffatc@gmail.com.

Lobby Labour

Saturday March 5, 11am: March to Labour's local government conference. Assemble Geraldine Mary Harmsworth Park, Southwark, London SE11.

Organised by NSSN Anti-Cuts Campaign: <http://www.stopcuts.net>.

Day X for the NHS

Wednesday March 9, 5pm: March, assemble Royal London Hospital, Whitechapel Road, London E1.

Organised by the Right to Work Campaign, Keep Our NHS Public and Tower Hamlets Hands Off our Public Services: 07795 412932.

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.

Lobby Lib Dems

Saturday March 12, 11am: Demonstration, outside Scottish Lib Dem conference, Perth Concert Hall, Mill Street, Perth.

Organised by Scottish TUC: www.stuc.org.uk

Rage Against Lib Dems

Saturday March 12, 11am: Demonstration, Liberal Democrat conference, Assemble Devonshire Green, Sheffield S1.

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

Right to Work

Saturday March 12, 2pm: Delegates' meeting, Sheffield (after demo, venue to be announced). Election of steering committee. Send delegates' names to info@righttowork.org.uk.

Oppose the cuts

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

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

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.

LIBYA

Goodbye to Gaddafi

He may still be admired by sections of the left, writes **Eddie Ford**. But we would wholeheartedly welcome the fall of Gaddafi in what is the first armed uprising in the Arab revolution

Long oppressed by imperialism and corrupt local rulers, the Arab people are now demanding their freedom. Following the sweeping away of Tunisia's Zine el Abidine Ben Ali and Egypt's Hosni Mubarak, a democratic upsurge, including mass protests and popular uprisings, has swept the Middle East and North Africa. In Libya we are seeing the dying days (quite possibly literally) of the vicious, tyrannical, 41-year-old regime of colonel Muammar Gaddafi. As I write, Libya's second and third cities, Benghazi and Misurata, are in the hands of the local population, who are forming committees to take over the distribution of supplies and blocking airport runways to prevent the regime's planes from landing.

Before that, the focus had shifted to Bahrain. Inspired by the mass revolt in Egypt, at least 100,000 people - some 8% of the entire population - took to the streets of Manama, the capital, to voice their opposition to the autocratic king, Hamad ibn Isa Al Khalifa, a favoured client of US imperialism and Saudi Arabia. However, some media agencies claim that the February 22 pro-democracy rally actually consisted of more than 280,000, since the march extended up to 3 kilometres long - if true, a staggering turnout for a state whose entire population numbers little more than a million. Turning Pearl Square into their own Tahrir Square, now the symbol of freedom everywhere, the protestors initially demanded sweeping democratic reforms - especially greater rights and equality for the Shia majority, who account for about 70% of Bahrain's 525,000 native-born population, but have had to endure decades of apartheid-like discrimination (indeed, the regime even imports Sunnis from South Asia, the Baluch tribal areas and Syria in an attempt to artificially boost Sunni numbers¹).

As for Egypt itself, the ruling military council may have taken over the reins of power from Mubarak, thus saving the regime - however, the army has been unable to stem the revolutionary tide, let alone launch a counterrevolution. Quite the opposite, in fact. The regime has been massively weakened, whilst in turn, and crucially, the masses have been emboldened - their mood is one of confidence. Hence the protests have not only continued, but increased in numbers and militancy. So we had the huge victory celebration on February 18, at which the masses affirmed the new democratic agenda - *their* agenda, not that of the regime or the US/UK, which still dreams of a 'stable', post-Mubarak Egypt, which continues to serve the wider interest of imperialism (like continued adherence to the 1979 'peace treaty' with Israel, cooperation in the 'war against terror', etc).

Then we had another huge demonstration on February 22, which effectively became a protest against the military-initiated government reshuffle of the same day. Needless to say, most of the 'new' cabinet members had served loyally under Mubarak - with the key ministries of defence, interior, finance and justice remaining totally unchanged. Mubarakism lives.

Furious at the continuation of the old order, the protestors - just like their Tunisian brothers and sisters - have called for the resignation of the

entire 'interim' government and the speedy transfer of power to a civilian administration. Quite correctly from a tactical point of view, anti-government activists have concentrated their fire on the former Mubarak placemen, as a battering ram against the regime as a whole. And, of course, all this comes on top of the huge rash of strikes, which has seen workers from every conceivable sector taking action - steel and textile, oil, banking, health, tourism, Cairo Museum, etc (even some police officers). Sometimes the strikers have used the existing official unions, capturing them from the Mubarak-loyal bureaucracy, and sometimes they have used new trade unions. Faced with a weakened government, the workers have been winning concessions - therefore only further increasing their confidence in a virtuous circle. Yes, the working class in Egypt is on the move.

Just as encouragingly, or at least for communists, some youth leaders have opposed the call for elections in the immediate or near future. Quite correct (unlike the Socialist Party in England and Wales, etc, etc). We say this not because we are hostile to elections in principle - far from it. Rather, for the straightforward reason that, given the decades-long working class repression, and the absence of any active tradition or culture of democracy, any such elections would by definition be rigged in favour of powerful elites (not that communists have any objections in principle to participating in rigged elections: look at the outstanding record of the Bolsheviks in the tsarist duma). That is, any elections held now would be decisively skewed in favour of those with money, those with intimate connections and contacts with elements of the old regime and, most of all, those with ties to the United States: which, of course, is forging new links with assorted 'opposition' figures in preparation for elections and beyond, hoping for an "orderly transition".

Therefore it is tactically right to oppose the holding of elections at this point - the working class needs the time and space to grow organisationally and politically - which as a necessity requires freedom of the press, freedom of association, freedom to

form self-defence units, popular militia, etc. This way, by developing its own organisations - not to mention a strategy and programme for emancipation - the workers in Egypt can become a class for *itself*, independent of the liberals, Nasserites, Islamists, nationalists, etc.

Revolutionary

In Libya, the masses have exploded into life - and revolution - against colonel Muammar Gaddafi and his 'Great Socialist People's Libyan Arab Jamahiriya', the latter word being a neologism first coined by Gaddafi in his screwball, three-volume *The green book* (1975) and literally meaning 'state of the masses'. Well, as we can see daily on our TV and computer screens, the Libyan masses have risen up almost as one against the state and the 'Guide of the First of September Great Revolution' or 'Brotherly Leader and Guide of the Revolution' - to repeat just two of Gaddafi's official honorifics.

With events unfolding at lightning speed, changing by the hour, in Libya we are presented with a near textbook or classic revolutionary situation - where the masses *refuse* to be ruled in the old way, and the rulers are *unable* to rule in the old way. Determined to overthrow Gaddafi's cruel dictatorship, which has kept itself in power through terror and intimidation - like the regular showing of public executions on television - the masses initially revolted in Benghazi, Libya's second city. Inevitably, though Benghazi is separated from Tripoli by hundreds of miles, the revolutionary uprising has yet to spread to the capital. When Tripoli falls, the Gaddafi regime is dead.

Equally as determined to hang onto power by any means necessary, the regime has unleashed a barbaric salvo of violence against the masses. Heavy

machine fire, explosives and missiles have been fired into the protesting crowds - with government snipers firing from rooftops. Even aircraft and helicopters have been deployed against arms dumps. Bands of brutal mercenaries roam the streets like death squads, randomly opening fire on protestors - by all accounts some of these gangsters are from Russia and eastern Europe, as well as sub-Saharan Africa, and are purportedly paid huge amounts.² The hospitals have filled up with victims of Gaddafi's terror and when the count is finally done the death toll will be in the thousands.

These are all the crazed tactics of a dying regime. Benghazi, and the eastern half of the country as a whole, has been liberated from state control - as even Gaddafi has admitted (although, of course, he does not phrase it in quite that way). It almost goes without saying that virtually all the tribal elders have deserted the regime - they know which side their bread is buttered. The police have been driven off the streets of many Libyan cities and towns, their premises ransacked for weaponry and other potentially useful material for the revolution. More and more sections of the army are refusing to obey orders and are turning against the regime, exemplified by the two fighter pilots who absconded to Malta rather than fire upon their own people. Indeed, those remaining segments of the military which remain loyal to Gaddafi - for now - have attacked army units which have passed over the side of the people, or at least are perceived to have done so. Ambassadors and diplomats abroad are queuing to denounce their former boss.

Apologists

Communists - genuine communists, that is - will not weep for Gaddafi and his henchmen, whatever their eventual fate. Good riddance to bad rubbish, frankly. But nor will we forget that his foul regime was courted by all manner of political tendencies - the apologists including sections of 'official communism' such as the New Communist Party, Arthur Sacrgill's Socialist Labour Party and, perhaps most infamously, by the Trotskyist Workers Revolutionary Party (which was well rewarded with cash and other subsidies worth at least £500,000).

The wretched WRP professed fealty on countless occasions to the Libyan Jamahiriya - eg, writing about its "support of the Libyan masses under their leader, Muammar Gaddafi".³ That line continues to this day. Hence, the WRP condemns the democratic uprising in Libya. It is led by opportunists who pose "as out-and-out revolutionaries"; that, or contradictorily, it is characterised as "rightwing", "reactionary" and sponsored by a US-UK imperialism bent on getting hold of the country's substantial oil reserves. However, albeit at the 11th hour, we hear criticism of Gaddafi. Apparently he was ill-advised not to identify himself with the mass movements in Tunisia and Egypt. Despite that "major mistake" the WRP urges the "Libyan masses and youth to take their stand alongside colonel Gaddafi to defend the gains of the Libyan

revolution". By way of advice the organisation laughably suggests a "national discussion" in Libya designed to see in the "introduction of workers' control and management of the Libyan economy and society".⁴

Ironically enough, but quite logically, Gaddafi was also cultivated by far-right and fascist organisations and individuals, attracted to his "third international theory" or "third universal theory"⁵ - predicated on an imaginary, and ultimately nightmarish, alternative to both capitalism and communism. At one stage such fascist couriers consisted of Nick Griffin and his then sidekick, Patrick Harrington - a former leading member of the National Front and now swishing in such obscure organisations as Third Way (UK)⁶ and Solidarity - The Union of British Workers⁷. So the WRP found itself in good company then.

What we are witnessing now is profound and deep discontent in the Arab world, which has its own revolutionary momentum and logic. Self-evidently, there are two burning questions - class and the national question. Yes, there *is* an unresolved Arab national question. Egyptians identify with Tunisians, Libyans identify with Egyptians, Yemenis with Jordanians, etc. And that is because they are part of the *same* people, balkanised by history and imperialism. Hence this is a very real question, the Arab masses having seen the royals and sheiks of the region bought off by the imperialists with kingdoms (Saudi Arabia, Jordan, etc). Who will carry out this historic mission task? For communists it can only be the working class - there is no other social-economic force which can do so - and communists are obliged to take the *lead* in fighting for pan-Arab unity.

We in the CPGB have no hesitation in calling for the overthrow of all the region's reactionary regime, 'anti-imperialist' or not, and for revolution. But *proletarian* rule is not on the immediate agenda. Therefore our strategy is for pan-Arab revolution, which can be usefully informed by the Marx-Engels approach to Germany in 1848-51 - ie, that of the revolution in permanence. A perspective somewhat different from Lenin's call for "uninterrupted revolution" in Russia. By 1905, and definitely by 1917, the working class had a distinct and realistic possibility of coming to power in alliance with the peasantry. In the shape of the RDSLП it had a *mass workers' party*, with a clear strategy and global vision.

Obviously, this is just not the case anywhere in the Arab world. Hence the working class should avoid premature bids for power, shun all offers of government posts and instead form itself into a party of extreme opposition which guides the process of revolution and democracy ever onwards to the point when it can carry out its full minimum programme ●

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Notes

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ISRAEL

Nuclear dangers and capabilities

With the decline of US hegemony and the loss of its ally in Egypt Moshé Machover fears that Israeli could react irrationally and launch a spectacular attack on Iran

For nearly 50 years I have been talking and writing about the prospect of an Arab revolution and only last year I said that, while I am confident this is going to happen, "don't hold your breath". What has been taking place has been a nice dress rehearsal, but we can see that the Arab revolution is not such a distant prospect. It is difficult to exaggerate its significance - not only for the region, but also for the whole world and for human history.

It is against this background that I would like to discuss the Wikileaks revelations. One whole section of Wikileaks has to do with the Middle East, and specifically with Israel and Iran.

There have also been other significant leaks. One came from Palestine: someone in the Palestinian Authority, obviously exasperated by the PA's abject stance, released a lot of documents, revealing what everyone knew about the role of the Palestinian Authority. The other set of leaks has been less publicised in Britain and in Israel as well. These were released by a woman who worked in the Israeli military and released a whole lot of documents to an Israeli journalist (who fled to the UK in order to avoid arrest). The woman is now on trial.

The main conclusion that I draw from these multiple leaks on what has been happening supposedly in secret is that there is nothing in them that we did not already know, nor anything that would make us change our position. What these revelations do confirm, however, is that a guerrilla or terrorist war against Iran has been conducted for a number of years by the US and Israel. Mainly using Israeli agents, it has employed espionage, sabotage and even assassinations directed specifically against the nuclear enterprise of the Iranian regime.

There have been two well known cases of nuclear scientists being assassinated in Iran. In one instance an assassin was caught and confessed to being trained in Israel. Another interesting case is that of Iran's former deputy defence minister, Ali-Reza Asgari, who disappeared in 2007 and was believed to have defected to the US. It turns out he was abducted in Turkey by Israel. How do we know this? Well, because he died recently in Israel in Ayalon prison. It is possible that he died of natural causes, but I think this is the least likely explanation. He could have died under torture, but this is also unlikely - Israel does employ torture, but to extract information, not as a simply vindictive or punitive measure. So the most probable explanation, given the circumstances, is that they decided to execute him. They got the information they wanted from him (very little, by the way) long ago and had no further use for him. He was simply an embarrassment, so why not get rid of him? As I say, this is merely speculation, but it is known

that Asgari died in Ayalon prison.

'Dog that didn't bark'

What Wikileaks tells us is that Meir Dagan - the former head of the Israeli intelligence agency, Mossad - claimed some years ago that Iran's nuclear programme is unstoppable and so one probably has to live with it. When Binyamin Netanyahu became prime minister, he promptly sacked Dagan.

Wikileaks also tells us that Israel is set up and ready for an attack on Iran: that is to say, it has contingency plans and is just waiting for the green light. Well, thank you, Columbus, for discovering America! We already knew this. In fact the official reaction from Israel to Wikileaks has been: all this shows is that what we have been saying in public is correct - why should we be embarrassed? This was the semi-official response of the Israeli government and it is true: nothing surprising was revealed by Wikileaks.

What is significant is what Wikileaks does *not* say. For instance, there is nothing in the leaks indicating that Iran is planning to produce nuclear weapons. Western propaganda constantly attempts to sell the message that Iran is set on this course, and the Iranian regime constantly denies it. There is no reason to believe either of them, but on purely rational grounds the most likely scenario is that the Iranian regime is planning to acquire nuclear *capability*. That is not the same as producing nuclear weapons and the Iranian regime is by no means the only state in the world set on this course. That is to say, to be in a position to produce a nuclear weapon if and when necessary in a short space of time. There are many advantages to this - one of which is that it is not prohibited by any international treaty.

If, however, the regime was planning more than that, then one would have expected some information in Wikileaks about more tangible steps. By this I do not mean a fully-fledged nuclear test - in order to actually use a nuclear weapon you do not need to have performed such a test: it is useful, but not necessary.

Take the example of Israel. Already at the time of the 1967 war, Israel is known to have had not only nuclear capability, but actual nuclear weapons. There are multiple grounds for this, published in many reports, and it is more or less agreed by all experts. Of course, this is not officially acknowledged, but everyone who has written on the subject accepts that Israel already had nuclear weapons in 1967 and was thinking of using them - not in its actual attack on Egypt, but as a standby if the war went wrong. Of course, the war did not go wrong for Israel, so the question did not arise. In the 1973 war initiated by Egyptian president Anwar Sadat, Israel was taken by surprise and its generals were seriously considering the use of nuclear weapons. However, the first fully-fledged nuclear test by Israel did not occur until September 1979. However,



Moshé Machover

in November 1966 Israel had conducted what is known as a 'cold test', where the mechanism needed to detonate the bomb is tested, as opposed to causing an actual explosion.

So, if Iran was actually on the verge of producing nuclear weapons, one would expect some information about it in Wikileaks - there is no way that Iran can be in a position to fire a nuclear weapon without at least having undertaken a cold test. This is the 'dog that didn't bark': there is no evidence that anything like this is happening. In summary, nothing that has been revealed changes for me the most likely scenario - Iran wants to achieve nuclear capability; it is not attempting to produce nuclear weapons.

Momentous

Let me turn now to the Arab revolution and explain why current events are so momentous for the Middle East and the whole world. This is because they are a sure and clear sign of the decline of American hegemony. (I would not like to comment on whether world capitalism is in decline - I like to keep an open mind on this. I hope it is, but we will know later on, after the event!) The decline of US hegemony is palpable.

The US is losing control in Latin America, and has lost ground in sub-Saharan Africa. However, Latin America and sub-Saharan Africa are not the Middle East; the Middle East is strategically the most important part of the world - the most important pillar for American domination.

I say this for two reasons. The first is an old one: the Suez Canal in Egypt, which has been a vital trade route since 1869. The second reason has been with us since 1913: oil (1913 was the year the British navy converted from coal to oil). Nothing that happens in the Middle East is unrelated to oil.

Egypt is the most important country in the region. It is the most highly populated, at around 83 million (by comparison, Turkey and Iran have a populace of around 77 million), and is the key Arab country. Although it does

not have much oil itself, the Middle East tends to follow developments in Egypt.

However, the immediate reaction of US secretary of state Hillary Clinton was to affirm that the state was stable. This showed that, not only had the US lost control: it was not even properly informed about what was happening. The US knew there was resentment from below, but it felt the regime was able to deal with it.

This will have tremendous implications for the rearrangement of American power. Of course, it would like to recoup some of its influence (although it will not be able to recover all of it, no matter what happens). Even if a military dictatorship is re-established in Egypt, which is not the most likely scenario, that would not produce the same reliability and stability as the Mubarak regime. It is not just a feeling throughout the Middle East and the Arab world that the region is no longer a secure asset. It is a fact. I repeat: Egypt is the key country and the Middle East is the most important strategic area in the world for American domination.

It is no coincidence that the last stand of British imperialism was played out in Egypt in 1956. Anyone can see how big the change was. Take one example: if you look at pictures from the Suez war protests in Trafalgar Square, all the men were wearing hats! Yet after 1956 no-one wore a hat any more: this is just a symbol of how life changed completely - not only in Britain, but in the world. Similarly, today everything is going to change.

Israel's allies

From the point of view of Israel, the loss of Egypt as a secure ally is even more momentous. Israel used to have two allies in the region: Iran and Turkey. It lost Iran in 1979 after the revolution, but fortunately for Israel it got Egypt at the same time through the peace treaty (and Jordan too, but that is far less important). Turkey is no longer a secure ally, and this not just because of the Mavi Marmara: that was merely a *manifestation* of the shift in Turkish policy towards Israel for its own reasons. Now Egypt, an absolutely crucial ally for local Israel hegemony and a sub-contractor of American imperialism in the region, appears to be lost.

As everyone knows, Israeli forces were evacuated from Gaza in 2005 on the assumption that Israel could with impunity maintain a siege at less cost financially and militarily. But the collusion and complicity of the Egyptian regime was crucial to this because of the border at Rafah, which is half in Gaza and half in Sinai.

The strategy of keeping the Palestinian Authority divided between Gaza and the West Bank, in order to control the Palestinians the better, is also conducted through Egypt. Egypt is supposed to be the mediator between the two arms, but in fact it does Israel's job by keeping them apart and preventing a coalition.

There are also other implications

that are not often commented on. Since the peace treaty with Egypt, Israel has been able to drastically cut its military forces in the south. Before 1979 the biggest concentration of the Israeli military was in the southern command, facing Egypt, but afterwards this was very much depleted - it was just not needed from the point of view of the Israeli military. Later the central command facing Jordan was also cut.

Israeli military expenditure costs a fortune, as does that of Egypt, but both are funded by America. The Egyptian military costs the US taxpayer around \$1.5 billion a year, while the Israeli military bill is more than twice that. With the changing circumstances in the region, even this will not be enough - Israel could well have to pay more itself. At the moment it is economically prospering, but because of what has happened in Egypt and the prospect of increased military expenditure, this is under threat.

Another important factor is that Israelis use gas for cooking much more than electricity, but 40% of Israel's gas supply comes from Egypt through the pipeline in the Sinai (which has now blown up - maybe by accident, maybe not).

So what are the political conclusions? In a situation like this there is a lot of uncertainty - a state threatened with loss of power or influence can react in unpredictable ways. Look how Britain and France reacted over Suez in 1956. It was a stupid war and, worse, they did not inform the Americans what they were intending. It has been noted many times that declining powers tend sometimes to react in very irrational ways. While Obama appears so far to have reacted rationally to events in the Arab world, that may not mean much. Besides, who knows who the next US president will be and what he or she may do? There are various factions within American imperialism, all pulling different ways.

As for Israel, for its own local reasons it is allied with the most adventurous and the most aggressive section within the American ruling elite. In a situation where Israel is losing huge political, military and economic assets, it is possible that it may react in an irrational way - or in a way that in retrospect may seem irrational.

So the conclusion that I draw is that we should maintain our vigilance. The dangers of an Israeli attack cannot be ruled out - I mean a fully-fledged attack, not a terroristic, low-intensity war against Iran, of the type which has been going on all the time, but something much more spectacular. Such an attack might be carried out in order to try to reverse Israel's loss of influence and be supported by the more irrational and aggressive section of the American ruling class.

We have seen inspiring events that point the way to the Arab revolution. But we are entering a period of instability and that implies a lot of dangers as well ●

KURDISTAN

Self-determination and the

The Communist Party of Iran is an ex-Maoist organisation, which now states it is 'closer to Trotskyism'. On his recent trip to Iraqi Kurdistan, Rozh Ahmad visited the camp run by Komalah, the CPI grouping in Kurdistan, and spoke to **Hassan Rahman Panah**, a member of its central committee

What are the aims of Komalah?

We are a Marxist organisation, and our maximum programme is to destroy capitalism and replace it with a workers' state in Iran. Our socialist demands are the same as those in the CPI's programme. However, as there is national oppression in Kurdistan, ending this is one of our prime goals. We are fighting for people's judicial power in Kurdistan, which was agreed upon at our latest congress.

Our party believes that the Iranian state is run by a theocratic, dictatorial regime. It has created a barrier which denies people their basic democratic rights, and so the destruction of this theocratic regime and its replacement by a democratic government through mass workers' participation is the only way to guarantee the democratic rights of the people of Iran.

Of course, socialism is what we are aiming for and we do not think of it as a distant goal. However, socialism cannot be achieved through a single political party: it needs the mass of workers to be organised. But a mass, conscious proletariat could only come through the collapse of the theocratic dictatorship in Iran.

How much support does Komalah-CPI enjoy among the Iranian people?

I do not want to spout propaganda - you can ask others - but we are one of the main opposition forces in the country. For example, six years ago we called for a general strike; the call was opposed by almost all of the other Iranian opposition forces, including those in exile. But we went ahead with it and it met with a good response. The mass support for the strike forced even the Iranian regime to respond to its demands. Last year we called for another general strike in Kurdistan, and this time it was supported by all the different political organisations

**Pershmerga: self-defence**

that had learned from their mistakes in the recent past. It was actually supported from the right as well as the left of the Kurdish movement, and again it was a success.

This demonstrated the strength of our support among the people in Kurdistan. Also, due to the fact that Komalah has a history in Kurdistan (our organisation was in control of the Kurdish region of Iran after the 1979 revolution), the differences in terms of practice are clear, when people compare us to the nationalist forces, such as the Democratic Party of Kurdistan-Iran (PDKI).

On occasions such as May Day celebrations and March 8 [International Women's Day], there are always strikes, demonstrations and other anti-establishment activities. I do not want to claim that those activities are entirely led by us - they include other workers' and women's rights activists in Iran, but they are often inspired by our programme.

Recently, we have been quite influential in Iran too, especially in the universities and in the workers' unions in Tehran, Esfahan, Khuzestan and even in Azerbaijan. You can see

this too in our media outlets, which illustrates that we are a movement growing among the people of Iran. Nevertheless, you should not forget that our demands and activities are opposed with an iron fist by the theocratic regime. Hence the struggle is underground and limited too, but in recent years, through our media, especially our radio and TV stations, the message has been spread widely and the broadcast of our demands through these channels has given us the opportunity to win strong support from the people. So, yes, we see ourselves as a movement growing among the masses and the poor.

Here in this camp the comrades are armed. How do you view armed struggle?

The armed struggle was a tactic to defend ourselves; it was imposed on us by the Islamic regime after Khomeini announced a jihad against the Kurdish people in Iran. When our organisation was in control of the Kurdish region, there was complete freedom during that period; there were no political prisoners and nobody was ever executed for their political affiliation. Most of the Iranian newspapers and magazines came to Kurdistan despite being banned in Tehran.

The armed struggle was a tactic and it has been fairly successful in defending the people. If we had not carried out that struggle, Khomeini and the Islamic regime's forces could have destroyed Kurdistan and carried out mass atrocities similar to what happened in the Kurdish region of Iraq.

Our activities mainly consist of civil and mass political struggle, but if we did not have guns we would not be able to defend our media. We carry guns to defend the political and also the civil struggle that we are trying to carry out in Iran today among university students, in the workers' unions and women's organisations. We are envisaging a society where there are no guns. We even criticise some small groups carrying out armed struggle in Iran for giving the regime an excuse to militarise Kurdistan. The struggle

is in the cities, in the factories and among the oppressed in Iran.

What are the main differences between Komalah-CPI and other opposition forces?

I will tell you about our differences with other organisations on the left, because I do not really consider the monarchists and other such groups as opposition forces. Generally we do not differ so much in our programmes - we all demand a workers' state, socialism, etc. The differences are on tactical issues regarding our daily struggle and the strategy for that struggle.

For our part, we do not believe we can achieve our goals just through increasing our membership. However, other forces, even though they are very small at present, argue that through gaining thousands of cadres they could bring about socialism. We do not believe in one organisation gaining power and handing it to the workers. Komalah-CPI believes our aims and objectives can only be achieved through mass, organised, conscious workers. There must be organisation from below and conscious participation of the workers in the process to set up their own state. So in Iran the differences are in our daily, practical struggle.

In Kurdistan it is different, because there is a cause which involves all of us, from the right to the left of the movement, and that is the right of the Kurdish nation to self-determination. The differences are between federalism and the right of Kurdish nation to form its own independent state. All the other Kurdish forces are demanding federalism, when the right to self-determination is a basic democratic right of every nation. They fear being labelled rebels or separatists by demanding that democratic right, but we clearly state that Kurdistan must separate from Iran if the Kurdish people demand it.

From the experience of other nations around the world, it is clear that federalism is the wrong way to go about it. The experience of the

Successful strike

On February 22, a one-day general strike against the Iranian regime closed down Kurdish towns and cities. In Mahabad anti-government protestors torched a truck belonging to the Revolutionary Guards, who opened fire, wounding at least four people. There are reports of demonstrations and protests from Bukan, Sardasht, Sanandaj, Saqez, Marivan, Kermanshah and Kamyaran.

Previously, on Sunday February 20, thousands of Iranians in Tehran had joined protests on the seventh day of the 'martyrdom' of two students killed during the February 14 demonstrations. The regime had hoped to contain the opposition by isolating the leaders of the green movement. An iron fence was erected outside the entrance of Mir-Hossein Mousavi's residence and his personal guards replaced by security forces loyal to the regime, suggesting that the 'reformist' figurehead is facing a long detention. Fellow prominent 'reformist' Mehdi Karroubi is also under house arrest.

However, the reality is that the movement acts independently of these 'leaders'. For example, the

evening before the February 20 demonstrations cries of "Allahu Akbar" came from rooftops all around Tehran and did not die down until dawn. On the Sunday morning, security forces and bassij militia were deployed throughout the capital. But despite the intimidation thousands of protestors showed up in the streets and main squares of the capital. In the early evening crowds gathered outside the main, state-owned radio and television channel and, showing their determination to bring down the entire regime headed by supreme leader Ali Khamenei, they shouted "Death to dictator" and "Khamenei must go". There are short videos on the internet of crowds attacking the bassiji and plain-clothes security men who had been trying to break up the demonstrations. Similar protests were held in Shiraz (where one student was killed), as well as Isfahan, Tabriz, Mashhad and Rasht.

Meanwhile, workers at the Abadan oil refinery have continued their strike and occupation. As with many other groups of workers, they took action in response to the non-payment of wages - they have not been paid for the last six months.

There have been clashes with security forces, but the sit-in and strike still continue, with the company blaming subcontractors and denying responsibility for the fact that their workers have received no wages.

Despite this, ayatollah Khamenei announced on February 4: "Based on reports that I have received, the country will be completely self-sufficient in the production of gasoline by February 11." People across Iran facing increased prices across the board as a result of the removal of fuel subsidies might not believe him.

As in Libya, we could be witnessing the crumbling of the old power structure, with state officials and diplomats beginning to abandon the regime. In Italy, Ahmad Maleki, the head of Iran's consular office in Milan, resigned his post in protest at his government's "barbaric actions against the Iranian nation". He told reporters there are "many others" in the Iranian foreign ministry who are unhappy with the government ●

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The fight for a socialist state

Kurdistan regional government in Iraq shows that, as does the experience of Palestine, India and other countries around the world. So why not fight for the right of the people to choose their own fate? As in the separation of Slovakia and the Czech Republic, it is a democratic right and we defend it to the core in our democratic programme to guarantee the rights of every nation and ethnicity within Iran - and that includes the right to secede.

When you talk about setting up a democratic state are you referring to a two-stage theory to achieve socialism?

In Iran there is no separation of state and religion and there are no democratic rights. Very basic rights - for women, children, for the different nations and other ethnic minorities, and so on - are not recognised by the system. If the working class could gain the strength to build socialism, that would be great. However, the workers need to go through a stage to do that. We are fighting for a government that could guarantee all democratic rights, similar to the rights recognised in Europe today, such as freedom of the press, equality between men and women, and the right of nations to self-determination. These are the pre-conditions that could open the closed road to building a socialist state in Iran.

Now, we disagree with the Stalinist notion of a democratic state as part of the two-stage theory. The idea of socialism in one country was brought into so-called Marxism by Stalin. If we go back to Marx, he did not even imply a single party for each country. As a matter of fact, he participated in the International Working Men's Association. We reject the Stalinist

theory - quite popular among the Iranian left, particularly among the reformists - that calls for a democratic government without workers' control. By contrast, we think that such a democratic government *has* to be under workers' control.

Stalinism and Soviet-type communism ditched international socialism and disabled many great socialist movements around the world for the USSR's benefit. For example, the Soviet Union turned its back on the first ever Kurdish republic in Iranian territory (aka Republic of Mahabad), which was established by Qazi Muhammad in 1946, because of the Soviet Union's relations with the monarchy in Iran. The Kurdish republic was sacrificed for Soviet political interests.

Some of the communist parties in the Middle East were among the biggest in the world, but they were decimated by Stalinism, and revolutionary communists were executed. For instance, Avetis Sultanzadeh, who was a great leader in the Iranian communist movement and its well-known representative in the Third International, was executed by the Soviet Union in the 1930s. This was all done in the name of Marxism. The Communist Party of Iraq had one million members after the republican revolution in 1958 - it had 500,000 members on the streets of Baghdad celebrating May Day that year. But its policies were determined by Moscow's interests, and the communists were told not to take power in Iraq.

So we reject that theory. But the problem is not whether socialism is practicable in Iran or not - many who insist on that sort of black and white

analysis do so in order to argue it is not. Is socialism possible in the US, Canada, Britain or Japan? The debate cannot be black and white. It has to do with the consciousness of the working class and whether the movement is powerful enough.

Our organisation views the democratic state from the point of view of the balance of class forces. If the workers and the toilers in Iran have more strength than the bourgeoisie, then it is obvious and absolutely possible for the workers to take power and begin the process of building socialism.

Komalah-CPI publications are full of references to internationalism. How do you view Hugo Chávez's call to build a fifth international?

We do not even consider Chávez to be a socialist. He supports Ahmadinejad, one of the biggest capitalist murderers in Middle East, so how could people trust him to build socialism? He supports a government which murders youth, women and political prisoners.

This region has had many examples of people claiming to be anti-imperialist. Saddam Hussein Iraq was another one - like Ahmadinejad he was fond of so-called 'anti-imperialist' slogans. But he carried out mass atrocities against the Kurds here, gassed Halabja town in 1988 and destroyed many villages in Operation Anfal, the attempt by the former regime in Iraq to ethnically cleanse the Kurds in 1987-88. Yet he was labelled a socialist by some.

We think Chávez came to power as a result of US oppression in Latin America and America's long war against freedom lovers in that entire

continent. We do not consider his administration to be a socialist government built by workers and the poor from below. Power is not in the hands of the Venezuelan working class.

As a Communist Party we are internationalists, but we do not belong to any international. We have participated in international communist aggregations, but we have not concluded we ought to become a member. This year we participated in an international conference of communist and socialist organisations in Germany, where, as well as European communists, there were representatives from Latin America and Asia. But we were there as observers.

Our party has ideological and political differences with the Trotskyist internationals, even though we share some similarities. But we do not have any common ground with the Stalinists and the Maoists. We consider ourselves closer to the Trotskyists, who are more radical. We have activists in Europe, especially Norway and Sweden, who have relations with working class organisations, and we exchange different analyses on the movement's politics and strategy with them.

The European workers' movement is very weak - in fact that has been the case since World War II. There have been movements capable of destroying capitalism in France and other European countries, but the trade union bureaucracy looks to the bourgeoisie and is incapable of leading a movement to transform society, or even to develop a vision for a socialist society as an alternative to capitalism.

If there had been a communist international and a European

Communist Party, do you think the situation would have been different?

This is really the weakness of the communist movement around the world, including our own organisation. When there was an international in Marx's lifetime with the *Communist manifesto* as its programme, the workers' movement was politically armed in Europe and America. Currently such a thing does not exist and that is our weakness.

There are other factors too, such as the hegemony of neoliberalism, and the coming to power of governments such as that of Thatcher in Britain, which almost destroyed the powerful workers' movement. Then there were those states that were claiming to be communist like the Soviet Union. To this day, China still claims to be a 'communist' country (one where, according to a recent survey, 3,000 workers died in coal mines in 2008). This is useful propaganda for the capitalists in order to blind the workers and lie about genuine socialism and communism.

So, yes, Komalah-CPI believes in internationalism. This does not mean we claim to be leading revolutions in China or Europe. We are carrying out that struggle in Iran, where we are trying to lead the workers' movement, but we need to be part of an international, which does not exist. The capitalist system is a global system; we have to be a global organisation to challenge it. This applies to organisations all over the world. For example, to oppose the capitalists who have come together in the European Union, the movement needs a European workers' union and a European Communist Party ●

Release all political prisoners

John McDonnell MP launched the new campaign, 'Free Jafar Panahi and all political prisoners in Iran', at the February 12 annual conference of Hands Off the People of Iran

This campaign is at the heart of Hopi's work for the coming year. We formed Hopi at a time when there was a real danger of imminent attack on Iran, right after the war on Iraq. While opposing any imperialist attacks, we positioned ourselves in clear, active solidarity with the people of Iran who are fighting against their theocratic regime. That also led us to clearly oppose all sanctions on the country, because in our view that is just another form of imperialism attacking the people of Iran. I think we have successfully engaged others in that discussion.

It is clear that threat of a military attack and an invasion has still not gone. For example, you will have heard Tony Blair's speech before the Chilcot enquiry. With his last words he effectively called on the imperialist powers to invade Iran. And, of course, we have seen the recent cyber-attacks on the country. The threat continues and the imperialists will not give up.

However, at the moment there is a certain quietude. Partially this has to do with other activities in their spheres of influence that the imperialists are anxious about, for example in Afghanistan. And there is an acceptance that, as long as the Iranian regime is quiet, 'maybe we can turn a blind eye'. And that is why we have not had

any major political leader in the west take on the question of Iranian political prisoners in a serious way. We have not heard any British politician in government raise the issue of Jafar Panahi, for example.

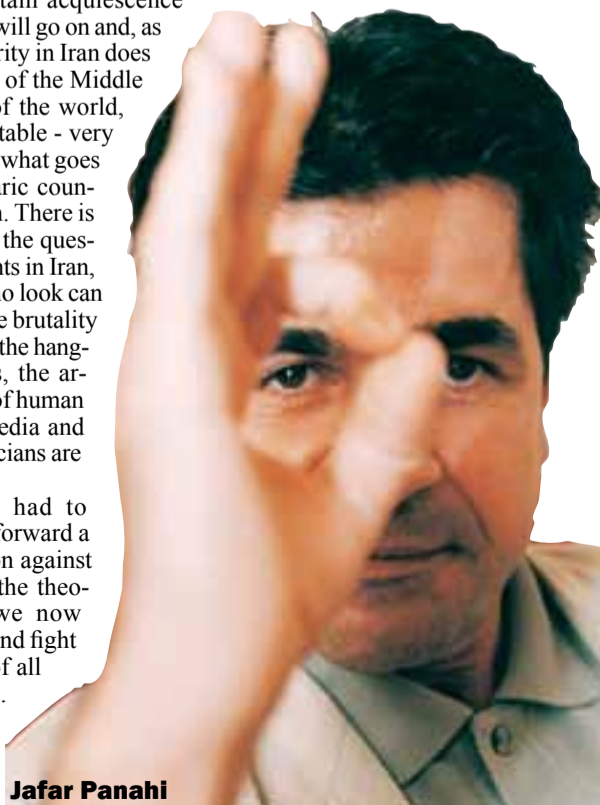
There is a certain acquiescence that the barbarity will go on and, as long as this barbarity in Iran does not affect the rest of the Middle East or the rest of the world, it is almost acceptable - very much in line with what goes on in other barbaric countries in that region. There is a real vacuum on the question of human rights in Iran, whereby those who look can easily discover the brutality of the executions, the hangings, the tortures, the arrests, the denials of human rights. But the media and mainstream politicians are not interested.

Just as Hopi had to stand up and put forward a principled position against war and against the theocratic regime, we now have to stand up and fight for the freedom of all political prisoners.

The responsibility falls on our shoulders, because no-

body else is doing it.

We are focusing on Jafar Panahi, because campaigns like this need a symbolic figure - in the same way that in the anti-apartheid campaigns we focused on



Jafar Panahi

Nelson Mandela, but, of course, we fought for the freedom of all political prisoners. By focusing on a well-known name like Jafar Panahi, we will be able to raise the campaign to a higher level.

We all have to set time and resources aside for this campaign and approach it in a systematic manner. Just like when we launched Hopi, we again have to focus on the union and labour movement, get articles in their journals and websites, organise for resolutions and fringe meetings at union conferences, and conduct discussions with MPs and political parties.

The parliamentary wing of Hopi, which includes myself, Jeremy Corbyn and a few others, will put forward early day motions and will try to lobby other MPs, including those who are now in government. We are also trying to organise some activities in parliament - for example, show some of Panahi's films and get along intellectuals and artists to discuss the campaign and the issues. In other words, we will also run a parliamentary campaign.

Of course, we also need to mobilise artists and film makers to act in solidarity with Panahi. In addition to that, we also want to reach wider civil society and in that respect I think last year's film showing in the Soho Theatre was a breakthrough, which

attracted a whole new audience. We should also not shy away from engaging with religious groups, for example, who are working on human rights matters.

All the way through we have to discuss with these forces on how the theocratic regime can be got rid of. Clearly, this can only be achieved through the actions of the working people of Iran themselves. The only consistent force that can bring about long-term stability in a secular society is the workers' movement.

That is a fairly extensive range of work. But we have done it before and I think we can do it again.

The situation in Egypt provides an ideal opportunity to raise these issues. I attended a demonstration in Trafalgar Square and, although the organisers had printed their placards only 24 hours earlier, they were already out of date and still contained the call for Mubarak to go. But this shows what is possible, how quickly things change and that this can also be achieved in Iran.

Only the people of Iran can bring down this regime. Our task is to assist them as best as we can. If our campaign brings just one release for one political prisoner, if just one prisoner can get some hope from a clipping about our activities smuggled into prison, then I think our campaign is already successful ●

DISCUSSION

A Marxist culture free from the taint of Stalinism

In the first of two articles, **Paul B Smith** argues that Marxism must be distinguished from Stalinism if a new generation of anti-capitalists fighters are to be properly educated. The starting point must be Marx's *Capital*

There are signs of a revival of interest in Marxism. These are visible beyond the boundaries of disintegrating leftwing groups and the specialities of an academic division of labour. I offer a lecture on *Capital* recently as evidence. Over 20 people paid £10 each to attend a two-hour session on Marxism.

I subscribe to *Critique*. This is a journal of socialist theory edited by Hillel Ticktin in Glasgow. Whilst in Glasgow, I helped form a supporters' group to promote ideas from the journal. The group initiated the Campaign for a Marxist Party five years ago. This was an attempt to bring socialist or communist groups together on the basis of a shared political project.

The CMP was short-lived and proved unable to meet various challenges. These included differences over the nature and urgency of adopting a political programme; impatience over involvement in electoral campaigning; suspicion and distrust between members with Labourite, Stalinist and Trotskyist heritages; and an indifference to (some might say celebration of) *ad hominem* argument.

The failure of the CMP does not mean that every attempt at reconciliation and fusion is impossible - nor that the challenges of resolving the problems of party, programme, electoral involvement and mutual distrust cannot be successfully met. This will take place within a Marxist environment. I argue below that this does not yet exist. The crucial reason is the destructive intellectual, political and moral legacy of Stalinism. Collusive with this is the continual effort to keep commodity fetishism alive in reality and as ideology.

Few people today distinguish between Marxism and Stalinism. I define Marxism as the knowledge the proletariat needs to rule and create the conditions for a democratically planned, classless society worldwide. At the centre of this is political economy. Stalinism produced no knowledge of any worth. It attempted to destroy Marxism in the name of 'Marxism'. The fact it failed is a tribute to the work of a few relatively isolated individuals.

The CMP's motion committing the group to Marxist education pointed in the direction of the culture needed to overcome the challenges facing socialists or communists today. It symbolised the reality that there are revolutionaries who might be persuaded to make the teaching and learning of Marxism within and outwith higher education a priority. Organising around education is the means to creating a Marxist culture. Efforts to build a mass working class party based on the working class and a Marxist culture are complementary and mutually reinforcing.

I had two brilliant Marxist teachers when I studied at Glasgow University's Centre for Socialist Theory and Movements from 1985 to 1988: Scott Meikle and Hillel Ticktin. Their influence is evident in the text that follows. The latter embodies an understanding of a world emerging out of the cold war. This is based on

my reading of the pristine Marxism these teachers tried to advance. The simplification, distortions and mistakes are my own.

Introduction

Capitalism is experiencing its gravest and deepest crisis since the 1930s. The near collapse of the world's banking system in 2008 led to huge government bailouts. These included nationalising various banks and injecting large amounts of public money into the financial system. In the UK alone, the government used £200 billion of state revenue to buy financial assets through so-called 'quantitative easing'. The US government is spending a further \$600 billion in this way to try to kick-start a sluggish economy. Meanwhile in this country, the government has announced cuts in public expenditure that will mean between 500,000 and a million job losses over the next four years. This is at a time when official unemployment figures in the UK are two and a half million and there are eight million people who are defined as "economically inactive".

Since 2008, journalists, politicians and academics have written a number of books describing the events leading up to and during the crash. The stories these books tell have passed into popular culture with Hollywood films such as *Wall St: money never sleeps*. They focus on the activities of greedy bankers, corrupt politicians and deluded economists.

The tendency in the literature has been to seek scapegoats for the crisis. The bankers are to blame for having a misplaced confidence in speculative forms of investment; politicians for failing to regulate the banks; and economists for giving the politicians and bankers the information and ideas to act on. For example, Gordon Brown was supposed to be the most economically aware prime minister the UK has ever had. He stated that Britain's previous history of economic instability - of booms and busts - was finally over. Economists had deluded themselves into thinking that unregulated markets were supremely efficient. They thought that individuals' economic behaviour was always rational and the only phenomenon needed studying was the movement of prices.

The scapegoating of economists is paradoxical. Economists have tended to conceive of society as the product of the decisions of a collection of separate individuals. Individuals engage with one another because it is in their self-interest to do so. Blaming economists for this belief, however, only reinforces it. It reverses the notion that the pursuit of self-interest is rational into its opposite - self-interested motivation is immoral or corrupt.

The blame game is a distraction. It reduces the task of explaining and predicting tendencies within an evolving political and economic system to individual psychology. Karl Marx commented on the psychology of economists over a hundred years ago. He wrote in *Capital* that economists were no longer concerned about whether their doctrines were true or

false. All they were interested in was whether they were useful or harmful to the accumulation of capital - whether they were expedient or inexpedient, or whether they were or were not politically dangerous.

A neglected masterpiece

Marx's *Capital* is a masterpiece of world literature. Yet the book's contribution to world culture is neglected. Among the reasons for its neglect is that it is not useful to the accumulation of capital. The ideas in *Capital* cannot be used to manage the present crisis. The book will not help people who want to see capitalism come out of it stronger and healthier. Moreover, the study of the book is no longer central to the culture of anti-capitalist critics and activists - including some people who call themselves socialists or communists.

In Michael Moore's latest documentary *Capitalism: a love story*, Moore offers viewers a humane and witty critique of the system. He sees capitalism clearly as a cause of economic oppression. He notes correctly that those who benefit from it act within an oppressor role and those who lose out are oppressed and victimised. However, when investigating the nature of the system, he ignores Marx, Marxist intellectuals or members of Marxist political groups. Instead he turns to the Roman Catholic church. He interviews radical priests who condemn capitalism as evil and inhumane.

Christianity's denunciation of those who make money out of money is ancient. Readers familiar with the Christian *New testament* will recall the story of Christ's overturning of the tables of the money-lenders in the temple. They will remember Paul saying that the love of money is the root of all evil. The ancient prescription against usury condemns the attempt to make money out of money. It can be found in all the major religions. Basing a critique of modern capitalism on it is highly limited. A religious form of anti-capitalism tends to view the present crisis as a crisis of morality. Moral failure or sinfulness is the cause of unemployment, exploitation, alienation and dispossession. The remedy is religious revival, not socialist revolution.

Religiously inspired anti-capitalism looks back to the pre-capitalist past fondly. Prior to capitalism, the surplus product did not take the form of value. Markets were for the exchange of consumable goods, not for making money out of money. Criticism of interest-bearing capital helps anti-capitalists target finance capital. However, it ignores the historical origins of finance capital. It ignores its attempt to escape an engagement with living labour in the productive process. Moreover, small businesses are exempt from condemnation. During crises, they are more often than not oppressed by the banks and lose out in competition with larger companies. They are victims too. Applied to the contemporary world, a religious critique of capitalism is partial and inadequate.

A full critique both negates the system as a whole and poses a positive socialist alternative. Rightwing politicians describe all forms of government interventions as 'socialist'. They associate socialism with the former Soviet Union and tyranny. This is a point Michael Moore ridicules in his film. Both advocates and critics of capitalism share the fear that an alternative to capitalism might turn out to be worse than its survival in a declining and decaying form. I shall argue here that this is the chief reason for the neglect of *Capital* as a work of socialist theory.

Capital is a large book. It has four volumes - the last of which, *Theories of surplus value*, consists of three sections. Marx supervised the editing of the first volume only. The later three volumes were edited by his friend and ally, Friedrich Engels. It is the first volume only that we find in the bookshops for sale. The edition most of the educated public are familiar with is published as part of the Penguin classics series. For this article, I have used Trotsky's selected readings from volume 1. This was first published in 1939 and republished in 2006 with the title *The essential Marx*.¹

Throughout this article, I refer to two contributing factors to the neglect of the book. The first is the influence of living and working within a capitalist society - in particular our exposure to what Marx called commodity fetishism. The second is the absence of a vital socialist movement. I explain the latter as a result of the influence of Stalinism. Stalinism is the doctrine that it is possible to build socialism in a backward country, separated from the rest of the world. The doctrine was realised in the anti-human and totalitarian regimes found in countries such as the former Soviet Union, eastern Europe and China. These regimes killed millions of good men and women, among them thousands - perhaps hundreds of thousands - of Marxists. A theme I want to develop here is Hillel Ticktin's description of Stalinism as "anti-Marxism dressed up as Marxism".²

I argue the book is relevant to understanding the world today. I do not think *Capital* is too hard to understand. This complaint is not new. Its rehearsal as a reason for avoiding the text is, however, relatively recent. Marx, himself, recognised that the first chapter would be the most difficult part for the reader. He attributed this not to a lack of transparency (or poor expression), but to the fact that people had been trying to understand the value form with no success for thousands of years.

The value form

Marx mentioned that the ancient Greek philosopher, Aristotle, had tried to grapple with a problem. How could one commodity or quantity of commodities have a value equivalent to another commodity or sum of commodities? Marx quoted Aristotle and used the same examples as Aristotle. How could it be, for example, that five beds could equal one house in value? And how could it be that five beds could equal a certain quantity of money? What was it that made things

so different as a bed, a house and money commensurable as values? Aristotle grappled with these questions, but could not come up with any answers. He gave up.

Marx, however, not only gave an answer, but also an explanation for Aristotle's problem. Marx answered that the substance commodities and money had in common was socially equalised human labour. The form socially equalised human labour takes in capitalism is what Marx called 'abstract labour'. He believed the doubling of the form of social labour into concrete and abstract labour within a commodity-producing society was - along with his treatment of surplus value - the most important of his discoveries.

Marx explained that Aristotle could not conceive of abstract labour as the substance making commodities commensurable, because his society was based on slavery. Slave-owners such as Aristotle assumed that individuals were naturally unequal. Surplus produce was not generated through exchange. It was pumped out of slaves through force. Marx, on the other hand, was able to make the connection because he lived in a society based on generalised commodity production. Everyone was an actual or potential commodity owner. For example, even if the only commodity they possessed was their capacity to work, as commodity owners workers had equal rights in law with their employers. The equalisation of labour-time was therefore built into the system.

Marx called workers' capacity to work 'labour-power'. Like other commodity owners, workers entered into a contractual relationship with a capitalist. They sold their labour-power as a commodity. In return for the capitalist's use of their labour-power for a certain length of time, workers received a wage. People accepted the formal equality of individuals as an unquestioned assumption. Unlike slavery, within capitalism, surplus produce took the form of value and was pumped out of workers. Workers were slaves to a wage, not to a particular master. They were legally free, but coerced and oppressed economically. They had little or no control over the product or process of their labour. As a result, the capitalist could make workers work for hours they had not been paid for - an unequal exchange. In other words, workers were alienated and exploited.

These ideas are in the first few chapters of *Capital*. The question is whether they are too hard to understand. If they are difficult, maybe this is because they are unfamiliar. For example, the commodity has become such an all-pervasive part of everyone's everyday existence that many workers do not question why people exchange something as obvious as their ability to work within a certain length of time for a definite sum of money. Many people take for granted that this has always been the case and will always continue to be the case. They think that a world without commodities would either be contrary to human nature or an unrealisable utopia.

Other workers may be horrified by the commodification of such things as sex, the human body and the daily pressures to consume. Yet they might still be surprised or puzzled when asked to think about what it is that makes a commodity equal to another in value.

The idea that money is a commodity too and that what makes all commodities capable of being equated with each other is the human labour expended on them is not obvious. The term 'market forces' is familiar, but it is not associated with the idea that commodities are exchanged according to the socially necessary labour expended on them. Workers may not know that prices can oscillate above and below values. They may also find the idea that money and capital are expressions of social relations, not of things, hard to grasp. Much of the knowledge on the relationship between value and labour has been lost or forgotten.

The fact that Marx admitted that the first chapter of the book is difficult to understand is, on the other hand, no excuse for giving up. Each reader must make his or her judgement as to whether it is worth pursuing Marx's arguments to their conclusion. Marx wanted readers who were willing to learn something new and therefore to think for themselves. The problem readers have today is the kind of support they can expect to get in helping them to understand difficulties when they arise.

The problem of support divides into two overlapping parts. The first part assumes that readers are students struggling to learn within the academic division of labour. The second part assumes that they are struggling to learn in order to improve the clarity of their thinking on how to change the world. They overlap because there are academics who want to change the world through their intellectual work and because there are people on the left who see the importance of organising around socialist or communist ideas outwith the limits of higher (or other forms of adult) education.

Another way of putting the problem of finding support in reading *Capital* is to state that, at present, it does not exist. One reason is that the survival of a few tiny leftwing groups does not constitute a movement for socialism. Another reason is that, as I mentioned previously, the doctrines found in *Capital* are not capable of being used to manage capitalism. It is difficult, therefore, to justify the teaching of it to undergraduates. Thus, apart from a few maverick academics, the teaching of *Capital* within higher education is non-existent.

Political economy

Marx's subtitle for the book is *A critical analysis of capitalist production*. In some editions this is paraphrased as *A critique of political economy*. Modern political economy developed in parallel with the growth of capitalism in the 17th and 18th centuries. Capitalism, or 'commercial society', was its object of study. It emerged from a branch of moral philosophy called jurisprudence - now called the philosophy of law. The 18th century Scottish author of the *Wealth of nations* - Adam Smith - described political economy as the science of the legislator. Political economy was the body of knowledge that the newly triumphant capitalist class required to rule.

Prior to the French Revolution and the emergence of the new doctrine of socialism, intellectuals made honest attempts to understand the new political and economic order. Adam Smith, for example, defined the concept of class according to the sources of revenue groups of people gained. He identified three classes. The capitalist class derived a revenue from capital. The landowning class got its wealth from rent. The working

class was the class dependent on wages.

Smith's investigation into productive labour - the labour that produced value - contained an anticipation of the notion of surplus value. This was value added to the commodity in the process of production. Moreover, Smith identified a tendency within capitalism to destroy workers' creative and intellectual capabilities. According to Smith, daily exposure to repetitive and mind-numbing work was harmful. Workers therefore needed state education supplied free or at a cost they could afford.

For Smith political economy was an inquiry into the origin of wealth. He stated that labour was the chief source of wealth. He understood 'labour' to be the total aggregated work of a nation within a social division of labour and 'wealth' as the total amount of material products or articles of consumption. He studied production, exchange, consumption and distribution and their relationships to law, customs and governments both past and present.

Marx assumed his readers had a basic knowledge of political economy. Unlike today, most educated capitalists and workers in the 19th century were familiar with the idea that labour was the source of wealth. Socialists in Britain, France and Germany used this idea to criticise capitalism and argue for a rationally planned, alternative society. Marx, however, was different from Smith in three crucial aspects.

The first was that Marx intended *Capital* to be a contribution to proletarian science. This was the body of knowledge the working class needed to rule and create the conditions for a classless society. Marx wrote the book to assist proletarian emancipation. It is a work that unmasks capitalist ideology and shows how a reorganisation of

Capital's combination of machinery, time and labour could lead to a rationally planned society. *Capital* is therefore a major contribution to socialist theory.

The second defined political economy as the inquiry into how the surplus product was extracted from labour. Marx wrote in *Capital* that the essential difference between the various economic forms of society - between, for example, a society based on slave labour and one based on wage-labour - was the way in which surplus labour is extracted from the labourer.

The third was to identify the form of surplus labour with the commodity in its dual aspects of use-value and exchange-value. The source of surplus labour was both abstract labour - commoditised labour-power measured by its labour-time in the process of production - and concrete labour - labour of the particular kind required to produce the desired product. Labour therefore had a dual form - one of which, abstract labour, produced surplus product as surplus value. This was specific to capitalism and would end with it. Freed from the value form, useful labour characterises the rationally planned future society.

It was on the basis of this dual form of labour that Marx criticised Smith. Marx argued Smith had been unable to distinguish between the material-technical labour process required for every conceivable form of society and its historically specific form as value within capitalism. In other words, Marx's political economy is concerned with the way in which value is extracted as commodified labour-power. It covers both the way in which capital uses workers to produce surplus value and how the class struggle challenges and transforms it.

Students who come to *Capital* within an academic division of labour

face various problems. The first is that political economy is viewed as a dead subject - a topic to be studied as part of the history of ideas in general and the history of economic thought in particular. Neither of these disciplines gains much funding for post-graduate studies. To find them taught on an undergraduate course would be remarkable.

The second is that the concepts and methods contained within *Capital* are likely to contradict students' working assumptions about individuals and society. Many young adults in Europe and the US have difficulty finding employment. Unless they have been involved in collective struggles against their employers or the government's employment policies, they may think of the class struggle as something in the past rather than in the present. The revolutionary youth of Tunisia and Egypt have therefore given the notion of class struggle and the power of collective action a fresh injection of reality recently.

Moreover, even the most militant anti-capitalist activists will find their study of *Capital* hindered by living within a declining capitalism. A Stalinised political environment trapped a generation of older working class leaders. This generation prioritised practical activity over intellectual activity. It separated education from organising. The point, they stressed, was to change the world. There was no time to interpret it. The influence of unreflective activism lives on in the organisation of many of the small groups surviving today.

Commodity fetishism

In *Capital*, Marx identified commodity fetishism as the source of the ideology which keeps capitalism in place. He defined commodity fetishism as social relations between people taking

the form of relations between things. Commodities, money and capital have a life of their own. They seem to operate independently of what people actually do.

The pursuit of jobs and profits dominates most people's lives. Some people treat each other as things - means to material ends. The notion that there are market forces which operate independently of individuals' actions; the idea that individuals are biologically determined to exchange and compete with one another; the assumption that capitalism has existed and will exist for all time; and the doctrine that workers are powerless when faced with economic reality - all are effects of commodity fetishism.

The ideology is pervasive. It preaches that, in an ideal form of capitalism, all production would be managed by separate commodity producers - not by society. Society would have no role in regulating the working activity of its members. It would have no role in prescribing what is to be produced and how much.

For example, at a time when the US government is about to inject \$600 billion into the economy, the idea that the market knows best and that national economies are more efficient without government interference is transparently absurd. Yet it persists sufficiently to produce a powerful movement of popular dissent in the USA today - the Tea Party.

One result of commodity fetishism is that capitalism works on the basis that everyone is apparently independent of each other and of society. Workers are atomised - they compete against one another for jobs and wages. Capitalists, in turn, compete against one another for markets. To workers, capital is an alien force which hires them for a wage. To capitalists it is an alien force which drives them to make profits. In other words, all activity is focused on the production and consumption of value and surplus value - not on the actual and potential needs of people. It is a world in which, faced with trillions of dollars-worth of surplus capital to invest, bankers, politicians and economists collude to create fictional sources of short-term profit, whilst millions of children die of malnutrition each year. It is a world of 'dog eat dog' in which 'greed is good'.

Students of *Capital* will carry many bleak assumptions about human nature into their reading of the book. They will find that Marx's approach contradicts the notion that human nature is inherently selfish and vicious. For Marx, humans are essentially social animals. Humanity is a species with a vast creative potential. Humans are presently struggling to free themselves from their past. Marx was supremely confident that all the problems humans face - however apparently intransigent - can be solved swiftly and elegantly.

Moreover, many students are used to reducing social problems to problems of individual psychology. Marx did not do this in *Capital*. He did not condemn or blame capitalists for their behaviour. Nor did he idolise or praise workers for theirs. On the contrary, he expressed a deep horror that things have come to dominate, like monsters, the lives of workers. Thus he compared capital to a vampire - a form of dead labour that lives by sucking the life out of living labour. Similarly, he likened automatic machinery to a demon with countless arms, legs and organs, whirling fast and furiously around the worker ●

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Notes

1. HH Ticktin, 'What is Marxism?' in *Marxist Voice* Vol 2, Issue 1, 2008, p15.
2. L Trotsky *The essential Marx* New York 2006.



Stalin's boots

HISTORY

Lies that refuse to be buried

On the anniversary of the 1933 Reichstag fire, **Bob Potter** looks back at the trial of Marinus van der Lubbe and Georgi Dimitrov

Watching a history programme on TV's digital channels can be both irritating and frustrating. For me, a repeat broadcast of films, comments and discussion related to the Reichstag fire trial proved a case in point. Stalinist misrepresentations, manufactured at the time, continue to be presented as 'possible options' ...

In the early evening of February 27 1933, less than a month after Hitler's appointment as German chancellor, the debating chamber of the Reichstag burst into flames - an event destined to find a prominent place in world history. There was no great mystery about the fire: soon after the blaze was spotted, firemen and police entered the building and promptly arrested a young man attempting to escape. He was searched and found in possession of three items - a pocket-knife, a wallet and a passport. "Why did you do it?" he was asked. "As a protest," replied the Dutch bricklayer, Marinus van der Lubbe, who gave the arresting officers a coherent account of his actions during that night - purchasing firefighters in a local store, several unsuccessful attempts to start fires in four public buildings, succeeding only when he broke a window and entered the deserted Reichstag.

Here are extracts from van der Lubbe's statement to the police of March 3 1933:

"In Holland I read that the National Socialists had come to power in Germany. I have always followed German politics with keen interest ... when Hitler took over I expected much enthusiasm for him, but also much tension ... I myself am a leftist and was a member of the Communist Party until 1929. What I did not like about the party is the way they lord it over the workers, instead of letting the workers decide for themselves ... The masses themselves must decide what they ought to do and what they ought not to do.

"In Germany a national coalition has now been formed, and I think it holds two dangers: (1) it oppresses the workers, and (2) ... it is bound to lead to war. I watched on for a few days and then I decided to go to Germany and see for myself ... I started in Düsseldorf, where I spoke to workers in the street. I did the same thing in other towns. In Berlin, I also studied the pamphlets of the various parties and then went to the welfare offices in Lichtenberg, Wedding and Neukölln. I also went to the labour exchange ... I found out that, whereas the national coalition has complete freedom in Germany, the workers have not.

"Now, what the workers' organisations are doing is not likely to rouse the workers to the struggle for freedom ... that is the reason why I asked the workers to demonstrate. But all I was told was to take the matter to the party ... But I heard that a Communist Party demonstration was disbanded by the leaders on the approach of the police, and that the people listened to these leaders instead of carrying out their own resolutions. I realised then that the workers will do nothing by themselves, that they will do nothing against a system which grants freedom to one side and metes out oppression to the other. In my opinion something absolutely had to be done in protest against this system.

"Since the workers would do nothing, I had to do something by myself. I considered arson a suitable method ... something that belonged to the system itself: official buildings - the



Marinus van der Lubbe with interpreter

welfare office for example, for that is a building in which the workers come together; or the city hall, because it is a building belonging to the system; and further the palace, because it lies in the centre of the city, and if it goes up, the huge flames can be seen from far away ... When these three fires failed to come off - that is to say, when my protest did not come off - I decided on the Reichstag as the centre of the whole system ... *As to the question whether I acted alone, I declare emphatically that this was the case. No one at all helped me, nor did I meet a single person in the Reichstag.*"

The chief police investigator, detective-inspector Dr Walter Zirpins, added his own observations to the final report:

"He is endowed with a great deal of (admittedly very one-sided) intelligence and, appearances to the contrary, he is a very bright fellow. His grasp of the German language is so good that he can follow even finer shades of meanings, though his own speech is slurred. Thus he could not only follow the examination but remember entire sentences and repeat them word for word. Especially during the discussion of his motives he kept correcting those phrases which, he thought, did not fully reflect his real meaning ... in short he had no need of an interpreter."

The prisoner willingly accompanied the police officers back to the Reichstag to re-enact his earlier visit, leading them all the way. His 'journey' at the crime scene was monitored by stopwatch, leaving his companions convinced he was telling the truth in every detail. (Van der Lubbe told police his 'detailed memory' developed consequential to his very poor eyesight - worthy of mention, as he was deprived of his glasses for early court sessions!)

Nazi stooge?

Although his account made good sense to the investigators, his insistence on 'acting alone' throughout suited neither Nazis nor communists. Foreign reporters present at the burning building when Hitler arrived were convinced the fuhrer had been caught completely by surprise: he immedi-

ately declared his "suspicion" it was the "opening phase" of a planned communist uprising; Ernst Torgler, leader of the KPD in the Reichstag, and three Bulgarian communists were promptly arrested (Georgi Dimitrov, chief European representative of the Comintern being amongst them, although the Nazis were unaware of his international role).

The arrested communists insisted the fire had been instigated and orchestrated by the Nazis themselves, to justify police raids on the offices of opposition parties, along with wider excesses by their brown-shirted thugs, aimed at anti-fascist groupings and trades union; and prompt repressive legislation (the 'enabling acts' - the first promulgated the day following the fire). It was inevitable the German Communist Party would view the Dutch bricklayer as a "Nazi stooge". In those 'third period' days, any leftist *not* within the Stalinist orbit was a 'social fascist', objectively a Nazi ally. The Stalinist press consoled their readers with glib assurances that Hitlerism was no more than the "death rattle of expiring capitalism" - soon the victorious working class would sweep away excesses under the leadership of the 'vanguard of the proletariat' - the KPD - so laying the foundations for the future socialist society.

Today, probably the majority of people believe van der Lubbe was a congenital delinquent in the service of the Nazis. All attempts to describe the *real* van der Lubbe come up against two books published, at the time, by Comintern propagandists, based in Paris: *The brown book of the Hitler terror and the burning of the Reichstag* (1933) and *The second brown book of the Hitler terror* (1934) - both 'proving' the Reichstag was ignited by the Nazis, a version made 'credible' by fabricated evidence to transform van der Lubbe into an occasional 'speaker at Nazi meetings', a degenerate homosexual or simply a Nazi stooge. The anonymous author of these texts was Otto Katz, a full time Comintern official based in Paris - ironically, 20 years later he was to be hanged in Prague as one of the accused in the Slánský trial.¹

Within a few weeks, the first book appeared in 17 languages with millions of copies in worldwide circulation - becoming the bible of the anti-fascist crusade. Details of relevant behind-the-scenes activities in the books' creation are described in Arthur Koestler's autobiographical *The invisible writing* (1954). Koestler worked for Willi Münzenberg, who had escaped from Germany on the night of the fire and set up office in Paris as western propaganda chief of the Comintern. As a record of the trial events, Koestler's book has little value, presenting only the official 'party line', which the author admits comprises "a unique feat in the history of propaganda ... producing international committees, congresses and movements as a conjurer produces rabbits out of his hat ... Münzenberg organised the Reichstag counter-trial, the public hearings in Paris and London in 1933 ... We had no direct proof, no access to witnesses, only underground communications with Germany ... We had to rely on guesswork, on bluffing and on intuitive knowledge of the methods and minds of our opposite numbers in totalitarian conspiracy."

It is time these Stalinist falsifications are buried once and for all. Much of what follows is culled from the work of Fritz Tobias, who in 1946 joined the Hanover Denazification Court and later the German State Denazification Commission. He carried out a thorough examination of all existing evidence relating to the fire and subsequent trial, held in Leipzig, September-December 1933. There was little 'new' evidence: rather a re-examination of all the material that had been available. In the summer of 1956, Tobias was asked by the Federal Information Office to publish his findings; cautiously he agreed to send extracts to *Der Spiegel*. The howls of rage that followed their publication were the consequence of the recent proximity of the Hitler regime - the Stalinist version of the Reichstag fire had become the generally accepted 'official' history - the Nazis had fired the building! People were less interested in learning the truth than their fear these later 'findings' might be

perceived as an attempt to 'white-wash the Nazis'. The English edition of Tobias's book, *The Reichstag fire* (1964), was introduced by AJP Taylor, who apologised for having been duped by the Stalinist lies.

Independent

An active revolutionary from his teenage years, a member of the Young Communist League, Marinus van der Lubbe soon proved his ability to influence others. A studious youth, he was well known at the Leyden public library, where he first studied Marx's *Capital*, although his hatred of capitalism was based less on Marxist science than on youthful enthusiasm and utopian dreams. Although a childish prank had severely damaged both his eyes (from which he never fully recovered his eyesight - he was awarded a small disability pension), he was of good physique, and started work on building sites.

Well known by the local police as chair of the local Communist Youth, he rented an empty storeroom, baptising it 'Lenin House'; it became the meeting place for the Communist Youth, and he busied himself there writing leaflets, and editing factory and school pamphlets, increasingly centred on the unemployed movement; he became well known at the head of processions through the streets of Leyden.

His break with the Dutch Communist Party was inevitable. His independent attitude and spontaneous identification with broad self-activity of the working class made it increasingly difficult for him to accept the discipline of the sectarian Stalinist party; he drifted into associations with 'left deviationists' (Left Workers Opposition) and finally the Party of International Communists (or Rade Communists). With only a handful of members in Holland, these 'council communists' and their supporters solidly defended van der Lubbe when the Leipzig trial got under way, publishing the *Red Book*, which demolished the slanders of his being a Nazi agent. Marinus perceived Hitler's triumph as a possible "tinder point" for revolution. While the communist press consoled readers with glib assurances that Hitlerism was merely the "death rattle" of expiring capitalism, van der Lubbe hoped the situation might be quite different in Germany. Following heated meetings with friends and comrades about revolutionary possibilities bound to happen across the border, he set out on foot for Berlin.

He spent his first night in a men's hostel; the following day saw a concert organised by the Social Democrats closed down by the police without explanation - yes, his arrival in the German capital soon disillusioned him. Nowhere any resolution to fight against the brown 'mercenaries of capitalism'. He visited labour exchanges, welfare offices, mingled with the locals, suggested protest marches (which he had found so successful back home). Nobody was interested in his suggestions; indeed he was treated with suspicion or as a 'foreign' busybody. He quickly realised there was no hope of any 'mass revolutionary action'.

The final straw was his attending a communist mass meeting at the *Sportpalast*, addressed by communist deputy Wilhelm Pieck. Van der Lubbe prepared notes, hoping for the opportunity to express a point of view, but the meeting was closed by the police as soon as it started - again,

no protest or resistance on the part of the audience! *The great Communist Party of Germany had gone into voluntary liquidation!* Completely disgusted, van der Lubbe returned to his hostel, seething with impotent rage and unable to fall asleep for a long time. One can readily imagine his distress, irritation and frustration. It became apparent to him, if anything was going to happen, he would have to initiate it himself. He decided to set a number of public buildings on fire, hoping that once the intimidated masses saw these strongholds of capitalism going up in flames, they might, even at this late hour, shake off their lethargy.

The final police report, submitted to the court by detective-inspector Zirpins, encapsulated everything about van der Lubbe's individual actions on the evening of February 27 1933:

"There is no doubt that van der Lubbe committed the crime entirely by himself. This conclusion follows from the investigations, the objective facts and the precise answers of the suspect ... the scene of the crime and his activities there were described by van der Lubbe right from the start (ie, before the official reconstruction of the crime on the spot) in such detail - seats of fire, damage caused, trails left and paths taken - as only the incendiary himself could have supplied. Had he not been there himself, he could not possibly have described and later demonstrated on the spot all these facts and especially the smaller fires which he had lit at random. The reconstruction of the crime proved that all the details he gave were absolutely correct."

Lies

Both Moscow communists and Nazi publicists presented the main defendant as a congenital idiot, a juvenile delinquent, a pathological vagrant, a pathological liar, incorrigible boaster and homosexual call-boy in the service of Nazis/communists. Here is Koestler's version:

"Lubbe was a horrifying apparition, half man, half beast. Saliva was dribbling from his mouth, and mucus from his nostrils down on to the floor. From time to time his counsel wiped his face with a paper handkerchief. When standing, Lubbe's hands were dangling down and his head bent on his chest like a chimpanzee's. When sitting, his head hung between his knees like a broken puppet's."

Koestler was not present at the hearings he described - van der Lubbe had spent seven months in heavy, painful chains, impeding the blood circulation and leaving visible sores on his feet. Indeed his general appearance caused a tremendous stir among observers, especially towards the end of the trial. While police witnesses described Marinus as mentally alert and quick to respond, now he appeared completely broken and dull-witted.

Contrary to the assertion of Koestler and others, there is no reason to believe he had been drugged; had he yielded to Nazi pressure to 'confess' to being part of a 'communist plot', his gaolers might well have drugged him to keep his mouth shut in public. A much more likely explanation is that after many months of consistently repeating the same simple truth, he eventually gave up in despair when he realised the presiding judge was far less interested in facts than in his own pet theory. Unlike the other defendants, with the world Stalinist movement supporting them, Marinus remained isolated and alone, unaware even of the tiny (if growing) band of supporters, largely in Holland. (There is evidence that from the beginning of the trial, Dimitrov knew a secret agreement had been concluded between the Soviet state security GPU and the Gestapo, according to which, whatever the outcome of the trial, he would reach Moscow in safety.) Alone in the dock, without a single friend or colleague, is it not possible van der Lubbe finally cracked from exhaustion and suffered a total nervous breakdown? Perhaps it is possible to pinpoint the final breaking point? On the 43rd day of the trial, van der Lubbe stood up and asked if he might ask a question. He was told he could - here is a portion of the transcripts:

Van der Lubbe: "I should like to know when the verdict will be pronounced and executed."

President: "I can't tell you that yet. It all depends on you, on your naming your accomplices."

Van der Lubbe: "But that has all been cleared up. I fired the Reichstag by myself, and there must be a verdict. The thing has gone on for eight months and I cannot agree with all this at all."

President: "Tell us then who your accomplices were."

Van der Lubbe: My fellow defendants have all admitted they had nothing to do with the fire, were not even in the Reichstag, and did not fire it."

President: "I have told you repeatedly that the court cannot accept your statement that you were alone. You simply must tell us with whom you did it and who helped you."

Van der Lubbe: "I can only repeat that I set fire to the Reichstag all by myself. After all, it has been shown during this trial that Dimitrov and the others were not there. They are in the trial, that is quite true, but they were not in the Reichstag. The court does not believe me, but it's true all the same."

President: "You have confessed to the crime and there is therefore no argument on that point. But it remains a fact that other persons have been accused and that the court must now decide whether or not these people are guilty. It would help us

greatly if you now admit with whom you committed the crime."

Van der Lubbe: "I can only admit that I started the fire by myself; for the rest I cannot agree with what this court is trying to do. I now demand a verdict. What you are doing is a betrayal of humanity, of the police, and of the Communist and National Socialist Party. All I ask for is a verdict."

Here, by contrast, are extracts from Dimitrov's address to the open court:

"Van der Lubbe has by no means told the truth in this court and he remains persistently silent. Although he did have accomplices, this fact does not decide the fate of the other accused ... While the representative of political insanity sits today in the dock, the representative of provocation has disappeared! Whilst this fool, van der Lubbe, was carrying out his clumsy attempts at arson in the corridors and cloakrooms, were not other unknown persons preparing the conflagration in the sessions chamber ..."

At this point van der Lubbe began to laugh silently. His whole body was shaken with spasms of laughter. Dimitrov continued, pointing at van der Lubbe as he spoke: "What is van der Lubbe? A communist? Inconceivable! An anarchist? No! He is a declassed worker, a rebellious member of the scum of society ... he is the misused tool of fascism ... he should be condemned to death for having worked against the proletariat ... the Reichstag fire had nothing whatever to do with any activity of the German Communist Party - not only nothing to do with an insurrection, but nothing to do with a strike, a demonstration or anything of that nature ... the Reichstag fire was not regarded by anyone - I exclude criminals and the mentally deranged - as the signal for insurrection."

Infamy

What a revealing comparison! The Dutchman courageously persisted throughout the proceedings in absolving his co-defendants, while the Bulgarian communist referred to the Hollander as "belonging to the class of criminals" and "mentally deranged". For revolutionaries, Dimitrov and his fellows deserve to be remembered in infamy for his unbridled slanders directed at a comrade who had sought to stimulate the kinds of action that could have become the opening shots of resistance to the Nazi tide enveloping them - acts that might have aroused the German people to accept the challenge.

Dimitrov and his three associates were adjudged 'not guilty' - Marinus van der Lubbe was sentenced to death ... despite appeals and countless petitions from all over the world, the executioner, in top hat and tails, called for him on January 10 1934. Van der Lubbe was calm and peaceful, no tears, no belated confession. He was decapitated - executed by virtue of a special law, made retrospective for his case; his capital crime was not to have set fire to the Reichstag, but to have had accomplices in doing so!

Most Marxists appreciate that protest actions such as van der Lubbe's only have meaningful revolutionary significance when integrated with a prevailing political consciousness; as part of a mass movement, a personal act *can* be of the greatest significance. Van der Lubbe's tragedy was that, as opposed to his actions at home, in Germany he stood alone, far removed from any 'movement'.

Revolutionaries should make a point of reading the Fritz Tobias book - a full analysis of the documentary evidence that not only vindicates Marinus van der Lubbe from the slanders thrown at him by his co-accused and the world's Moscow communists, but also reveals the equally despicable manner by which the Nazis attempted to force van der Lubbe to implicate his cowardly co-accused, and who executed him because of his refusal to do so ●

Notes

1. Rudolf Slánský, general secretary of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia, and 13 others (11 of them Jews) were convicted of participating in "Trotskyite-Titoist-Zionist activities in the service of American imperialism" in December 1952. Eleven were executed after having confessed in court and requested to be sentenced to death.

What we fight for

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

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

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

■ **Communists oppose all imperialist wars and occupations but constantly strive to bring to the fore the fundamental question - ending war is bound up with ending capitalism.**

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Fighting fund

Record-breaking

With five days still left before the end of our February fighting fund, we have already passed our £1,250 target. Thanks to a combination of standing orders, PayPal donations and the £30 handed over by comrade WD, the extra £385 that came in over the last week has taken our total to £1,336. Thanks too to comrades SK, MM, DO, RP, EL, CC, GD and AN for your fantastic donations. Good news indeed!

But we are not finished yet. Our February fund ends at 12 noon on Monday March 1, so we could yet notch up a substantial surplus, which might go some way to make up for the overall deficit of £830 we suffered in 2010. The quickest way to get your gift to us is via bank transfer or using the PayPal facility on our website. But even if you post us a cheque or postal order first class as

soon as you read this, we should still receive it by Monday.

We could certainly do with the extra money. We are looking to upgrade our office software, which will also require some extra hardware. All this should help make the production of the *Weekly Worker* a less fraught process and enable us to continue our efforts to improve the paper's appearance, not to mention its content.

So do you want to be part of a winning effort? One that could take us to a record-breaking monthly total? If so, you know what to do! ●

Robbie Rix

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**Cuts will
produce
unrest**

Despised by the Tory right

James Turley says that Kenneth Clarke is telling his party exactly what it does not want to hear

Kenneth Clarke is a sufficiently experienced Conservative Party frontbencher to be widely reviled - especially among card-carrying Thatcherites. Despite being on the left of the party he has served in every Tory government from the election of Thatcher to the fall of John Major, and was snapped up by David Cameron when it came to his turn to appoint a cabinet.

He is no spring chicken, of course - and is surely aware that he is unlikely ever to lead his party, having failed to secure that post in three successive elections. So, with his eyes no longer on the greasy pole, he has felt able to be far more forthright than most on the principles and likely consequences of government policy. Far more than Nick Clegg's hopelessly compromised Liberal Democrats, he has emerged as a kind of *ersatz* conscience of the government - a most unlikely role for a man perhaps most infamous for maintaining close links to the tobacco industry while serving as secretary of state for health.

The most recent controversies he has become embroiled in centre on the coalition's economic policy of brutal cuts and the usefulness or otherwise of prisons. The first is conjunctural, relating to the concrete political-economic situation faced by the government; the second goes to the heart of a more or less timeless Tory verity: the need to be tough on 'law and order'.

On the economic front, it is clear enough what being 'on message' constitutes for Cameron, Clegg and Osborne - cuts will be painful, but will surely issue in an economic recovery in the relatively short term. Clarke, however, is not trying to fool anyone: "We're in for a long haul back to normality," he warned *The Daily Telegraph*. "I don't think middle England has quite taken on board the scale of the problem. That will emerge as the cuts start coming home" (February 22).

In the wake of militant student protests against cuts and fee hikes, and in advance of what looks to be a sizeable demonstration called - albeit hesitantly - by the TUC, this is the last thing that George Osborne wants his cabinet colleagues to tell the press. It is one thing talking about the clampdown on benefit scroungers; it is quite another to admit that 'middle England' is in for a battering as things get worse, and that economic recovery is not likely to ride to the rescue.

Though Clarke is a 'deficit hawk', and fully behind the cuts, the spin doctors and PR men in Westminster will worry that the germ of an idea will be planted; if the whole point of reducing the deficit is to avoid economic chaos, but no less a figure than the man who picked up the pieces at the treasury after Black Wednesday seems resigned to the inevitability of further convulsions, what exactly is the point? That he is so *blasé* about the prospect of serious suffering among the middle classes, meanwhile, is not likely to endear him to the Tory right - who, as we shall see, already have cause to despise him.

Clarke's ministerial portfolio, meanwhile, puts him in charge of the department of justice - and has presented him with a whole host of further headaches. He is, perhaps, to be commended for responding to the 'spirit of the age' - deficit reduction - by making moderately serious proposals to reduce the overall prison population. The *Telegraph* interview already cited makes it clear that he has managed to cajole the government out of the preposterous Tory manifesto commitment to lock up *everybody* found in possession of a knife: "You'd send every fisherman in the country to prison," he pointed out.

His department has already closed three prisons and, by specifically attacking, as he sees it, the causes of re-offending, as well as reducing the number of prisoners on indefinite sentences, he hopes to close more. Of course, we should not overrate his chances of success here. It is not like the British economy - or more or less any economy just now - is overflowing with jobs to keep reformed ex-cons out of trouble. Large-scale cuts in departmental budgets mean less room for drug rehabilitation schemes and so forth - and Clarke is no more likely than any Tory to abolish the insane policy of drug prohibition.

Nonetheless, his stance is an implicit repudiation of erstwhile cabinet colleague Michael Howard's obscene dictum that "prison works." Clarke is happy to admit that prison is not, even in the most narrowly capitalist of terms, a cost-effective way of reducing crime.

Rational calculations even of this philistine type, how-

ever, are not exactly the stock in trade of the Tory right and its supporters in the reactionary press. For them, prison is not a bureaucratically ordained, if slightly brutal, means to increase social cohesion; it is a matter of revenge fantasy against morally degenerate reprobates. One never reads a call for an 'appropriate' prison sentence in the *Mail* - more like 'throw away the key' or nothing.

If that were not enough to antagonise his supposed colleagues and supporters, Clarke's job has suddenly become tied up with that other great bugbear of the Tory right - the European Union. In October 2005, John Hirst - serving a sentence for manslaughter - won his case at the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR), which argued that the blanket exclusion of prisoners in the UK from the electoral franchise was contrary to the European convention on human rights. The UK government was thereby required to change the law - the details being unspecified. Labour talked about it, dithered and

did nothing. Now it is the Tories' job.

David Cameron declared that the thought of prisoners voting made him feel "physically sick"; his old nemesis, David Davis, put together a motion in parliament with Jack Straw - who seems increasingly on a mission to make Melanie Philips look like a bleeding-heart liberal - in defiance of the ruling. Yet the government is well aware that to defy the ECHR judgment would be to provoke a constitutional crisis (and remove some traction it currently has in horse-trading with Russia and elsewhere).

Clarke is particularly vulnerable to criticism - he is a leading pro-EU Tory, a matter which probably cost him the leadership on all those occasions. His rather grudging acceptance that prisoners serving under four years in prison should be allowed to vote is considered too generous - and his refusal to countenance a full break with the European court downright heretical.

It all adds up - and Clarke is now viewed as little better than a Lib Dem by a Tory right which considers him out of step with the grassroots (indeed, given that he has something of a spine, he is probably worse from their point of view). For some he has become a focal point for discontent with the coalition as a whole. It is, again, no surprise to see David Davis's fingerprints on a pretty major attempt to embarrass the government - given that the motion to defy the EU and continue denying prisoners the vote got through the Commons with an overwhelming majority, a rather successful one too. The *Guardian* reports that Tory backbenchers are pressing for a cabinet reshuffle, and hoping to see Clarke replaced by (who else?) Michael Howard.

Will they get their way? It is hard to tell. Most likely, they will

be thrown a sacrificial victim in the form of Caroline Spelman, who has been seen to make a real mess out of the proposed sell-off of large areas of forest, on which the government has been forced to backtrack. Cameron's hold over his lunatic right wing seems to be relatively secure - for now. Yet it would not be surprising if, should the government fall before its full term is completed, the matter be forced by a Tory rebellion rather than a breakdown in relations between Cameron and Clegg.

The socially reactionary and chauvinistic nature of the opposition to the ECHR ruling should not lead one to imagine that they do not have one or two points in their favour. Communists, of course, support votes for prisoners - *all* prisoners, that is, not only those arbitrarily deemed worthy by a sniffily moralistic judiciary. This is hardly some mad fringe position, but common to existing legislation in many countries in Europe and elsewhere - of the signatories to the European Convention, it is overwhelmingly ex-Stalinist regimes that join Britain in denying votes to prisoners as a whole.

Yet we do *not* share the naive faith of many liberals in the 'rule of law', including 'human rights' law. It is perfectly legitimate for parliamentarians to object to a ruling being foisted upon them by unelected judges - whether in Strasbourg or London (with the recent controversy over the sex offenders register, both types of judgment have been major issues on the Commons floor in the last few weeks). Such political forms are in practice a check on democracy, not a support for it. *These* parliamentarians, of course, are utter hypocrites; they are wedded to the constitutional rule-of-law state, and want to pick and choose where to defy it for purely demagogic purposes; but the principle is correct. It is for us to force progressive measures on society through the power of the majority, not appeals to unelected judges ●

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Kenneth Clarke: prison doesn't work

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