



weekly
worker



**May 5 and the alternative vote:
socialism means winning the
majority, writes Peter Manson**

- Lib Dem oblivion
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Towards a Communist Party of the European Union

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The unfolding Arab revolution



LETTERS



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

Workers' interests

Sandy Johnston says that "A democratic republic is a socialist republic or it is a sham" (Letters, March 3). Bourgeois democracy is indeed a sham, that is true - but does that mean workers have no interest in struggling even for this 'sham democracy', as opposed to continuing to suffer under the heel of some form of oppressive regime? Unless you are some kind of third-period Stalinist, for whom everything other than communism is some form of 'fascism', then of course the answer to that question is 'no'.

That is what Lenin set out in his *Two tactics of social democracy in the democratic revolution*. What Sandy might be implying is the idea that it is now impossible to achieve bourgeois democracy without it overflowing into a struggle for socialism, for the reasons that Trotsky set out in *Permanent revolution*. But that is clearly wrong.

Firstly, Trotsky's theory of permanent revolution is written in relation to particular conditions. Those conditions are either that the particular society is one where the state is in the hands of some pre-capitalist class, which wages a fight to the death to remain in power; or that some colonial power exercises state power and wages a similar struggle. This fact means that the bourgeoisie has to rely on the working class for the success of its revolution, which leads to the necessity of permanent revolution.

But rarely today do these conditions exist. Under pressure from US imperialism after World War II, and the drive of multinational companies to open up markets and available sources of exploitable labour-power, the old colonial empires were dismantled. So the latter case no longer exists. There are some parts of the world where economic development has not yet occurred sufficiently for old landlord classes to be undermined, but in most parts - certainly those where democratic revolutions are on the agenda - that is not the case. In many of these countries, national independence was won back in the 19th century and capitalist development took place. Egypt, in fact, established its own empire by taking over Sudan and other territories, and one reason it got into serious debt was due to its costly war to try to colonise Ethiopia.

These countries developed their own capitalist state, back in the 19th century, and many attempted to follow the model, established by Bismarck and Louis Napoleon, of a top-down industrialisation under the guidance of state capitalism. This in part reflected the weakness of the domestic bourgeoisie and was the main reason that these economies' political regime developed as some form of Bonapartism or military junta.

In fact, what we are seeing today in the Middle East is an indication of the extent of recent economic development, which has increased the power and influence of the domestic bourgeoisie and the growth of a sizeable middle class that now seeks to carry through a political revolution to assert its own direct political rule. That being said, it is possible that permanent revolution might still apply.

What Egypt and certainly Libya are demonstrating is that a Bonapartist state apparatus is such a powerful social force that it can resemble a

ruling class in its own right. Indeed it is that fact which leads those who operate using a subjectivist method analysis, such as the third campists, to mistake such a Bonapartist regime for some form of new class formation.

To the extent that such a state continues to protect its own particular interests over and above those of the actual ruling class, so the ruling class has to rely upon the working class to assist it in overthrowing the military-bureaucratic state apparatus. However, it is clear that national bourgeoisies can also rely on support from their larger, more powerful capitalist brethren in such struggles too.

The US has long since attempted to persuade various regimes to introduce land reforms, for example. It is likely that the influence of the US worked behind the scenes, through its connections with the Egyptian military, to get it to launch a coup to remove Mubarak, though we will have to see exactly how that plays out. Similarly, it looks likely that the US persuaded the state in Bahrain to remove its forces from the streets, in the hopes of bringing about some orderly transition. The simple evidence is Latin America and those Asian 'tiger economies' where bourgeois democracies have been established.

Such a transformation is in workers' interests, as Lenin set out, but as Marxists our main concern has to be to emphasise the separate interests of workers. In that sense, Eddie Ford's argument is correct: we should support the struggle for democracy, but we should do so by proletarian means, by promoting the self-activity and independent interests of workers across the Middle East and north Africa.

Arthur Bough
email

Marxist culture

I welcome the contributions by Paul B Smith on the need for a Marxist culture free from the taint of Stalinism (February 24 and March 3). He takes up some aspects of the influence of Stalinism on theoretical discussion, and appeals for renewed study of Marx, particularly *Capital*, rejecting those who counterpose the young Marx to the old.

We should not view the experience of Stalinism as something that happened mainly in the 1930s and all but disappeared with the collapse of the Soviet Union. The 30s experience cannot be treated as only of historic interest. We cannot build anything new without absorbing the lessons - the struggle against bureaucracy, the pernicious influence of stages theory, the disastrous economic model. The betrayals continued well into the cold war period (eg, Indonesia in 1965, when a Maoist Stalinist party was massacred by a 'progressive' national bourgeoisie using Soviet-supplied weapons).

However, even as the Stalinists were murdering a generation of Marxists and strangling revolutions, they were sowing the seeds of a political method which influences the radical left today. Communist parties were subordinated to Soviet foreign policy interests, and this meant popular front movements with supposedly progressive elements in each country. The national reformist roads to socialism were born. This dominated workers' movements such that even groups to the left of the communist parties adapted to it. Instead of a Marxist culture in the working class, we have a series of single-issue campaigns, based on alliances with whoever appears 'progressive' among the servants of the ruling class. Any perspective

based on the independent interests of the working class is sacrificed in each country to relationships with, for example, union or labour figures.

Paul provides an interesting summary of some aspects of *Critique's* contribution to Marxist theory. I was a student at Glasgow University's Soviet Studies Institute in the mid-1970s. Two things stand out, apart from *Critique's* contribution to understanding the Soviet Union. One is that we used to have *Capital* reading groups. I was in one that worked through the early chapters; another one inhabited by radical academics spent one evening on *Capital* and, having got that under their belts, moved swiftly on to Mandel's *Late capitalism*. Fast readers or academic division of labour? Does anyone hold reading groups now? It would be a good thing, especially if linked to discussion of crises, and held on a cross-tendency basis. It seems every tendency has their pet theoretician.

I also recall some discussion around the idea that *Critique* should venture into political organisation - there were jokes about a 'Critique Workers Party'. I think the idea met resistance from the radical milieu. I wrote a discussion paper on the subject, which probably sank without trace. The idea seemed to have resurfaced in the Campaign for a Marxist Party, again foundering on the fractious nature of the left.

This brings us back to the need for a Marxist culture in the working class. For the left in general, workers are there to be mobilised for this or that campaign (calls to action rather than propagating ideas), but, without at least a part of the working class adopting Marxist ideas as their own, whatever demands, slogans or programmes are issued will fail to resonate.

Mike Martin
email

Not Marxist

How about calling for a democratic socialist culture where everyone has the right to express their views? When people start calling for a specifically 'Marxist' culture, you can be certain that they are on the way to turning Marxism into a secular religion, and this is only one step away from totalitarianism in the ideological field.

Paul Smith says that he defines Marxism "as the knowledge that the proletariat needs to rule and create the conditions for a democratically planned, classless society worldwide". This is a peculiar definition of Marxism, because Marx wrote very little about a future socialist society and deliberately refrained from doing so.

Smith blames all the errors of Marxism on Stalinism, but some of these errors can be placed at the door of Marx himself. For instance, the latter famously described religion superficially and one-sidedly as "the opium of the people". Where did this lead? It led to the persecution of religious people by communists. Thus Marxism alienated millions of people from communism because, not unsurprisingly, they came to see communists as a mortal threat. In other words, Marxism pushed millions into the open arms of counterrevolution.

Secondly, Marxism, formulated in the 19th century as a critique of bourgeois political economy, is not based on an understanding of the energy revolution which made industrial society possible and, like bourgeois economics, is mostly not cognisant of the consequences of the energy decline and the present unfolding, energy-related economic crisis.

In the second part of his article ('Stalinist barriers to study and thought', March, 3), Smith writes:

"... crisis, therefore, poses the possibility not only of recovery, but also of decline and termination of the system". In fact, here we see that the real barrier to study and thought which Smith himself is suffering from is not 'Stalinism', but 19th century Marxism, unrelated to the understanding of the energy crisis and the impending oil shortage. This orthodox Marxism enables Smith to posit the possibility of a recovery for capitalism, where if the energy picture remains the same the possibility of capitalist recovery is zero. So once more I have to remind people that this crisis of capitalism is permanent. Smith, like most Marxists together with 99.9% of the global population, remain in collective ignorance or denial about the consequence of the watershed peak in world oil production.

In concluding his article, Smith wants to know how people on the left define Marxism. There are several different definitions of Marxism, but what is important is what they all have in common. Marxists are people who believe that communism is a product of, and dependent on, advanced technology. In other words, they believe that what makes communism possible is advanced productive forces. The existence of communism in pre-history, or even in Inca socialism, doesn't support this Marxist view.

Consequently, I now believe that, in principle, communism was possible at any stage in world history. Its absence was a matter of ideology, not of productive forces. I think that those individuals on the left who think that communism is simply a matter of constantly expanding the productive forces rather than working towards a steady state economy are now part of the problem, not the solution.

Tony Clark
email

Pool resources

On Saturday March 5, members of Communist Students joined the march that had been called by Manchester Coalition against Cuts to protests against this year's spending cuts and, more specifically, the £110 million worth of cuts to services that Manchester city council was set to vote through on March 9, which coincidentally, considering the slash and burn nature of these cut, is the same day as the Christian festival of Ash Wednesday.

The march from All Saints Park to Albert Square outside the town hall was attended by roughly 1,000 people. It was a diverse crowd with many parents bringing along their children for the day, some of whom were wearing T-shirts bearing the truism, "You cut, we bleed". The march was the biggest in Manchester since the student protests of the autumn last year and the difference in its nature was noticeable. Whereas the police had come out in full force for the marches last year in anticipation of scuffles, their presence this time was somewhat more subdued and the crowd's mood reflected this. There were no attempts to storm the town hall, close roads or veer off prescribed routes, as there had been last year. Rather the crowd seemed content to march and chant, and unwilling to raise the level of militancy. One would like to put this more subdued mood down to the presence of many children, whom it would have been highly irresponsible to involve in potentially violent affairs, but one could not help suspect that, even without the presence of children, the assembled mass would not have been willing to venture outside the realm of legality. If this was the case and the feeling is reciprocated all over the nation, then it doesn't bode well for the

chances of people power preventing the current assault on working class living standards.

In between waving the red flag of revolution amongst all the placards decrying the Tories, bankers and Top Shop, CS members distributed 300 copies of our latest leaflet, titled 'We have a world to win'. The leaflet was produced as a way of explaining to the people on the march, many of whom were protesting over single issues such as the closure of their local library or Sure Start centre, that the closures of public services in Manchester were but part of something much bigger. The cuts are in fact part of the attack by the ruling capitalist class on the working class worldwide. That the cuts are not simply the result of greedy bankers or nasty Tories (although they are belligerent), but rather the inevitable result of the way in which the capitalist economic system that we toil under functions and that to truly defeat the cuts agenda we have to defeat capitalism itself and work for the communist revolution.

Everybody we spoke to seemed quite receptive to the ideas of Marx and many who weren't at first became so when we explained that the struggles of the working class in Britain are being shared by the working class of the Middle East, Greece, Ireland, Spain, France, Italy, America and every nation in between. The images on the news of the struggles in the Middle East seem to have made many more people receptive to internationalism than before.

The one aspect of the day that could have been marked out as a potentially crippling weakness for the fight against the cuts was the sheer variety of literature being distributed to the crowd. Organisations out in force that day included the Socialist Workers Party, the Green Party and Respect. In addition there were members of Socialist Resistance, the Campaign against Climate Change, Fight Racism, Fight Imperialism, Revo, the Anarchist Federation, Coalition of Resistance and numerous local cuts campaigns, all vying for attention.

There still seems to be a lack of unity in the campaign, draining resources that, if pooled, would be able to offer more effective opposition to the austerity agenda than at present. Our enemies in all their offensives against our class pool all of the resources, information, skills and minds available to them in order to counter any challenge posed to their interests, and our class must do likewise if we are to have any chance of protecting the gains we have fought for and won over the last 200 years.

Alfred Stevens
email

Class identity

Maciej Zurowski's analysis of the long-standing debate about whether homosexuality is a genetic predisposition or a psychological choice was correct ('Lady Gaga and the "gay gene"', March 3). I agree that the development of the gay identity as a strictly separate, innate orientation has origins in Victorian divide-and-conquer tactics.

However, I would say that such arguments are not relevant for Marxists and are part of the identity politics which distracts our attention from class struggle. The bourgeois state has now abandoned official homophobia. The liberal bourgeoisie now use a different tactic to pacify the working class: they have watered down the radical element of LGBT culture so that it becomes yet another area for class division and commodity fetishism to expand in, thus ensuring the working class remains pacified with consumerism. Indeed, as a socialist, if I go on a gay pride

demonstration now I feel very little to be proud about.

Why should a socialist like me feel ashamed of the LGBT scene? The scene is very much a rich person's world. Even if you have the money to go to a club, you will find it very difficult to fit in unless you wear expensive designer clothes. That is before you take into account the hidden costs of the cloakroom charges and price of drinks. There are gay establishments in London which do cater for a more proletarian clientele. Many provincial pubs and clubs are often the focal point for LGBT people in those communities. Thus there is more of a welcoming atmosphere - even to those not wearing expensive clothes.

In spite of this, for someone of my generation the idea that gay rights activists once organised support for strikers during the 1984-85 miners' strike is a world away from the shallow individualism and consumerism of the modern bourgeois gay scene.

Equally, conservative rightwing capitalism finds its expression in the LGBT community. The writer mentions the marginal expression of LGBT support for the imperialist wars against Muslim countries embodied in the LGBT division of the English Defence League. However, there is more to it than gaining support for war. There has always been a rather disturbing link between homosexuality and the political far right. The frustration of non-procreative sexual desires in the bourgeois family was seen by the psychologist Wilhelm Reich as a way of creating fear and embarrassment about one's own sexual impulses, which in turn ensured psychological conformity with corporate fascism and Stalinist state capitalism.

Bourgeois sexuality is not simply restricted to repression: it can find its most extreme expression in acts of sexual violence. The philosophy of cruelty and absolute freedom espoused by the Marquis de Sade reflects the extreme authoritarian nature of many fascist regimes and can provide some disturbing insight into the extreme effects of bourgeois sexual repression. Sadomasochism finds its political expression in the political philosophies of the far right.

What is to be done? Socialists must unite the heterosexual working class and the homosexual working class to achieve its common goal. We must abandon identity politics and concentrate instead on class as the major division in our society. At the same time, we must advocate general sexual liberation. In practical terms, that means those of us who cling to the parliamentary route must do the following: campaign for equal recognition of gay civil unions with marriage and to promote general sex education in schools, including the teaching of homosexuality from a young age.

Kevin Hind
Bury St Edmunds

Poppy fetish

As someone whose maternal grandfather was killed in World War I, I have never been happy that the Earl Haig Fund has been largely dependent on the annual poppy appeal. Field marshal Earl Haig, commonly known as 'Butcher Haig', was a true blue blood who never gave a damn about the cannon fodder he sent over the top to certain death. Two million soldiers died under his command, including at Passchendaele and the Somme. He was the Royal British Legion's first president; its HQ is Haig House. So we have good reason to question what the poppy really stands for.

Many contribute to the poppy appeal each year in order to help servicemen and women disabled in the course of military duty. Why? Because the state has failed disgracefully over

decades to make proper provision.

But to look more closely at what the poppies symbolise, rather than at what money for them goes toward, is to see an unattenuated glorification of imperialist adventures that led to death and destruction. That may be why some anti-war protestors burnt the damn things during a Remembrance Day two-minute silence last November near the Royal Albert Hall.

Unfortunately for the protestors, the British state - the very state that is responsible for over two centuries' carnage and for spawning monsters like Haig - attacked them through its laws. Accused of burning oversize poppies under section five of the Public Order Act, Emdadur Choudhury, a member of Muslims Against Crusades, was found guilty and fined £50, while Mohammed Haque was cleared. Others at the protest had allegedly chanted "British soldiers - burn in hell".

Of course, I would argue that protests couched in such terms are counterproductive. Propaganda designed to split workers in uniform from their modern Haigs is far more effective and therefore politically astute. Indeed such propaganda worked stateside during Vietnam protests, and there was not one documented case of peaceniks verbally abusing serving personnel or veterans, subsequent Hollywood lies notwithstanding (eg, Rambo).

Be that as it may, Choudhury and other such demonstrators must be free to offend without the weight of the law coming down on them. And their political opponents must have the right to criticise them. That someone may be offended, get upset, or even become apoplectic is absolutely no reason to render 'offensive behaviour' illegal. These things are, after all, part and parcel of the rough and tumble of politics.

Outrageously, the district judge who found Choudhury guilty stated that freedom of expression is not unlimited and that some who saw the poppy burning suffered "harassment, harm or distress". Who was harassed or actually harmed? Many of us are daily distressed by the continued existence of capitalism, its satraps in government, and what they inflict on people and the environment; I doubt we shall see those responsible prosecuted any time soon.

Used against these quasi-Islamist demonstrators one day, these legal attacks will inevitably be trotted out against the left the next. Now I'm off to burn a 'butcher's apron'.

Jim Moody
Isle of Wight

Conflagration

Chris Knight's Pentacle plan for London on March 26 certainly sounds like fun and I hope to be at Trafalgar Square when the Shiraz starts flowing (Letters, March 3). I worry though whether the doubtless very strong magic of the spell which will see the electricity being turned off all over the city has really been thought through? There would be safety implications, such as tube trains stuck in tunnels, street lights blinking out, people trapped in lifts in tall buildings and other sundry dangers and inconveniences. Meddling with magic is really not advisable.

Not to worry, however, because the police (wizards division) will be on hand at the witching hour and at all the other specific times carefully outlined in the 'battle of Britain' plan (www.battleofbritainmarch26.org) to defuse in the usual manner this and all other activities they deem to be mischievous, big spoilsports that they are.

The level of helpful detail leads me to speculate whether all this information, so widely disseminated and publicised, is actually part of a cunning plan on the part of

Chris Knight and Liberate London intended to confuse and distract the cops, with the real actions meanwhile actually occurring elsewhere and being entirely different from those described. If I have stumbled upon the truth, I promise not to breathe a word of it.

I do hope "all hell breaks loose" in a peaceful kind of way, though. It is intended to be a family day out, after all. I doubt whether the massed ranks of the constabulary and all their little helpers in the TUC, with their thousands of stewards in constant phone contact with the police, will in fact allow even the tiniest little spark to be lit, never mind a conflagration, metaphorical and all, as this image of hell is supposed to be.

Still, I will be waiting with great anticipation by the fountain for the turning of the water into wine (it's been done before so I'm sure it can happen again) and maybe a bit more than the usual boring trudge will occur. Good luck with it but keep your 'What to do in case of arrest' card and the phone number of your solicitor handy.

Fiona Harrington
email

Right royal

The royal wedding on April 29 is likely to run into difficulties.

The Police Federation has set its sights on the security preparations leading up to the event, threatening some kind of industrial action in protest at Theresa May's attacks on their pay and conditions. Then there is the problem of the Saudi and other royals on the guest list, some of whom, by April 29, may have been overthrown in the wave of democratic revolutions now sweeping the Arab world. Third, there is the problem of Prince Andrew and his intimate friendships with savage dictators, sex offenders and crooks of various kinds. Fourth, there is Her Royal Majesty's patently unconstitutional political pressure bearing down on the Con-Dem government, threatening dire consequences should anyone have the temerity to kick her son out of his arms-selling role - funded by the taxpayer to the tune of £500,000 a year. Fifth, lots of us - anarchists, republicans, group marriage advocates, *Weekly Worker* readers and others - will be having a right royal orgy at exactly the same time in the immediate vicinity of the wedding.

Taken together, hardly a good set of omens.

Chris Knight
South London

Conspiracy

I did enjoy Bob Potter's article on the Reichstag fire ('Lies that refuse to be buried', February 24). Certainly I had believed the version where Hitler had started it to whip up hatred of the Jews. The last time I heard it referred to was to support the conspiracy theory that George Bush was involved in the attack on the Twin Towers.

Daniel Lewis
Evesham

Centre ground

What is happening in Libya and the Middle East gets you thinking about human rights and how that would apply to a socialist society. What I'm grappling with at the moment is whether you would be allowed to speak out against the government in a more socialist society or would you be clamped down on, as happened in China, North Korea and Russia?

If there is a good form of socialism, I see it as the Labour Party - ie, not extreme, but on the centre ground. While this may not be the equality of, say, communism, does it really matter, as regimes of that sort never promised what they delivered?

James Hadfield
email

ACTION

London Communist Forum

Sunday March 13, 4pm: Artillery Arms, 102 Bunhill Row, London EC1. Debate: 'General strikes and general strikeism'. Speakers: Mike Macnair (CPGB, author of *Revolutionary strategy*), David Broder (The Commune).

CPGB podcasts

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

Communist Students

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

Radical Anthropology Group

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

March 15: 'The woman with the zebra's penis' (Hadza). Speaker: Camilla Power.

Fight the cuts

Saturday March 12, 11am: March, Gloucester Park, Gloucester. Speakers include Billy Hayes (CWU).

Organised by CWU: www.keepthepostpublic.org.

Birmingham 6

Saturday March 12, 12noon: Event, Glasgow Film Theatre, 12 Rose Street, Glasgow: 'Whatever happened to the Birmingham 6?' - includes a showing of the documentary 'Who bombed Birmingham?' Speakers include: Paddy Hill, Gerry Conlon, Gareth Peirce, Maggie Scott QC. Tickets £10.

Organised by Miscarriages of Justice Organisation: www.mojscotland.com.

No intervention

Saturday March 12, 2pm: Protest, Downing Street. Troops out of Afghanistan, no Middle East intervention.

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

No poverty and discrimination

Saturday March 12, 12 noon: Mothers' march. Assemble Trafalgar Square (north side). Followed by speak-out, 2pm, room G2, School of Oriental and African Studies, Thornhaugh Street, London WC1.

Women and men, young and old.

Organised by Global Women's Strike: www.globalwomenstrike.net.

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.

Travesties of justice

Reports from Bail Observation Project on immigration hearings. With report's authors, former detainees and immigration lawyers.

Tuesday March 15, 7:30 pm: Old Library, town hall, St Aldates, Oxford.

Tuesday March 22, 7pm: Committee room, Houses of Commons, London SW1.

Further information: Campaign to Close Campsfield: www.closecampsfield.org.uk.

Build the resistance

Wednesday March 16, 4pm: Teach-in, Kings College London and London School of Economics. Sessions include: 'Learning from Wisconsin', 'Defending the right to protest' and 'The role of social media in the movement'. Speakers include: Laurie Penny, Alfie Meadows, Liz Fekete and Martin Smith.

Organised by Education Activists Network.

We're all in this together

Friday March 18, 7pm: Art Uncut first London show, Bull and Gate, 389 Kentish Town Road, London NW5. Featuring UK Uncut, False Economy, Josie Long, The Temp and the Tycoon, Rumour Cubes. Discussion on social and economic consequences of cuts, followed by music and comedy.

Organised by Art Uncut: www.artuncut.org.uk.

No to cuts budget

Wednesday March 23, 5pm: Demonstration, Trafalgar Square, for rally at Downing Street 6pm.

Organised by Right to Work and Coalition of Resistance: www.righttowork.org.uk.

Euro unions against austerity

Thursday March 24, 6.30pm: Rally, Mander Hall, NUT Hamilton House, Mableton Place, London WC1. Speakers include: Christine Blower (NUT), Jimmy Kelly (Unite Ireland), Didier Louvet (CGT, France), Fernando Puig-Samper (CCOO, Spain), Owen Tudor (TUC international department).

Organised by Sertuc: www.tuc.org.uk/sertuc.

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.

ALTERNATIVE VOTE

Socialism means winning the majority

Winning a 'yes' vote in the May 5 referendum on AV should be seen as part of the battle for extreme democracy, writes Peter Manson

Last month the leftwing Labour Representation Committee issued a statement calling for a 'no' vote in the May 5 referendum. The electorate will be asked to agree to the proposed change in Britain's voting system from 'first past the post' (FPTP) to the alternative vote (AV).

LRC vice-chair Susan Press said: "FPTP is by no means perfect, but does mean that coalitions are less common, and it also sticks to the principle of 'one person, one vote'. However, the whole thing is at best an irrelevance, and at worst a distraction from the real struggles people are facing in the face of this government".¹

The claim that a discussion and decision over the method of electing parliamentary representatives is "an irrelevance" and "a distraction" is rather philistine. A voting system, rather obviously, determines who is elected and given law-making powers. Even a comparatively minor reform like a switch to AV would produce a different election result in a number of constituencies, perhaps leading to a change in the overall balance between the parties. The adoption of a coherent view in opposition to the UK constitution is not in contradiction to the fight against the all-out 'austerity' assault fronted by the coalition government.

The two reasons given by comrade Press are embarrassing, especially coming from an organisation that calls itself socialist. The implication that AV does not stick to "the principle of 'one person, one vote'" is one that is also made by the Labour right. **Margaret Beckett MP**, president of the cross-party No to AV campaign, claims that the alternative vote is "**not a fair system**" because "Supporters of fringe parties can end up getting five or six votes, while people who backed the mainstream candidates only get one."²

This is profoundly ignorant. Under AV everyone has a single vote, but each voter is equally entitled to express an order of preference for the allocation of that vote. The candidate with the fewer first preferences is eliminated first and all those who gave their first preference to that candidate will then have their second preference taken into account, the process being repeated until one candidate has a majority. *All* votes for the re-

maining candidates are added up in every round, so everyone has their single vote counted an equal number of times, whether or not it is transferred to a different candidate.

But it is particularly disturbing that an organisation of working class partisans (the LRC, while based on the Labour Party, also includes members who belong to a range of left groups) should give as its first reason for support for the current flawed voting system that it "does mean that coalitions are less common". That is because FPTP often distorts the franchise by translating, say, 40% support for a given party into more than 60% representation in parliament. We should leave it to our class enemies to argue that an undemocratic procedure is preferable to a democratic one, since it is more likely to produce 'strong government' - even though it has not been endorsed by the majority of those who vote.

The LRC statement reveals a lack of understanding of what genuine socialism entails. Working class rule requires the support of a clear, if not overwhelming, majority of the population. Socialism is the act of the working class, carried out by the working class. It cannot be legislated into existence from above - and certainly not by a government that has less than 50% of the popular vote. As soon as a working class government attempted to introduce measures that undermined the power and privileges of the ruling class, it would be paralysed and in the end removed by any means necessary through the bourgeoisie's control of state institutions, the means of production and, not

least, its "bodies of armed men".

Since we are for the rule of the majority, we have no interest in futile attempts to sneak in progressive measures through undemocratic means. We are for representative bodies accurately reflecting society's contending political views - both under the current capitalist order and in the future socialist society. That is why we demand a voting system based on genuine proportional representation.

The alternative vote is designed to pull votes towards the centre. The Electoral Reform Society estimates that, if the 2010 general election had been held under AV, there would have been different results in just 26 constituencies. The Tories would have had 26 fewer seats, while Labour would have won four more and the Liberal Democrats would have gained 22 (although no doubt if a new election were held today under AV the Lib Dems would come in for just as much a hammering as under FPTP).

Both FPTP and the AV systems are based on local or district representation, where one MP is supposed to represent an entire locality and all the people within it, irrespective of their class, lifestyle and general political preferences. In fact AV could be said to be a *form* of 'first past the post' - or, to use a different athletic term, 'first to clear the bar'. It merely employs a different method (ie, moving the winning post or raising the bar) for electing a 'representative' who claims to speak for his or her entire electorate.

Whereas FPTP simply elects the candidate with the high-

any of the other candidates.³

It is, however, a moot point whether it is preferable to elect someone who is in effect regarded as the least unacceptable, rather than a candidate who has the greatest degree of active support, whether or not they are reviled by more voters than those who positively approve of them. The problem is the very fact that the successful candidate is supposed to represent the entirety of their constituents, with all their disparate, often antagonistic interests and views.

In other words, while the CPGB is advocating a 'yes' vote in the referendum, for reasons I will explain below, we are under no illusions that AV represents a marked democratic advance. There is nothing undemocratic *as such* in the election - whether by FPTP or AV - of a single representative or delegate for a given constituency. For example, workers in a factory or office have a common interest relating to their workplace, and it is often appropriate that they should elect their own representative to union bodies or, in a situation of much greater class-consciousness, to soviets. But council wards or parliamentary constituencies rarely have common factors that give their inhabitants, or at least the overwhelming majority of them, a common interest based purely on where they reside.

Under full proportional representation elected candidates represent not a geographical location, but a political viewpoint. The CPGB favours the party list system, such as the one operating in South Africa, where the whole country is regarded as a single constituency for purposes of election to the national assembly. The 400 assembly members are elected from party lists according to the percentage of votes recorded for each list. And there is no minimum threshold which a party must reach. In 2009, for instance, several smaller parties won a seat by virtue of receiving more than one-400th (0.25%) of the total votes cast.

In other words, the party list system, if run without undemocratic barriers such as artificial minimum-percentage thresholds for election and the requirement for large deposits to be paid (one of the reasons why the South African far left claimed it was unable to stand in 2009, although in truth, given the political will, it should have been able to overcome this), would represent genuine PR and allow the (admittedly meagre) support for socialists and communists to be reflected in parliament. This would help us develop our organisational muscle and increase our political impact.

But PR - let alone the genuine PR represented by the party list system - will not be on offer in May's referendum. Nevertheless, there are reasons why we should advocate a 'yes' vote in favour of AV, despite its dreadful limitations. First, a change of voting system will demonstrate that there is nothing sacrosanct about the current UK electoral procedure. But secondly, and more importantly, it will allow the genuine preferences for parties marginalised by the current political system to be reflected in recorded votes. Because casting a first preference for a 'no hope' candidate is unlikely to cost a voter's second favourite victory, such first preferences under AV are much more likely to register a smaller party's actual support than is the case with votes cast for it under FPTP.

That is why the CPGB, while continuing to advocate full PR without restrictions, will recommend a 'yes' vote on May 5 for what Lib Dem leader Nick Clegg referred to as "miserable little compromise" before last year's general election. We do this in line with our insistence that the working class can only emancipate itself by winning the battle for extreme democracy and by winning the overwhelming majority to its programme •

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Notes

1. February 16: <http://l-r-c.org.uk/news/story/lrc-says-no-to-av>.
2. www.channel4.com/news/av-referendum-labour-mps-back-both-sides.
3. Moshé Machover's article, 'Proportional representation and Brown's opportunist play' (*Weekly Worker* April 1 2010) is recommended reading for an explanation of the quirks of the various voting systems.

London Communist Forum

Sunday March 13, 4pm to 7pm,

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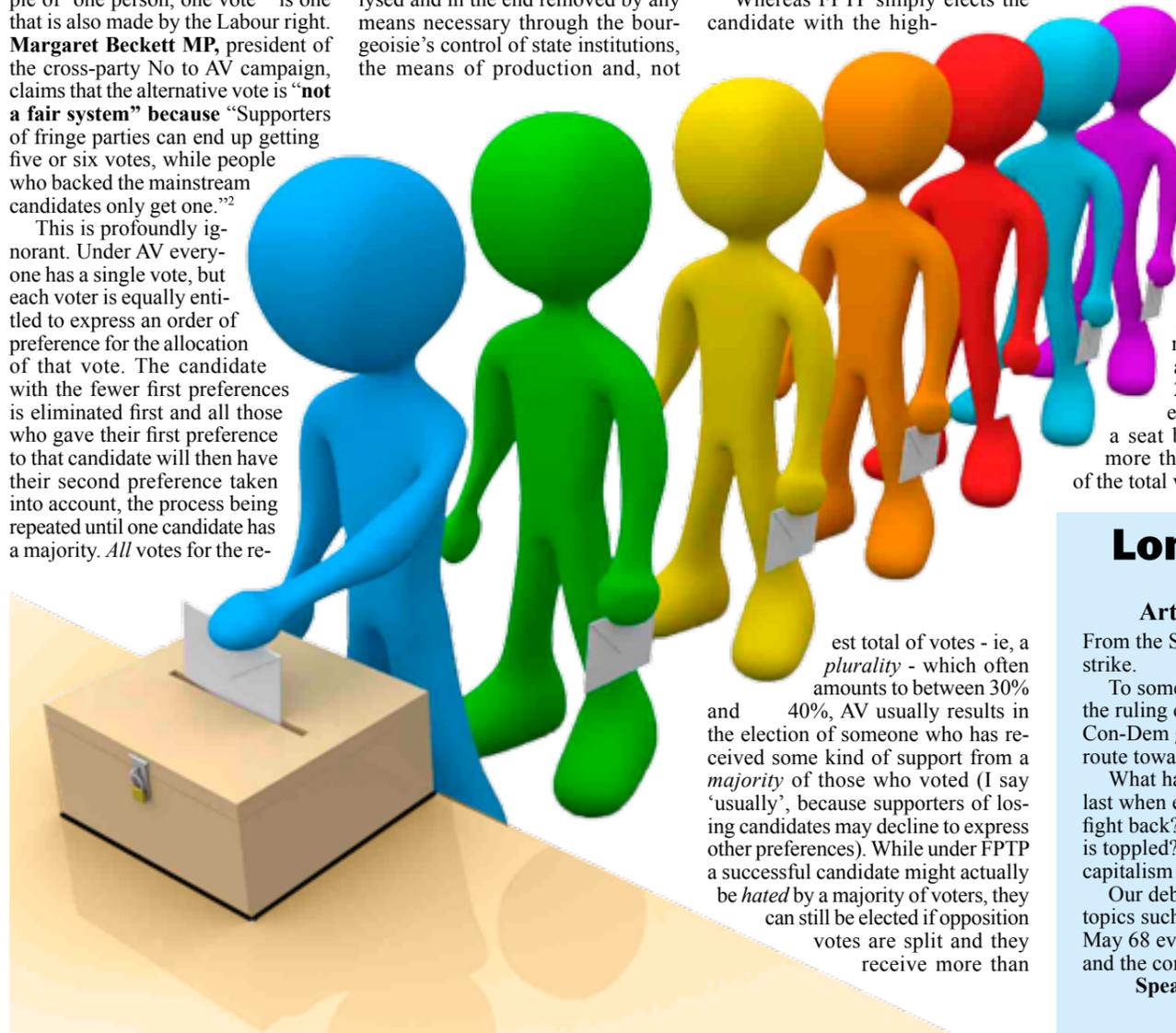
From the SWP to anarchists, Britain's far left is calling for a general strike.

To some, the general strike is a tactic to extract concessions from the ruling class. Others believe a general strike can bring down the Con-Dem government. And then there are those who regard it as a route towards working class rule and socialism.

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Our debate will address these and other questions, touching on topics such as Rosa Luxemburg's seminal text, *The mass strike*, the May 68 events in France, the 1980 Solidarnosc-led strike in Poland, and the continuing strikes in Egypt.

Speakers: Mike Macnair (CPGB, author of *Revolutionary strategy*), David Broder (The Commune)



est total of votes - ie, a plurality - which often amounts to between 30% and 40%. AV usually results in the election of someone who has received some kind of support from a majority of those who voted (I say 'usually', because supporters of losing candidates may decline to express other preferences). While under FPTP a successful candidate might actually be *hated* by a majority of voters, they can still be elected if opposition votes are split and they receive more than

LIB DEMS

Another nail in the coffin

Political oblivion looms large, writes James Turley



Nick Clegg: trouncing

It has, all told, been a quiet month or two for the Liberal Democrats, who in the run-up to and aftermath of the holiday season seemed to face gaffe after gaffe, culminating in a mediocre performance in the Oldham East by-election in January.

Now, they may look back to that poll with a certain amount of nostalgia. Mediocrity has become humiliation. Like Oldham, last week's Barnsley by-election would - under 'normal' political circumstances - be a good chance for hopeful pretenders to this safest of Labour seats (returning a red rosette since 1935) to make a decent showing at least. After all, the last MP, Eric Illsley, did not vacate his seat due to death or ill-health, or elevation to the Lords - he was a casualty of the expenses scandal, one of the handful of MPs whose greed was deemed to have crossed the line of legality.

The Lib Dems placed second in the 2010 general election, beating the Tories by a mere six votes. Less than a year later, their candidate finished sixth - out of six - losing his deposit. Dominic Carman was roundly beaten by the Tories, UK Independence Party and - worst of all for a veteran liberal anti-fascist campaigner - the British National Party, of whose leader Nick Griffin Carman has written an unpublished, unofficial and presumably pretty uncomplimentary biography.

This is about as thorough a trouncing as it is possible to imagine. What is worse is that even the Lib Dems clearly saw it coming. Carman complained of suffering intense abuse on the campaign trail, to the point of people spitting in his face. Nick Clegg, according to the *Evening Standard*, became the first Lib Dem leader since 1999 to leave a by-election candidate in the lurch, not visiting the constituency once (May 3).

Indeed why bother? It is the Labour heartlands where anti-Lib Dem hostility is at its strongest. If a nobody of a candidate can expect to get spat on, lord only knows what the good people of Barnsley would have in store for Nick Clegg. A visit from one of Britain's most hated men would probably have reduced the party's meagre return even more.

The Lib Dems have not lost anything here - apart from face, and morale. Even a robust challenge from a less detested task would have had an impossible task dislodging Labour in Barnsley. Far more serious challenges loom, however. On May 5, local elections take place around the country.

The Barnsley result is probably a good indicator of Lib Dem chances in the Labour heartlands - the north, Wales, Scotland. As for Tory-leaning wards, Clegg and co are despised there too, for their part in (supposedly) watering down Tory policies on key rightwing shibboleths. Resentment of the coalition is now, outside bourgeois politics and the media, a national pastime, uniting everyone from the far left to the hard Tory right. (In Barnsley, it is worth noting that Ukip beat the Tories into third.) It is difficult to imagine any other result for the Lib Dems than near wipe-out on May 5.

Whoever does reap the spoils, of course, only inherits a local government structure systematically gutted by Thatcher and her inheritors - but that should not lead us to underestimate the importance of local elections. Getting councillors elected means having a layer of full-timers, who (if they make even a passable pretence of doing their job) will be in touch with the concerns of local people, and available to go on the knocker for Westminster candidates. So a catastrophic showing in the local elections will amount to a serious body blow for the Lib Dems, and will make the already very shaky possibility of recovery in time to fight the next general election in good order even more remote.

Best-case scenario

If the Lib Dems are to survive the next election as an organisation, they will require a lot of help - crucially from the Tories. In the first instance, they will need to secure a 'yes' vote in the forthcoming referendum on the *ersatz*-proportional alternative vote system - the only substantial concession Clegg managed to get out of Cameron in drawing up the coalition agreement. AV, as is well known on the left, barely qualifies as an improvement on the current 'first past the post' system. All things being equal, it will make it easier for smaller parties to register their level of support. As far as winning goes, it will favour those standing in the centre - note, the Lib Dems have traditionally posed as an intermediate option between Labour and the Tories (or at least it would have done prior to the disaster for the Lib Dems known as the coalition).

Current polls suggest a 'yes' vote to be marginally more likely; yet the pro-AV camp's worst enemy is once again its staunchest supporter - Nick Clegg. In an earlier article, I half-joked that the 'no' campaign could win simply by pointing out that the Liberal Democrats would benefit from a change in the electoral system ('The second death of liberal England' December 9 2010); now it is a gleefully acknowledged line of attack to paint the AV system as a self-interested move on the part of Clegg and his cronies. People will be hammering the Lib Dems up and down the country with their local election votes; defenders of FPTP are keen to give them another way to send a message of protest.

Should the referendum be won, the Lib Dems will face their next major challenge, as masses move into struggle against cuts. Some kind of reaction is inevitable, as the bloodthirsty economic policies of the government hit home; indeed, it has already begun,

with the student movement that has erupted last year. Concerted action by the working class movement *could*, even in its current parlous state, break the government and force an election (though we would not get much more out of it than prime minister Miliband ...). Clegg will rely on 'good behaviour' from the union bureaucracy, and equally from the Labour Party. Unfortunately, he may well get it.

Finally, the Lib Dems will need to go into the next election on the back of some kind of economic good news. Clegg will then be able to claim that he has been vindicated, and portray himself as a man who will 'make the right decisions for the country', rather than (as his popular image, not unfairly, has it now) a man who would sell his own grandmother if the price was right. This factor, of course, is out of his hands completely - no amount of political manoeuvring and backroom negotiations will tame the anarchy of the market.

Plan B

This accumulation of hostages to fortune suggests that Clegg and his allies will have to move to 'plan B' - that is, going into the next election as part of a formal electoral pact with the Tories.

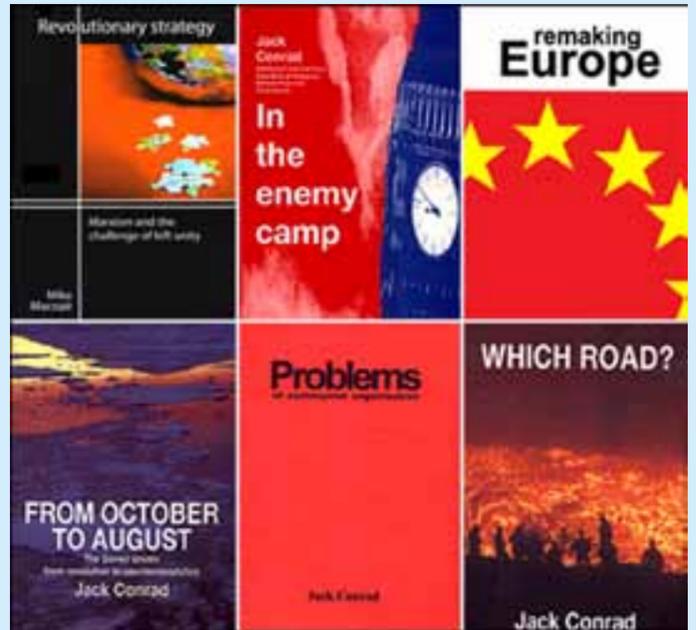
'Plan B' deserves quotation marks - in fact, this outcome is the logical conclusion of the trajectory of the Liberal Democrats since 2004, when David Laws and Paul Marshall cobbled together *The orange book*, a collection of essays by leading Lib Dems (including Clegg and Cable) that argued for a political shift towards neoliberalism. The contributors have increasingly come into dominance within their party, and coalition government has conveniently absolved them of the duty of fighting out political compromises with their left-leaning 'social liberal' opponents. It would be no *personal* disaster for Clegg, Cable *et al* to wind up as members of the Tory Party - rather that is their natural political home - but it would mean the end of the Liberal Democrats as a substantial organisation in its own right.

Apart from the subjective trajectory of its leaders, there are powerful objective forces pulling the Lib Dems to this conclusion. The coalition deal has left them utterly at the mercy of the Tories and, the worse things get for them, the truer this is. The niggling complaints of the Tory right have come to seem a more credible threat to the government's stability than the Lib Dem left, who stand to lose everything if it falls.

This is not the first time this has happened. The National Liberals joined the national government of the 1930s, first under Ramsay MacDonald, then under the Conservative leader, Stanley Baldwin, in the end becoming an adjunct of the Tory Party. The National Liberals won 19 seats in the 1959 with Tory support (to all intents they were Tories). They formally merged in 1968. Meanwhile, the Liberal Party was entirely marginalised. In the 1951 and 1955 general elections they held four of their six seats thanks only to local agreements with the Tories. Though the present-day Liberal Democrats will be concerned to avoid a repeat of history, political oblivion looms larger with every by-election ●

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IRAN

'Islamic feminism' and women's emancipation

Yassamine Mather examines the reality of the continuing struggle against the regime's oppression

On March 8, for the second time in a week, demonstrators gathered in the streets of Tehran and other major cities in Iran to protest against the regime - despite its attempts at suppression, its armed security forces, its tear gas and its arrests.

Thirty-two years ago, on March 8 1979, tens of thousands of Iranian women took part in the first major demonstration against the newly established Islamic Republic of Iran, following the forced imposition of the hijab. The women's slogans were: "I say it every moment, I say it under torture: either death or freedom!" "Freedom is neither eastern nor western: it is universal!" "Death to censorship!" "In the dawn of freedom, the place of women is empty: revolution is meaningless without women's freedom - we do not want the hijab!"

Since that day and for over 30 years hard-line fundamentalists have tried to impose their rules on Iranian women and youth. However, even these clerics agree that they face a cultural crisis. The majority of the youth and the women's movement openly reject fundamentalist Islam, and the generation born after the Islamic regime came to power is amongst the most secular sections of Middle Eastern society, campaigning for the separation of religion from the state.

A lot has been written on the unprecedented increase in the political and academic activities of Iranian women over the last two decades, but it should be emphasised that the overwhelming majority of these activities have taken place despite the clerical regime, and often against it. The women's movement is independent of the factional fighting inside the Islamic Republic and independent of the Islamic ideology which is the basis of the state. This movement has also been an anti-war movement, adamant in its opposition to US-style 'women's emancipation', as witnessed in occupied Iraq and 'liberated' Afghanistan. Most of the women who have taken an active part in this struggle do not consider themselves Islamist; quite the contrary.

Second class

There is no doubt that, with the exception of a minority of the middle and upper classes, Iranian women have traditionally suffered from patriarchal laws and practices both within the family and at work.

Since the establishment of the Islamic Republic in 1979, however, the plight of Iranian women has worsened, the rigid imposition of the veil (hijab) has reinforced discrimination and prejudice against women. Many families refuse to send their daughters to high school. In higher education girls are discouraged or prevented by the state from studying or working in fields and activities considered 'masculine', such as engineering, mining, the judiciary ... It is in opposition to the state that many women pursue such studies.

There is discrimination against women in sport and recreation. Participation in some sports is discouraged, and in recreation most facilities are rigidly segregated and rarely available to women. Many have called this a system of apartheid

against women. The ministry of education in the Iranian government recently reported that 94% of schoolgirls were unfit, as they did not participate in sport or physical education.

The combination of enforced hijab wearing and segregation is used to limit women's access to state education, sports and other facilities. In other words, the system is geared to institutionalise women's confinement to the home. These policies facilitate the objective of turning women into second-class citizens.

As they become teenagers, girls are driven more and more into a world dominated and manipulated by their male relatives. They can be given away in legal marriage without their knowledge or consent while still in their childhood. The legal age of marriage for girls is nine.

Discriminatory Islamic laws govern the private and public life of women: they have to follow a very specific and restrictive set of dress codes - a full veil or complete headscarf and long overcoat are the only accepted forms of dress. The law discriminates against women in inheritance, giving them at most half of the share of their male counterparts. According to the laws of Hodud and Qessas (*talion* and punishment) the life of a woman is worth half that of a man, with the implication that a man killing a woman and sentenced to death may only be executed if the victim's family pays the murderer half of his death dues. Article 6 of this law states that the bereaved family has to pay the murderer's family to get "Islamic justice" (a life for a life). Article 33 of the Hodud and Qessas states that women's testimony is not valid in homicide cases unless it is supported by at least one male witness. According to Iran's Islamic laws, women are considered generally unfit to be witnesses; their power of observation is considered half that of a man. And women have officially been considered too emotional and irrational to be judges.

Of course, in other religions equally anti-women rules and regulations are to be found. What differentiates Iran or US-occupied Iraq from other Islamic states, however, is that the *Qur'an* dictates civil and judicial law. In other words the basic democratic demand of separation of state and religion does not apply - quite the opposite.

Unequal marriage

Islamic marriage laws as applied in Iran are amongst the most repressive in the world in terms of discrimination against women. While men are allowed to marry up to four wives at a time in permanent marriage, plus an unlimited number of women in what is known as "temporary marriage" (*sigh*), women who do not adhere to strict monogamy are considered criminal and may be brutally and savagely stoned to death in public. This legal Islamic punishment for extra-marital affairs is carried out regularly in Iran.

Men control the lives of their wives, their daughters and their unmarried sisters. In Islamic societies women need a male guardian throughout their lives, to give them legal permission to travel, to study, to marry, etc ... As no consent is required for sexual relations inside marriage, wife-rape is common

and even wife-beating is tolerated in the process (with a *Qur'anic* verse that legitimises wife-beating in the case of "disobedient women"). Abortion is illegal, but the rising number of terminations is testimony to its use as a form of contraception.

Until 1996, as far as divorce was concerned, the man had almost a free hand to divorce his wife, while the woman had only a limited recourse to the legal system. Even after reform of the laws regulating separation, a woman can only file for divorce in exceptional circumstances. The extent of this discrimination was best exemplified by reports recorded by the Iran Human Rights Working Group: a court had taken 14 years to approve a divorce request from a woman who complained she was tortured by her husband. She was reporting new incidents of abuse every year. She had agreed to drop all financial demands against her husband, and finally had to contact Iran's prosecutor-general directly (who reported that she "shivered violently" whenever her husband was mentioned) to get her divorce. In another case, the process took eight years.

The divorce law is also designed to punish recalcitrant women, bringing them poverty and destitution, and leading them to resort to unusual tactics in order to obtain minimum maintenance for their children. In most cases women have to forfeit financial claims in order to obtain divorce, even if the proceedings were initiated by the man. Iranian law states that a male child above the age of two and a female child over the age of seven must live with their father. Even the father's father is given priority over the mother in custody matters.

In marriage, discrimination against women goes still further. A virgin woman (whatever her age) has no right to marry without her father's consent (or her paternal grandfather's, in the absence of the former). A Muslim woman has no right to marry a non-Muslim (a right her male counterparts have - with some limitations). And a divorced woman has to wait for a set period before remarriage (but there is no waiting period for a divorced male). These Islamic practices and laws have created a suitable environment for widespread abuses and atrocities against women.

Most women do not report incidents of rape outside marriage because the victim has more to lose. First she will be accused of bringing dishonour to her own family and in some cases might even be killed by family members. Second, she fears prosecution under the morality laws: the punishment for "unIslamic" behaviour is to be flogged or stoned to death, especially if a woman is judged by the court as being a willing partner.

While the laws of Hodud and Qessas prescribe "equal" punishments for men and women, it is women who suffer from these barbaric measures. A married man having an affair with an unmarried woman can always claim they were "temporarily married". But a woman in a parallel position has no such defence and would face the horror of death by stoning.

The discriminatory laws regarding women's rights cover a wide range of areas in marriage, divorce, child custody and inheritance, in addition

to the anti-women labour laws and social policies. These have had devastating results, causing economic deprivation and the social isolation of women and their children. Iranian women have been fighting hard against these injustices, but have had very limited success in the face of the overwhelming power of the religious state and its many institutions.

Whatever interpretation of Islam we take, the *Qur'an* is quite specific that women who disobey their men may be beaten. Should we accept this on the pretext of respecting Islamic values, and in order to combat racism? To do so would be to ignore what has been done to secular women in Islamic societies - to women who choose not to obey the rules. In Tehran teenagers who do not abide by the full Islamic dress code (showing a fringe under their headscarf, for example) are regularly arrested, flogged and made to sign a statement saying they will cease to "behave as a prostitute".

Secular resistance

Women have never forgotten that in the 1960s one of ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini's main objections to the shah's regime was that voting rights were given to women. While it is true that during that dictatorship the right to vote was meaningless, Khomeini objected in principle to a woman's right to be elected or to elect.

One of the first demonstrations against the Islamic regime was the women's demonstration of March 8 1979. Khomeini's decree that women should cover their hair rallied women of many classes and backgrounds in a major show of opposition against the new regime. Since then women have constantly opposed the erosion of their social and political rights.

In return the Islamic clergy and its government have consistently used medieval morality laws to suppress women. Especially in urban areas, women have fought back in an ongoing struggle that is only now beginning to bear fruit, very often despite the array of Islamic women's magazines and organisations. Inevitably some of the tolerated women's journals, publications and institutions have tried to catch up with this movement. However, they are at best tailing it, doing too little, too late.

The history of women's struggles in Iran goes back to the early years of the 20th century. Iranian women participated in the constitutional revolution (1906-11), they were active in the nationalist movement of the 1950s and throughout the shah's repression, when they formed a large part of leftwing underground organisations, as well as the Mujahedin-e Khalgh resistance. Hundreds of thousands of women participated in the demonstrations against the shah's dictatorship and no one could have forced them back into the middle ages. Economic factors, the role of women in production and the development of productive forces have all played a part.

In the early years of the Islamic regime, Iranian women fought expulsion from the workplace through enforced redundancy, and they refused to adhere to the strict Islamic dress code. It took over 18 years for the more enlightened members of the regime to realise that

it was impossible to keep the clock turned back. It is an insult to the courage and perseverance of Iranian women to label this long and complex struggle an Islamist movement, as the officially tolerated women's magazines do.

Apologists

In Shia Islam the most revered woman is the daughter of Mohammed, who died at the age of 18, having already given birth to three sons. Her short life symbolises the ideal woman. As a result, in Iran secular, Christian, Jewish, Baha'i and Zoroastrian women are all forced to wear the veil against their will. Their basic right to dress as they please is taken away because some Muslim men find it insulting to see non-veiled women.

Islamists claim that the veil, far from restricting women's social activities plays a liberating role, as it maintains a woman's 'purity'. But most women know that the primary role of the hijab is to subjugate them, segregate them and classify non-veiled women as evil temptresses whose sole role on earth is to corrupt men. It is also argued that the veil, like a uniform, hides class differences. Anyone who has seen the elaborate veils in the affluent suburbs of Iranian cities, as opposed to the hijabs worn by working class women, can see how absurd such statements are.

Hammed Shahidian asserts: "Defenders of 'Islamic feminism' in the west have founded their arguments in cultural relativism - a dangerous precedent both for feminists and human rights activists."²³ Indeed it is claimed that any attack on the veil is a form of western racism. One has to point out that combating racism has nothing to do with accepting double standards - women's rights for white/western women; Islamic 'rights' for Muslim/eastern women.

The main problem for Islamist women and Islamist moderates is that the reinterpretation of Islamic ideas regarding women to show them in a progressive light is impossible within the framework of the Islamic state. Mohammed is the final prophet in the long line of prophets, his book is the most complete message from god. The *Qur'an's* clear and explicit anti-women message cannot be changed. The current bitter struggle between the moderate and the conservative Islamists in Iran can either lead to the overthrow of the Islamic state or to a compromise with the conservatives at the expense of any 'moderation'.

Islamists, however, have by no means a monopoly on Iranian culture. Twentieth century Iran was dominated by a strong secular/progressive, non-Islamic culture. Iranian women's limited achievements against Islamic law, both under the rule of this regime and in the past, has its roots in this tradition. Yet defenders of 'Islamic feminism' write extensively on the relative freedom and status of women in Iran compared to women in Afghanistan or Saudi Arabia, as part of their defence of moderate, progressive Islam.

Here it is important to remind ourselves that in Iran's contemporary history the level of development of the productive forces has played a far more significant role than 'moderate' Islam. Traditions of secular politics

OUR HISTORY

The CPGB and parliament

have also had a far more significant role to play. Islamist women in Iran, as part of the 'reformist' faction of a brutal dictatorship, will try to give some women better opportunities in education and government. They will try to improve family legislation, but within the limits of sharia law in all its anti-women facets.

Iran's so-called 'Islamic feminists' are middle and upper class professional women in stable, traditional, family relationships. Many are immediate relatives of the highest-ranking clerics. They have no intention of challenging the religious state. As long as the basic demand for the separation of state and religion remains unfulfilled, as long as non-Muslim, Sunni and non-religious Iranians are considered second-class citizens, there can be no improvement in the plight of the majority of Iranian women.

Over the last few years, a minority of these Islamist women have taken up in a limited way some of the issues concerning women's rights. Many have advocated minor reforms - too little, too late. These women are identified as political supporters of one of the factions of the Islamic regime (that of ex-presidents Khatami and Rafsanjani). They do not represent an independent women's movement, but, on the contrary, form part of the ruling establishment and are considerably annoyed when western academics refer to them as feminists. The 'reformist' faction they belong to has not even challenged the medieval laws of Hodud and Qessas or the supreme rule of the religious guardian of the nation, the *velayat-e faghih*. By contrast, the newspaper *Zan*, which dared to question the stoning to death of women, has faced enforced closure and bans. In other words, Islamist women are not feminist and feminist women are not Islamist. The term 'Islamist feminist', created by western academics, remains an abstract idea, as far as Iran is concerned.

Of course, arguments within Islam on issues regarding women's rights are not new. For decades reformist Islamists have tried to present more moderate interpretations of Islamic laws and teaching. And, although it is true that over the last few years urban Iranian women have succeeded in asserting themselves and influencing aspects of their lives and the country's politics, any improvement in their plight is due mainly to their perseverance and courage, and the tradition of struggle against dictatorship - despite the majority of Islamic clerics.

The defenders of so-called 'Islamic feminism' occasionally challenge us to define what we mean by progress, if we say it has not taken place in Iran thanks to their efforts. How about an end to the stoning of women for adultery, to the flogging of teenage girls for daring to show a fringe, to the Hezbollah's practice of throwing paint at women who wear colourful scarves, to the segregation in hospitals, buses, schools and universities?

It is ironic that political correctness has discouraged many western liberals from challenging 'Islamic feminism'. Iranian women, who are amongst the worst victims of Islamic fundamentalism, have no intention of following this trend and indeed over the last couple of years have stepped up the fight against the forced wearing of the hijab, for freedom and equality.

March 8 2011 saw a new generation taking up the same slogans ●

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Notes

1. Talion: law that criminals should receive as punishment precisely those injuries and damages they had inflicted upon their victims.
2. www.ihrw.org.
3. H Shahidian *Islamic feminism and feminist politics in Iran* Springfield 2009.

The resolution on parliamentary action had been included on the agenda of the Communist Party's founding conference (July 31-August 1 1920) mainly to facilitate merger with Sylvia Pankhurst's Workers' Socialist Federation, now illegitimately re-branded as 'Communist Party (British Section of the Third International)'.¹ In contrast to Pankhurst's sect, both the British Socialist Party and the Communist Unity Group - the main organisations participating in the congress - were committed to standing parliamentary candidates as a form of revolutionary propaganda. The WSF, in contrast, maintained a stubborn opposition to revolutionary parliamentarianism as a matter of iron 'principle'.

The report on the unity negotiations given by comrade Albert Inkpin at the congress underlined the efforts which had been made to positively involve all communist groups in Britain in the project of a communist party.² Some stood aloof, however.

Despite the fact that comrade Pankhurst and her group had, for the moment, dropped out of the fusion process represented by the Communist Unity Convention,³ this did not mean the matter was done and dusted in the ranks of the fledgling CPGB itself.

There was still a considerable degree of political confusion among delegates on this question - mostly reflecting the relative political immaturity of these revolutionaries rather than some ingrained sectarian method.

How could it be otherwise? Bolshevism, Lenin emphasised in *Leftwing communism*, had gone through a very compressed, but extremely rich, political history. With sometimes breathtaking rapidity, it had seen military forms of struggle, parliamentary work, legality and illegality, underground and open mass action, and so on. In Bolshevism from 1903 to 1917, we see a complex diversity of forms of struggle unmatched anywhere on the globe.

At every stage, Lenin and his comrades sought to theorise their work, to rigorously draw the correct general lessons from whatever challenging stage they were passing through. In that sense, we can think of the Bolsheviks who organised, arms in hand, on the streets in 1905, the Bolsheviks who endured the subsequent 1908-12 period of reaction, the Bolsheviks who made the 1917 revolution, as a trend with an organic link to their embryonic form in the highly polemical press of 1903-05.

Marxists in Britain had neither the political experience at a comparable level of intensity and variety nor the writings of Lenin and other Bolsheviks on their work in the tsarist duma, etc, available to them.

Nonetheless, the resolution on parliament submitted by the Joint Provisional Committee of the CPGB by implication represented a challenge to naive, left-communist anti-parliamentarianism. It helped lay the basis for the party's highly effective parliamentary interventions during the early 1920s. Whatever its limitations and crudities, it represented a significant and positive step towards the revolutionary parliamentarianism pursued so brilliantly by the Bolsheviks.

The resolution read as follows:

The Communist Party repudiates the reformist view that a social revolution can be achieved by the ordinary methods of parliamentary democracy, but regards parliamentary and electoral action generally as providing a valuable means of propaganda and agitation towards the revolution. The tactics to be employed by representatives of the party elected to parliament or local bodies must be laid down by the party itself, according to the national or local circumstances. In all cases such representatives must be considered as holding a mandate from the party, and not from the particular constituency for which they happen to sit.

The chair, comrade Arthur MacManus,⁴ said there were several amendments to this resolution, but they did not affect its general tenor and would be included in the discussion after the resolution was moved by comrade Tom Bell for the Joint Provisional Committee.

This is how the official account of the congress reported Bell's speech:

So far as the Joint Provisional Committee were concerned, the Communist Unity Group and the

BSP were in complete agreement upon the need for and the advisability of taking parliamentary action, but the present resolution had arisen in the course of negotiations with the WSF and had been held very important at the time. After the defection of the WSF the resolution might have been cleared off, since there was no point of difference between the remaining groups that made up the Unity Committee; but, as there was still a considerable amount of hesitancy in many groups on the question of parliamentary action, for and against, it had been thought better to allow the question to be ventilated at the conference, that being the safest and simplest way to make the position clear, so far as parliamentary action was concerned. It would be seen that the resolution from the very first repudiated the reformist idea that a sound revolution could be achieved by the ordinary methods of parliamentary democracy.

In this respect its point of view was common to communist parties internationally at the present time. He and those who agreed with him did not believe that it was possible to effect a peaceful transformation in the parliamentary bourgeois democracy, as understood today, and thereby to work out the emancipation of the working class; they believed that the parliamentary institution as it existed today, the constituency in itself, was entirely foreign in the purpose of the communist state of society they had in mind. Consequently, in preference to the parliamentary constituency, they rather looked to the more direct method of representation as expressed through the workers' committees, whether in industrial or social life.

With regard to parliamentary and electoral action as providing a valuable means of propaganda and agitation towards the revolution, while they did not place any faith in the parliamentary institution in itself, and did not believe it was capable of fitting into the scheme of things that they as communists had in mind, nevertheless they thought it of considerable value to revolutionary propaganda not to shut the door on any avenue whatsoever that was going to liberate the minds of the masses from their superstitious faith in parliamentary democracy. He thought the best policy to adopt towards that particular objective was to demonstrate inside the House of Commons that, so far as the working class were concerned, there was nothing to be hoped for in that chamber.

By breaking the parliamentary precedents and conventionalities which played so large a part in shaping the minds of the workers, we could do a great deal to break down the reverence for parliamentary institutions that so many of our fellow workers had. This was a bone of contention, he knew; the contention arising because it was thought by some that by going into the House of Commons we were sacrificing some great principle.

The first argument brought against participating in parliamentary action was that before sitting in the House of Commons it was necessary to take the oath of allegiance. Speaking for the Provisional Committee, they had no dubiety on this point.

It was laid down in the resolution that the representatives of the Communist Party must be considered as holding a mandate from the party executive, and that they would be at all times under the control, management and supervision of the executive committee - that was what it amounted to.

If, in the course of our agitation, the executive thought it advisable that members should be in the House of Commons, the oath should not stand in the way; it was a question of deciding in relation to the expediency of the moment whether for our agitational purposes it was more valuable to refuse to take the oath or to take the oath in order to gain some other objective more valuable for our revolutionary agitation. And so on with reference to all the questions as to precedents and conventionalities inside the house.

He suggested that communist candidates only had allegiance to the principles of communism and the movement now organised in the Third International. Our ethic and morality had to be drawn from our fundamental principles of communism. In reference to action inside the House of Commons, our policy all the time was a critical, destructive one, exposing the fraudulent character of our modern

parliamentary democracy - which was not a free institution at all, but was an institution controlled by high finance.

That being so, he suggested that it was the business of the Communist Party inside the House of Commons, in order to liberate the minds of the masses with regard to capitalist fetishes, critically to examine every situation that arose, and to criticise the points of view put forward by our opponents - whether bourgeois, semi-radical or anything else - and, generally speaking, help to focus the attention of the working class upon the vital interests so far as the communist agitation was concerned.

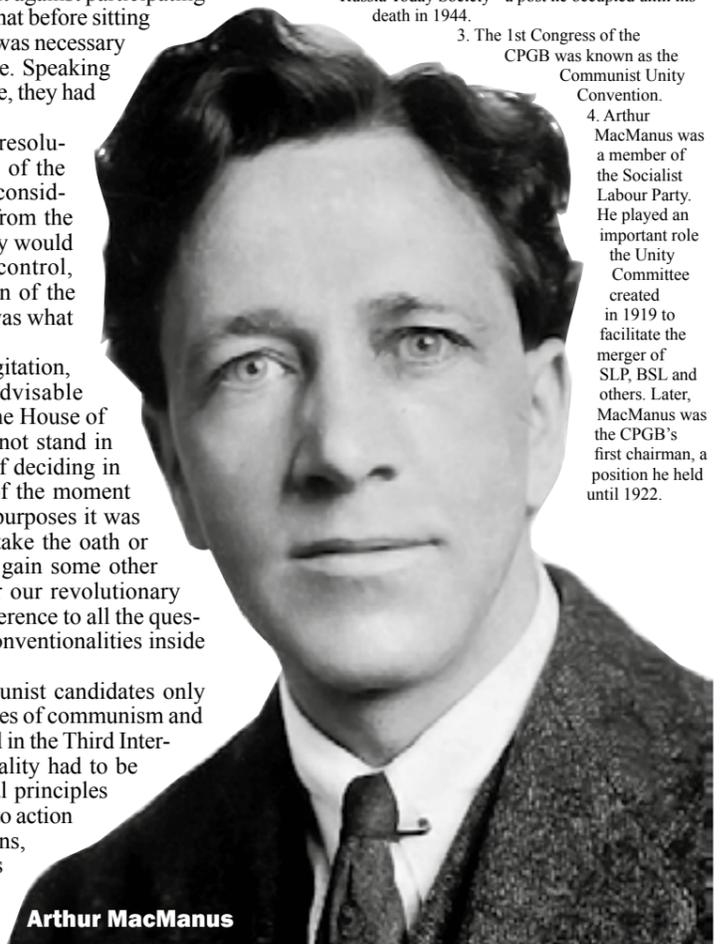
As to the clause, 'In all cases such representatives must be considered as holding a mandate from the party, and not from the particular constituency for which they happen to sit', those of us who had been identified with the political labour movement for any length of time knew the hackneyed phrase used by the politicians of all shades of opinion, that once they went inside the House of Commons they ceased to have any connection with their particular organisation and represented the interests of all sections of the community. This was a pretence, it was impossible - and this was the inherent weakness of the parliamentary constituency - for any representative to express the desires and wills of all the conflicting class elements that made up a constituency.

By this resolution we sought to make it emphatic that the candidate sent up by the Communist Party would contest his seat under the surveillance of the Communist Party executive, and would go to the House of Commons with a mandate from the party - that he would not draw his mandate from the constituency. This was the point of view sought to be brought out in the resolution - that we must have discipline to the communist executive from all members, whether outside or inside the House of Commons.

The resolution was seconded, and it was agreed, on the suggestion of the chair, that the discussion should take the form of a debate for and against parliamentary action, leaving till afterwards all questions of amending the resolution. As we will see in the next instalment of this series, six speakers opposed the resolution, while 13 spoke in favour ●

Notes

1. *Weekly Worker* September 21 2010.
2. *Weekly Worker* December 9 2010. Albert Inkpin (1884-1944) had previously been the secretary of the British Socialist Party, the largest component party of the new CPGB. When he gave this report, he was the secretary of the Joint Provisional Committee of the CPGB. Inkpin was the party's first general secretary and led the CPGB for nine years. In 1929, he became secretary of the Russia Today Society - a post he occupied until his death in 1944.
3. The 1st Congress of the CPGB was known as the Communist Unity Convention.
4. Arthur MacManus was a member of the Socialist Labour Party. He played an important role in the Unity Committee created in 1919 to facilitate the merger of SLP, BSL and others. Later, MacManus was the CPGB's first chairman, a position he held until 1922.



Arthur MacManus

MINERS

Tactics and the Great Strike

Ian Isaac responds to David Douglass's review of his book, *When we were miners*

It is always interesting to read two different accounts of the same thing: a strike, a meeting or an analysis of a series of events from people who could say, 'I was there'. In this instance if you were to read the book and then Dave Douglass's review ('A Militant take on the Great Strike of 1984-85', November 25 2010), you would be forgiven for being somewhat confused as to who had said what.

Dave often compares his own role to what was stated in the book and ends the description of each part he played with a one-sided polemical debate. This is hardly a very good method for honest review and as a consequence his subjective style and incessant search for the detail in the name of 'research' often fails to hit the mark. In the scheme of things he no more won majority support for his own position at critical times than I did. There is a critique to be had about the tactics of picketing, the lack of meaningful dialogue that could have led to more secondary action between the National Union of Mineworkers and the rest of trade union and labour movement, especially in the steelworks and power stations. I consider my views on these matters to be as valid as his in that we were not presidents or general secretaries of our respective NUM areas.

The piece begins by misspelling my name in the introduction and then rapidly denounces my book as being "poorly titled and slim" (at 184 pages). One in the teeth there, Dave! His own book, he says, is entitled *Ghost dancers*. On this basis perhaps we are entitled to assume that Dave Douglass' book might be about American Indians. Perhaps he would extend me the courtesy of a review copy, so that I might decide for myself whether or not my views on Orgreave, for instance, are objective by comparison to his. The caption to the photo that accompanied the piece written by Dave describes Orgreave as a "diversion"! Says who and on whose authority? I think we are entitled to know.

A coach full of pickets was sent to Orgreave from my NUM lodge at St Johns, south Wales, on June 18 1984. I followed behind in a car with some pickets and another lodge official. However, our car was stopped and turned back by police, causing me to miss this particular violent dress rehearsal by the state in the form of mounted police, riot shields and batons. I am under no illusions as to the importance or otherwise of the event in relation to the outcome of the strike.

That is not to say I agree with the analysis put forward by Dave Douglass - indeed I would refute his attachment of great importance of the event to the final outcome of the strike itself. Other more destructive forces lurked in the shadows of negotiations during the strike, including officials of the Nacods supervisors' union, the TUC and the Labour leadership - all hell-bent on ensuring that the miners would not return to work with the deserved victory of the right of veto over pit closures unless through proven exhaustion of coal reserves.



Orgreave: confrontation

Rushed

I get the impression that Dave's review was rushed to meet some kind of deadline and his work suffers from this. Dave, I did not move to the Cowley car works after Ruskin College (1978). I worked in Cowley between 1971 and 1974. I started in St John's Colliery, Maesteg in August 1974 and went to Ruskin College, Oxford on a two-year scholarship in October 1976 and returned to the pit and was elected full-time lodge secretary in July 1978. Also I have never been a "longstanding member of the Communist Party", as stated in the review. I was a Labour Party Young Socialist from 1969 to 1976 and a Labour Party member until I was expelled in 1989.

Dave rushes to the defence of the Yorkshire coalfield, as if somehow I have set out to be critical of it. My apologies to the hardworking Doncaster miners on the subject of the accessibility of coal seams: I was merely generalising when I wrote that the Yorkshire and Midlands coalfields had more readily accessible seams. What is not in question is that these areas enjoyed more investment per man, better pay and better conditions than those afforded to other coalfields, including my own. This is an established fact. The political point I was trying to make is that this divide-and-rule strategy of pitching miner against miner and area against area was created by the bosses, be it in the guise of private coal owners, or the senior managers and bureaucrats of the nationalised mining industry.

In 1982 under NUM president Joe Gormley we returned to piece work (added payments by results) under the area 'incentive schemes' that turned out to be no more than industrial Trojan horses sowing the seeds that led to the destruction of Britain's finest ever trade union. For the record - OK, Doncaster district apart - the Yorkshire and Midlands coalfields historically had better, more accessible coal seams, more investment per man,

better conditions and better pay during the years of piece work and incentive pay schemes.

Dave could have given some thought to the account of the significant campaign for trade union democracy in the NUM before, during and after the strike. In an article I wrote in November 1986 in *The Mineworker*, paper of the national miners' Broad Left, I called for one union and a national delegate conference linking the national officials to the rank and file, and doing away with the area unions and the last vestiges of federalism. This is described to a large extent in my book.

Dave describes the "trajectory" of the CPGB/Labour Left/Broad Left. These left officials and academics were mainly full-time officers organised around professor Vic Allen from Sheffield University. They were drawn from the so-called 'progressive' coalfields of Yorkshire, Kent, Scotland and Wales. The new national miners' Broad Left, which I helped organise, put on at least 10 open conferences over a three-year period, with attendances of 200 and more miners to discuss without rancour the best strategy and tactics to win the strike and create a socialist, democratic, fighting NUM. The state, the Labour and Tory leaderships and the systemic disunity within the NUM were powerful forces to contend with. Ultimately the role of state prevailed.

Now all that would be a worthwhile study. You could start with Seamus Milne's *The enemy within*, a book whose title quoted Margaret Thatcher and exposed the role of the state in the defeat of the miners.

Dave takes issue with my analysis of *The miners' next step* of 1912. He speaks of the syndicalists as if they were a socialist government in waiting! They were far from it. Sixty years later, the miners' strike was not the catalyst for the revolutionary overthrow of Britain and the setting up of workers' councils (soviets) out of the miners' support groups and women's support groups. This was

never a possibility, given the balance of forces at the time. The work of the miners' support groups had an enormous, uplifting impact on morale, but they were not soviets in waiting. The strike was a "political civil war without guns", in the words of Ken Smith in his excellent book of the same name.

One union

The question arises as to whether rule 41 and a national ballot were to be the main instruments or not for organising 100% member support for the strikes of 1981, 1983 and 1984. The first two refer to strike actions of two weeks' duration in each case which started in the South Wales coalfield. Despite what Dave states in his article, a national ballot did not take place in 1983 over Ty Mawr/Lewis Merthyr in South Wales or elsewhere - there were only area ballots.

The fact remains that the old CPGB-led Broad Left did nothing about the rule book, which was a concoction for bringing together of a series of area unions (including craftsmen, cokemen and clerical (weekly paid industrial staff) sections into one, ultimately loose confederation. This process was brokered in 1944 (The NUM was formed on January 1 1945) by none other than Arthur Horner of the CPGB himself, remained unfinished business in 1984-85 and is still so to this day. There should have been one union for mineworkers, whether as underground or surface workers, craftsmen, deputies or overmen. If there had been one union instead of a dozen, then a different outcome historically could have been achieved. These lessons of creating the structures for cohesive action and organisations capable of fighting back are being learnt and understood today in the industrial and public sector unions brought in the shape of mergers, arising from the necessities of the situation in the 1990s and 2000s.

Dave challenges my view on the role of safety workers during the strike. It would have been an absurd

situation if the union were to have called for no safety work to be carried out in the mines. There would have been no mines to return to after, as it turned out, 52 weeks. Any socialist, communist or trade union leader worth his salt will appeal for the right strategy and tactics, and will lead from the front, not follow a band of urban guerrilla fighters from behind or sit on the sidelines until its all over. Anything other than the preservation of an industry to return to is quite frankly anarchic and pathetic.

Dave states: "If Ian's attitude towards vigorous opposition to scabs and cops is anything to go by ..." and then quotes my opposition towards paint-bombing scab lorries and similar actions as "pranks". As someone who participated in (and organised for three days) the cranes occupation at Port Talbot steelworks and who was arrested by six policemen on the Margam picket line, spending 14 hours in a cell, I can say quite clearly that I did indeed witness pranks that did nothing to further the cause of the strike. Whilst not being afraid to be in the thick of the action when it was necessary or forced upon us, I saw no merit in organising the paint-bombing of scab coal lorries and such like.

On the question of the burgeoning bureaucracies in the NUM, they were already there and full-time positions were being used to protect these cliques, left or right. But there came a time when, yes, Dave, we had to go back to work with as much dignity as could be retained. We did not want a deal without the right of a qualified veto on pit closures. It was not about having any compromise deal based on the Nacods deal struck as early as July 1984. The Nacods rule book was used to declare that the 80%-plus ballot result was 'timed out' by that union's general secretary, Peter McNestry, and president, Ken Sampey. This was a fatal blow to the NUM, as well as to Nacods members themselves, who reverted to their non-striking, quasi-safety role. From then on these national figures representing deputies and overmen went back and forth between Nacods headquarters, the TUC at Transport House and the arbitration and conciliation service, Acas, in Kings Cross like men without a mission, knowing full well that they had done in the NUM.

I do accept the typographical error that Ravenscraig Steel works was stated as being in Lancashire, when it should have read 'Lanarkshire' - my apologies to all Scots. If I was in a pub quiz I would get it right every time, especially now.

I also appreciate the time and effort taken by Dave Douglass in reviewing *When we were miners*. However, this is not say that I accept his recollections of events or his analysis of the period as being an official history. It is not. He, like many, myself and millions of others, played an equal part in what became an historical chapter of the struggles of our class. I believe the book sets out many of the lessons learned.

For more information contact www.whenwewereminers.co.uk.

ANTI-SEMITISM

'Anti-Zionist' holocaust denier

Israeli jazz musician Gilad Atzmon represents a small but important current within the broader Palestine solidarity movement, writes **Tony Greenstein**. He sees the oppression of the Palestinians as being due to something inherent in Jewishness

Anti-Semitism in Britain is a marginal form of personal prejudice. Jews are rarely subject to physical attack because they are Jews, nor are they subject to state racism.¹ The Jewish religion and Jews are not demonised and ridiculed in the popular press. Racist and opportunist politicians do not attempt to 'make the non-Jewish folk angry' by alleging there is a campaign by Jews to 'take Phil Woolas out'.² Anti-Semitism is largely confined to loony tunes and conspiracy theorists.

It is precisely because of the absence of what most people have traditionally understood as anti-Semitism - ie, violence and discrimination against Jews - that bodies such as the Zionist goon squad, the Community Security Trust (CST), inflate and manipulate figures of anti-Semitic incidents and hype the figures.³

Anti-Semitic attacks in 2010 fell by 31%, yet they were portrayed as having risen. As Mark Elf points out ironically, 'Anti-Semitic incidents in the UK fall to a record high'⁴ How is this possible? Because there is a deliberate policy by the Zionist movement to equate opposition to Israel with anti-Semitism and conflate anti-Semitic incidents with expressions of disgust at Israel.

For example, last year I received two emails on the same day, one saying that the holocaust was a hoax, and another, from a Zionist, wishing that my family and me had perished in Auschwitz. I reported it to the CST and its spokesperson, Mark Gardener, responded by saying that the first email would be classified as anti-Semitic but the second one wouldn't because the "CST does not believe that arguments between 'Zionist' and 'anti-Zionist' Jews constitute anti-Semitism as such."⁵

Why, when anti-Semitism is at an all-time low, is Gilad Atzmon and his coterie of any importance? Atzmon and friends hardly represent a threat to British Jews. The answer is simple. Anti-Semitism is not a threat to Jews so much as a danger to Palestinians. Only Zionism benefits from anti-Semitism. It was anti-Semitism which pushed Jews out of Europe. It was Zionism which ensured that some of them went to Palestine.

There must be few if any, Jewish anti-Zionists who have not been called 'traitors' or 'self-haters'.⁶ To Atzmon those of us who also oppose anti-Semitism are "crypto-Zionists". He not only racialises the struggle, but tries to divide the Palestine solidarity movement by alleging that Jewish members are a fifth column. Jewish anti-Zionists serve as "an inside enemy".⁷

When a leading Zionist and anti-boycott campaigner, solicitor Anthony Julius, wrote a two-part article, 'Jewish anti-Zionism unravelled', Atzmon effusively welcomed it: "Julius correctly suggests that anti-Zionist Jews fall into contradiction when they hold that, while dispersion is good for the Jews, it is bad for the Palestinians, and when



Blowing his own saxophone

they demand of the Jews that they disavow 'nationalism', while valuing the Palestinians' 'continuing struggle for justice'; Julius obviously hit here on some severe level of lack of integrity within the Jewish left discourse."⁸

All this might be true if you accept the Zionist claim that the Jews are a nation.⁸ Atzmon makes no distinction between the nationalism of the oppressed and the oppressor. In *Not in my name* he argued that "Jews cannot criticise Zionism in the name of their ethnic belonging because such an act is in itself an approval of Zionism ..."⁹ For Atzmon "acting politically under a Jewish banner is in fact the very definition of Zionism".¹⁰

The Bund, a mass socialist party which organised Jewish self-defence against the pogroms in Russia and Poland, is the particular object of Atzmon's ire: "Bundists believe that instead of robbing Palestinians we should all get together and rob who is considered to be the rich, the wealthy and the strong in the name of working class revolution."¹¹ The redistribution of wealth by the working class is theft - the equivalent of the colonists who stole the land of the Palestinians.

Atzmon concludes: "We do not need 'working class politics' any more ... from a Marxist point of view I am associated with the most reactionary forces: I support Muslim Brotherhood, Hezbollah, and I support Hamas ... I am the ultimate reactionary being."¹² Who, apart from the Socialist Workers Party, could disagree?

SWP in denial

On June 17 2005 the SWP held a meeting at Bookmarks, with Atzmon speaking. Then national secretary Martin Smith presided and amongst those attending was the SWP's Mid-

dle East guru, John Rose. Atzmon spoke about the man Hitler described as his favourite Jew, Otto Weininger. The meeting was picketed by about 35 people, Jewish and non-Jewish.¹³

At least until July 2009, the SWP still had a statement on its website arguing that Atzmon was not an anti-Semite, though it has now been removed.¹⁴ There is no explanation for having defended an open anti-Semite and even put him on its platforms. Now the article has disappeared.¹⁵

According to the statement the SWP issued, "Gilad Atzmon is an Israeli-born Jew who served in the Israeli Defence Force and who now lives in 'self-exile' in Britain." And "He is an internationally acclaimed jazz musician, whose album *Exile* won BBC Best Jazz Album of 2003." Both were true, but completely irrelevant.

The idiocy of the SWP leadership provided a field day for rightwing pundits, like *The Times's* Oliver Kamm and David Aaronovitch.¹⁶ In contrast the American SWP apologised after it had interviewed him by mistake.¹⁷ The question of how a revolutionary socialist organisation can play host to an open anti-Semite and holocaust denier disappears down the SWP's memory hole.

Atzmon has previously been astute enough to realise what the consequences of open holocaust denial would be for his career. He has now abandoned this. In *Holocaust politics in the service of Anglo-American hegemony* he writes: "Regardless of what the truth of the holocaust is and what its denial may entail, to seal the past is to give away the vision of a better future."¹⁸

After I wrote 'Gilad Atzmon - now an open holocaust denier',¹⁹ I subsequently had doubts regarding the use of the term 'open'. Those doubts have now been laid to rest. As one writer has written, "Gilad Atzmon's center towards the territory of the extreme right continues on apace."²⁰

Atzmon admits: "I am not a holocaust scholar nor am I a historian. My primary interest is not the story of Auschwitz nor the destruction of European Jewry ... I do not wish to enter the debate regarding the truth of the holocaust."²¹

How the holocaust is used politically by the Zionist movement has been the subject of controversy and debate by historians and political scientists such as Norman Finkelstein and Lenni Brenner. But that is entirely different from denying that there was a holocaust.

Atzmon complains: "Most of the [anti-Zionist] scholars, if not all of them, do not challenge the Zionist narrative: namely Nazi Judeocide; yet more than a few are critical of the way Jewish and Zionist institutes employ the holocaust ... not a single holocaust religion scholar dares engage in a dialogue with the so-called 'deniers' to discuss their vision of the events or any other revisionist scholarship ... The holocaust religion is probably as old as the Jews."²²

And in 'Truth, history, and integrity' Atzmon leaves no room for misunderstanding: "If, for instance, the Nazis wanted the Jews out of their Reich ... or even dead, as the Zionist narrative insists, how come they marched hundreds of thousands of them back into the Reich at the end of the war?"²³ The answer is obvious. The death marches were organised to prevent the Jews falling into the hands of the Russians. Atzmon informs us that he "happened to learn from Israeli holocaust historian professor Israel Gutman that Jewish prisoners actually joined the march voluntarily". In fact Gutman refers to one prisoner who weighed up his chances of survival by escaping or going on the death march.

Atzmon is puzzled: "If the Nazis ran a death factory in Auschwitz-Birkenau, why would the Jewish prisoners join them at the end of the war?" The answer, as Primo Levi wrote,²⁴ was that most prisoners had no choice and feared that prisoners who were left behind would be murdered. Note how Atzmon now queries whether Auschwitz-Birkenau was a death camp. He continues: "We should ask for some conclusive historical evidence and arguments rather than follow a religious narrative ..."²⁵ In fact evidence exists in abundance: eg, the situation reports of the killing squads (Einsatzgruppen) in Ukraine and Russia.

Atzmon implies a parallel between anti-Semitism in Nazi Germany and Israel's treatment of the Palestinians, using the latter as an explanation (justification?) for the former: "Why were the Jews hated? Why did European people stand up against their next-door neighbours? Why are the Jews hated in the Middle East." The Israelis and Jews of Europe are one and the same. It is not a question of colonialism, it seems, but of Jews as Jews.²⁵

Atzmon rejects the concept of colonialism. To him Zionism "isn't exactly a colonial movement with an interest in Palestine. Zionism appears to be an international movement that is fuelled by the solidarity of third category subjects. To be a Zionist means just to accept that more than anything else you are primarily a Jew."²⁶

Indeed Zionism itself hardly exists: "The word 'Zionism' is almost meaningless in Israel and within the Israeli discourse: it is actually non-existent. Zionism may mean something to the American settlers in the West Bank or the new wave of French immigrants to Israel, but not much more than that ... As much as Israelis do not regard themselves as Zionists, they are hardly affected by anti-Zionism."²⁷

In 'Beyond comparison' Atzmon goes still further: "To regard Hitler as the ultimate evil is nothing but surrendering to the Zio-centric discourse. To regard Hitler as the wickedest man and the Third Reich as the embodiment of evilness is to let Israel off the hook ... Hitler has never flattened a country for no reason at all, and this is exactly what the Israelis have been doing in Lebanon ... and in Gaza ...

Nazis were indeed proper expansionists: they were trying to take towns and land intact. Carpet-bombing and total erasure of populated areas that is so trendy amongst Israeli military and politicians (as well as Anglo-Americans) has never been a Nazi tactic or strategy."²⁸

Atzmon is simply wrong. For three days, in April 1941, German bombers razed Belgrade to the ground.²⁹ Likewise Hitler's plans for Russia included the mass starvation of 30 million civilians and the complete destruction of Moscow and Leningrad.³⁰ Large parts were to be laid to waste to provide a breadbasket for Germany.

Any manifestation of being Jewish is automatically Zionist. All the problems that Palestinians experience are because of 'the Jews'. There can be no clearer reason why he is a genuine, 24-carat anti-Semite ●

Notes

1. See T Greenstein, 'Redefining anti-Semitism - the false anti-racism of the right' *Return* No5, December 1990, p10.
2. 'Phil Woolas "sought to make white folk angry" in general election campaign' *The Guardian* September 15 2010.
3. *Jewish Chronicle* October 5 2005; Jenni Frazer: <http://tinyurl.com/ykpov9u>.
4. <http://jewssansfrontieres.blogspot.com/2011/02/antisemitic-incidents-in-uk-fall-to.html>.
5. <http://azvsas.blogspot.com/2010/03/when-is-anti-semitic-attack-not-anti.html>.
6. See, for example, M Marqusee *If I am not for myself - journey of an anti-Zionist Jew* London 2008.
7. www.serendipity.li/zionism/not_in_my_name.htm.
8. <http://azvsas.blogspot.com/2008/05/gilad-atzmon-joins-with-anthony-julius.html>.
9. www.serendipity.li/zionism/not_in_my_name.htm.
10. www.gilad.co.uk/html%20files/3rd.html.
11. www.gilad.co.uk/writings/gilad-atzmon-swindlers-list.html.
12. www.gilad.co.uk/writings/silvia-cattori-an-interview-with-gilad-atzmon-to-call-a-spade.html.
13. See R Rance, 'Gilad Atzmon Bookmarks protest': www.labournet.net/antiracism/0506/bookmarks1.html.
14. See www.socialistunity.com/?p=4412. There are still other references up, such as an advert for the Cultures of Resistance festival starring Atzmon: eg, www.swappeal.org.uk/events/gilad.html.
15. www.swp.org.uk/gilad.php.
16. 'How did the far left manage to slip into bed with the Jew-hating right?': www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/comment/columnists/david_aaronovitch/article538076.ece.
17. socialistworker.org/2010/07/15/gilad-atzmons-anti-semitic-beliefs.
18. www.redress.btinternet.co.uk/gatzmon29.htm.
19. www.socialistunity.com/?p=1559, 21.1.08.
20. <http://modernityblog.wordpress.com/2010/03/17/gilad-atzmons-holocaust-denial-and-other-stupid-questions>.
21. My emphasis; www.redress.btinternet.co.uk/gatzmon29.htm 28.1.07. accessed 5.3.11.
22. My emphasis; www.counterpunch.org/atzmon0302007.html.
23. My emphasis; <http://dissidentvoice.org/2010/03/truth-history-and-integrity/> <http://tinyurl.com/6kvuuv3> 13.3.10.
24. *Survival in Auschwitz: the Nazi assault on humanity* New York 1961.
25. <http://tinyurl.com/6kvuuv3>: 'Truth, history, and integrity: questioning the holocaust religion', March 15 2010.
26. www.gilad.co.uk/writings/the-3rd-category-the-3rd-category-and-the-palestinian-solidar.html.
27. www.informationclearinghouse.info/article17969.htm.
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30. *Ibid* pp 996-97, p1020.

WORKING CLASS HEGEMONY

The unfolding Arab revolution

In the Middle East and north Africa we are not witnessing a series of disconnected protests, movements and uprisings, maintains **Eddie Ford**

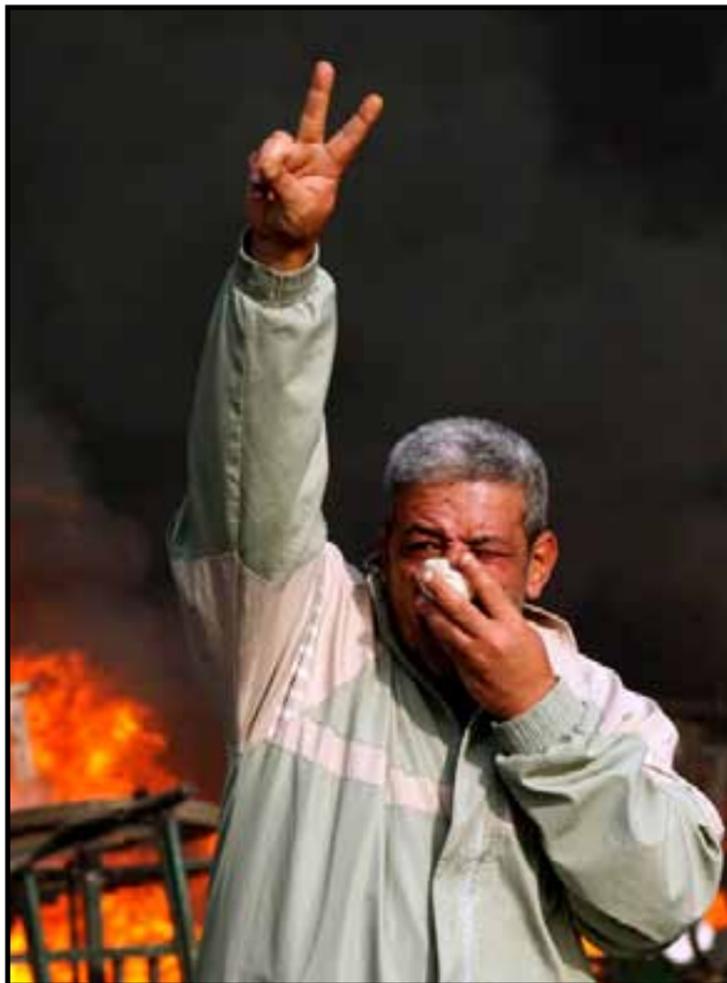
Clearly, we are witnessing a living, constantly growing Arab revolution - with its own history and inner class dynamics, which need to be analysed in the concrete rather than lightly dismissed or brushed aside with ready-made slogans or abstract schemas.

This explosive rebirth of the seemingly dormant pan-Arab national movement is by definition a movement against the *imperialist*-imposed order in that region. An order which saw the cynical slicing and dicing of the unwilling Arab people by the 'great powers' (most notably Britain and France, of course) into numerous Balkanised colonies, which later, under US hegemony, were transformed into formerly independent states ruled by local despots - friendly client rulers - deemed amenable to western interests. Now this old order - the evil empire, to coin a phrase - is unravelling in a quite spectacular manner. Something which communists wholeheartedly welcome, confident that the revolutionary elan displayed by the Arab masses will prove to be an inspiration for those everywhere.

Egypt

Naturally, Egypt is the fulcrum of the Arab revolution - with its 80 million people and the teeming urban masses of Cairo and Giza. A people who, weighed down for too long by oppression and poverty, finally throw off their hated dictator in the country where 'Arab socialism' under Abdul Nasser came to power in 1952. Far from the Egyptian revolution coming to a halt or suffering a crushing setback when the military junta took over from Hosni Mubarak, as some have stupidly suggested, the masses are pushing further and further - engaged in a war of attrition against the entire regime, which looks ever more fragile.

Hence the masses still protest in Tahrir Square, loudly expressing their wishes and intentions. Feeling the pressure, options running out, the regime unceremoniously ditched prime minister Ahmed Shafik on March 3 - just a day before major protests demanding his resignation were due to go ahead. In other words, the masses and the pro-democracy movement notched up a victory. Thus Shafik was replaced by Essam Sharaf, the former transport minister, and a figure identified with the Tahrir Square protests. The day after his appointment he addressed activists in the square, saluting the "white revolution" and its "martyrs", claiming to draw his "legitimacy" from the masses and promising to step down if he failed to meet their demands. In a further attempt to play up his radical credentials, Sharaf replaced the foreign affairs and interior ministers with figures not so associated with the Mubarak old guard. Perhaps partly accounting for his relative popularity with the masses, though doubtlessly that will be a short-lived affair, Sharaf is strongly opposed to the "normalisation" of ties with Israel.¹



Dress rehearsal

Of course, having said that, Sharaf is obviously a product of the old regime, for all his fine, revolutionary-sounding words - after all, he was a minister under the Mubarak government and was a member of the National Democratic Party's policy committee. So hardly fresh goods. But he is also a product of the anti-Mubarak protests - a manifestation of how people-power has advanced in Egypt. And the masses want much more, demanding - amongst other things - a purge of *all* ostensibly Mubarak elements (and the NDP as a whole) from the government, the immediate release of all political prisoners and the abolition of the brutal 500,000-strong internal security forces, especially the dreaded State Security Investigations. The SSI consists of at least 100,000 members, plus a vast additional network of informants, which has literally terrorised the Egyptian masses for decades.

To this end, there have been repeated demonstrations outside the interior ministry offices in Cairo, and in turn activists have been viciously attacked by plain-clothes thugs. Showing the depth of anger and hatred the masses feel for the SSI and other such state bodies, over the last week at least six state-security buildings have been stormed and ransacked - including the SSI's main headquarters in Cairo and Alexandria. With regards to the latter, the 2,500 or more people who swept into the

compound were anxious to prevent the shredding of incriminating official documents relating to systematic abuses committed by state security agents. Needless to say, they found a dirty treasure trove of state secrets, one protestor telling Al Jazeera that in every office building they found "tons" of shredded paper and left-over documents - particularly in the underground detention cells, where there were files concerning "almost every" activist in the country, to the extent that people were "finding their own folders and their own photos" amidst the debris. Now the masses want to see the prosecution of those security officials responsible for the torture and death of activists.

The Egyptian revolutionary movement is still in its early days - but growing in confidence, numbers and political weight, building up to a tipping point against the regime. And with the referendum on amendments to Egypt's constitution tentatively scheduled for March 19, or at least according to the regime's Facebook page (a real sign of the times), we can only expect the mass demonstrations to pick up even more steam - on top of the parliamentary elections slated for June and a presidential contest in August. Hence in their wisdom, a legal panel hand-picked by the military has "recommended" a package of 10 constitutional amendments that include setting a two-term limit for presidents, removing the restrictions

that make it almost impossible for non-ruling party candidates to compete in the presidential elections, and so on. All insultingly inadequate, of course, as the masses will make more than clear in subsequent protests and demonstrations.

Reciprocal

What we have seen in Egypt has essentially been repeated in Tunisia, in what you could call a reciprocal gesture - given that the uprising against the loathed Ben Ali, Tunisia's very own Mubarak, provided the spark for the Egyptian movement. In fact, if anything, the Tunisian masses have scored even greater victories than their Egyptian brothers and sisters.

Hence Mohammed Ghannouchi, both the prime minister and self-appointed acting president, was sent packing on February 27 and two other members of the 'interim' or 'national unity' government joined him on permanent gardening leave the following day. Then the new acting or interim president, Fouad Mebazaa, announced on March 3 that the general elections would be postponed to a so far unspecified later date and that instead elections to a "temporary" constituent assembly would be held on July 24. This constituent assembly, Mebazaa stated on state TV, would be charged with developing a new constitution or "new political system" that "breaks definitely from the deposed regime". At the same time, the latest prime minister (not a particularly enviable job any more), Beji Caid Sebti, unveiled a new cabinet containing not a single minister who had served under the old Ben Ali administration - a new government, as he put it, that would help to pull the country back from the "abyss".

Yes, needless to say, all the new appointees are technocrats and drawn exclusively from the ranks of the establishment. But nevertheless it represents a gain for the masses that all of Ben Ali's henchmen have been forced to take early retirement - just like in Egypt, with the steady whittling away of Mubarak's placement. Furthermore, showing how power in Tunisia is devolving to the streets, an interior ministry spokesperson declared that the secret police (ie, the political police and state security apparatus) had been "dissolved" and "other decisions that will please the people" were forthcoming. Of course, it would be foolish to take this statement entirely at face value - the repressive apparatus of the state in Tunisia lives on, even if there has been a change of uniform or bureaucratic reshuffle. Yet the mere fact that the regime had to be seen bowing, or acquiescing, to one of the key demands of the protestors indicates that the boot is now on the other foot - the masses increasingly calling the shots, not the government.

Bahrain's regime too has been hit by a new wave of protests, demonstrators keeping democratic vigil in hundreds of tents in Manama's

Pearl Square - which has now become a permanent 'people's parliament' like Tahrir Square, with the masses becoming further radicalised almost by the day. They are no longer content with the demand for a 'real' constitutional monarchy along the lines of the UK or the Netherlands, given the initial murderous response of the regime to such a move. So on March 8 three Shia-based groups calling themselves the Coalition for a Bahraini Republic explicitly called for a "popular revolution" against the oppressive, Sunni-minority regime - the absolutist monarchy of the Al Khalifa family - and the establishment of a "democratic republic that expresses the desires of the people", which as a bare minimum requires an elected parliament "with full legislative powers".²

The democratic contagion has now reached the shores of Oman, a prospect that would have been thought almost inconceivable only a few months ago. Protests broke out on February 26-27 in the port of Sohar, the second city - a spontaneous display of anger mainly by unemployed youth which left up to six people dead. The protestors' core demand was for more jobs and welfare for those without them. Obviously panic-stricken, the sultan, Qaboos bin Said al Said - who recently celebrated 40 years on the throne - hastily announced that the minimum wage would be increased by 40% to 200 riyals (\$520) a month. But protestors also called for the sacking and "the trial of all ministers", the "abolition of all taxes", measures to end the endemic corruption, press freedom, etc.³

Nor is Saudi Arabia immune to the spirit of democracy that has been unleashed across the Arab world. After two weeks of Shia demonstrations, which saw dozens arrested and beaten, the Saudi authorities on March 5 warned against further public protests. A terse statement by the country's council of senior clerics "affirms that demonstrations are forbidden in this country" and that the "correct way" according to sharia law of "realising common interest is by advising" - for "reform and advice should not be via demonstrations and ways that provoke strife and division", this being "what the religious scholars of this country in the past and now have forbidden and warned against". For good measure, the statement reminded the masses that political parties and organisations are not allowed in Saudi Arabia, as that would not be "in keeping with Islam".⁴

However, the elite of that foul regime, used to enjoying an obscenely opulent lifestyle denied to the overwhelming majority, are seriously rattled - as evidenced last month, when king Abdullah dished out \$37 billion in various welfare/benefits hand-outs in a bid to buy off dissent and rebellion. Indeed, all the despots and dictators in the Arab world have suddenly become aware

of their own mortality - as protests ignite in Algeria, Yemen, Jordan and Morocco, too.

Libya

Which brings us to Libya, which has seen the first armed uprising of the current upsurge. The tyrannical regime still clings on power, throwing everything it has into a counter-offensive. The tone of the revolutionary forces remains bullish though. "The Gaddafi regime is over," confidently declared a spokeswoman for the Provisional Transitional National Council of Libya based in Benghazi - going on to state that "it's a personal issue for everybody", as "our country is occupied". She also listed a series of demands made at its first 'national' meeting in March, referring to the PTNC as the "sole representative of all Libya" and the state as the "Libyan Republic".⁵ The council would not accept the division and partition of the country and there would be elections after Libya was "reunited". It also wanted "international recognition" of the PTNC as the new legitimate government and demanded action to halt the flow of arms and mercenaries to the Gaddafi regime - not to mention an "immediate freeze" on all funds held by the Gaddafi family.

The PTNC's initial statement clearly contains dangers. Yes, it is true that their statement rejects "direct military intervention on Libyan soil", but at the same time it makes a "request to the international community to fulfil its obligations to protect the Libyan people from any further genocide and crimes against humanity" - the distinct implication being that 'non-direct' military intervention would be welcome.

While, of course, it is understandable that the poorly equipped anti-Gaddafi forces are desperate to change the odds in their favour, imperialist intervention would play straight into Gaddafi's hands - enabling him to portray the forces pitted against him as 'traitors', 'agents of imperialism', etc. Maybe even give him the space to secure patriotic support from wavering elements, like some of the tribal leaders. And the evidence is growing by the minute that imperialism is indeed preparing some sort of military intervention, in order to prevent "genocide", more "crimes against humanity", etc. Thus Nato has introduced 24-hour air and sea monitoring of Libya, with both David Cameron and Barack Obama talking about the need to draw up the "full spectrum" of military responses - the US administration has seemingly been won over to support a possible no-fly zone over the country (dependent, at least for now, on such an action being "clearly" sanctioned by the United Nations). Hence, according to Cameron, he and Obama agreed in a telephone call that a major international operation "will swing into action" if Gaddafi refuses to relinquish power - which, of course, is as near to an absolute certainty as you can possibly ever get.

Communists adamantly oppose the imposition of no-fly zones on Libya, or indeed any other form of imperialist intervention. We in the CPGB want the masses themselves to overthrow the Gaddafi regime, not have it done on their behalf by an outside state power - which would only be doing so in order to *prevent* popular power, not facilitate it. If the masses were able to topple the Gaddafi regime from below, that would constitute the first real blow of the Arab revolution and would have a *profound* effect on the course of events in Egypt, Tunisia, Algeria, Bahrain, etc. We are not seeing presidents and monarchs falling neatly like dominoes - to use the clichéd imagery which has been routinely trotted out by unimaginative commentators (left and right). Rather, what we have are interconnected - and interwoven - democratic and revolutionary processes which are feeding off each other. What happens in any of these countries matters, and almost instantaneously impacts on its neighbours, because we are not dealing with discrete or national uprisings, but a truly pan-Arab movement which does not recognise imperialist-drawn borders. The *same* people are confronted by the same tasks and hence ultimately with the same

solution - ie, regional solidarity and pan-Arab revolution.

Arab revolution

In other words, the present situation has vindicated the perspective of an Arab revolution, a slogan that seemed to have been written off by history, but is now back with a vengeance. Plainly, the uprisings now taking place in the Middle East and north Africa have acted as a dress rehearsal for that very Arab revolution, and it is imperative that the working class wins hegemony over the movement.

Therefore communists are disappointed with comrades who stick their head in the sand and refuse to see the living reality of the Arab revolution, retreating instead to dogmas and slogans learnt by rote (or drilled into them by their respective sect leader). Hence comrade Sandy Johnson in a letter to the *Weekly Worker* fantastically claims that there is "little sign" of pan-Arab unity "from any reports on the ground" and then puts forward the idea that the "struggle for a united socialist republic of the Middle East would seem a more apt slogan" for communists, given that the "era of national democratic revolutions led by non-working class forces is long past and it can't be revived" (February 24). More explicitly still, and even more dogmatically, the left communist International Communist Current condemns the CPGB for "avoiding a class analysis" and its "promotion" of Arab nationalism - "in a way", we read, "that is reminiscent of Bakunin's pan-Slavism". Indeed, the ICC continues, the CPGB's advocacy of pan-Arab unity - which envisages, for example, a "free Egypt" that "would challenge the hegemony" of Israel - can only "lead to imperialist war".⁶

From the way the comrades talk you would think that the CPGB have some sort of inherent objection to a "socialist republic", workers' unity, proletarian internationalism, socialism, communism, etc. Believe it or not, we actually think that these are splendid things. However, obviously, the real question is *how* do we get to socialism - what is the means, or agency, that will bring about universal human emancipation? From the communist perspective, the only way is by the proletariat forming itself into a class - armed with political consciousness and a programme that acts as a map, or compass, to revolution. Self-evidently, or so it should be, this can only be done under conditions of democracy - which is precisely why we

communists take democracy so seriously and are its most tireless champions.

So, just to reassure the comrades above, the CPGB does not believe in any form of national socialism - which logically includes any 'Arab socialism' consisting of the Arab people 'going it alone' in isolation from the European and American working class. An obvious illusion and also an impossibility, as socialism is built upon the most advanced features and characteristics of capitalism. But we do believe in the Arab workers taking the lead, securing hegemony, in the struggle for democracy - which concretely means fighting to overcome the Balkanisation that imperialism has enforced on the Arab people.

It is all very well calling for "a united socialist republic of the Middle East". But what relationship does that have to the current struggles across the Arab world? Unlike such an abstract slogan, the regional movement against oppression is taking the form of pan-Arab solidarity against the dictators. The job of communists is to seek to ensure the living struggle for an Arab revolution has working class leadership. It goes without saying that its programme must seek to draw in all national minorities by championing the rights of Berbers, Kurds, etc.

The CPGB's perspective is informed by the programmatic approach taken by the Communist League - under the leadership of Marx and Engels - to the German revolution of 1848, which was for a *united* Germany. The German working class, they argued, could not come to power instantly - or even in the immediate future. However, they could constitute themselves as an extreme opposition to every non-socialist force or form that existed inside Germany and in that manner create a space for the workers' movement to grow.

Such an outlook can be applied to the Arab world too, given that the fight for national unity is a democratic task and hence one that communists ought to take with the utmost seriousness ●

Notes

1. <http://english.ahram.org.eg/~/NewsContent/1/64/6892/Egypt/Politics-/Meet-Essam-Sharaf-Egypt's-first-postrevolution-Prim.aspx>.
2. <http://english.aljazeera.net/news/middleeast/2011/03/20113924218214336.html>.
3. www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-12600098.
4. *The Guardian* March 6.
5. www.webcitation.org/5x0wuZ8r2.
6. February 5: <http://en.internationalism.org/iconline/2011/2/revolution>.

Fighting fund

Few blue

I see that sections of the media, including those normally opposed to all workers in struggle, have taken up the case of one group threatened with job losses and pay cuts.

In order to save over £1 billion in three years, home secretary Theresa May has demanded that 28,000 police jobs should be axed, including 12,000 uniformed officers. What is more, those that remain could find themselves up to £4,000 a year worse off. Well, if the Tories are going to treat the police exactly the same as other, more useful public services, I suppose someone - by which I mean the entire national press - will have to speak up for them.

As for the rest of the workforce - for the most part rather worse paid than the constabulary - don't expect much by way of support if like the Police Federation you threaten "war" and even illegal strike action to defend your conditions. However, we at the *Weekly Worker* will continue not just to champion the rights of workers, but to point to the necessary political fightback and the organisational form it must take. In that respect we are unlike

the rest of the left press, which fails to take up our call for the single working class party we need.

Although I suspect there are very few boys in blue among them, our readers and supporters recognise our invaluable role and continue to contribute to our fighting fund - despite many being on the receiving end of cutbacks themselves. Among them this week was comrade DL, who sent us a £20 cheque in appreciation of a couple of recent articles. I also had exactly £100 in standing order donations over the last seven days - thank you, SM, CG, SM (another one!), JS, RK and ST.

Then there were three gifts received via our website, from JS (£30), CM (£10) and EJ (£5) - three out of 12,273 readers, that is. I won't say it.

We have raised £340 towards our March target of £1,250 with a third of the month gone, so further donations will be gladly received. Even from boys in blue ●

Robbie Rix

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

What we fight for

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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weekly worker

**Use impetus
of TUC demo
for unity**

Build student assemblies

Both before and after March 26, the London Student Assembly can serve as a broad model for organising on campus, writes **Ben Lewis**

Those looking forward to what will surely be a huge, exciting, colourful and militant demonstration against the Con-Dem cuts onslaught on March 26 cannot but seek to draw inspiration from the recent past. The spontaneous outburst of protests, walkouts and occupations by school, college and university students over the winter took everyone by surprise - not least the Metropolitan Police and the dumbfounded National Union of Students president, Aaron Porter. The witty slogans, imaginative use of social media and undoubted militancy of the students can help provide a breath of fresh air for the workers' movement too.

Notwithstanding the rather desperate attempts of Mr Porter and the gutter press to portray the movement as a gaggle of self-seeking anti-Semites, or the crass scare tactics of the police and the courts, the demonstrations tapped into a vast range of support across society.

Now that the dust has settled and the kettles have been cleared, what has become of the student movement, and what role can it play in broadening and deepening the resistance to the coalition? As I have noted in previous articles, the passing of legislation to triple university fees and scrap the education maintenance allowance have undoubtedly taken the wind out of our sails somewhat. This is particularly palpable amongst many brave young militants mobilised at last September's freshers fairs on the basis that - if they organised enough action and sold enough copies of *Socialist Worker* - the coalition would fall, almost by Christmas.

The demoralising and demobilising effects such short-termism invariably bring with it must be countered by more informed, more serious, longer-term perspectives - perspectives which not only seek to bring down this government, but to articulate a viable alternative to it beyond Ed Miliband's 'nice' cuts. Indeed, without such perspectives we are more likely to be disorientated by the dynamics peculiar to student politics (holidays, exams, coursework, etc).

In terms of the movement, we are certainly not in the position we were a couple of months ago, when young people would turn out in their thousands on an almost weekly basis at the drop of a hat. What matters now is *organising*, winning the arguments on campus about capitalism and the cuts drive, and moving from a position of *minority* activism to *majority* support - and mass action, shoulder to shoulder with the working class movement.

There are, indeed, grounds for optimism. Tyrants are falling across the Middle East. The head of one of Britain's most prestigious universities has resigned for taking money from Libya. Inspirational scenes of popular democracy and self-organisation from Wisconsin to Cairo have captured the imagination. These are not 'normal' times. At a much lower level, even recent machinations in the NUS bear witness to the impact of recent mili-



Inspiration

tancy. Rightly no longer considered a safe pair of hands by the bureaucracy, Aaron Porter will not stand for a second term as NUS president. A not insignificant event, given that the last time this happened was in 1969! Now seeking employment (and touting his wares in various bourgeois papers), we can only hope that Porter faces a career of bureaucratic insignificance befitting his dreary and lacklustre misleadership.

It is surely also only a matter of time before we see more eruptions of anger on campus. Increasingly starved of much-needed funding, university departments across the board face unprecedented closures, drives to 'voluntary redundancies', the cutting back of teaching time and an ever greater reliance on postgraduate teaching. Whilst those from Eton or other centres of privilege might actually see £9,000 per year fees as perfectly acceptable (far less of a sum than their parents pay for a good public school) it is undeniably the case that the *quality* of education will also fall. In all likelihood universities will be forced

into accepting ever greater amounts of largesse from big business, crazy billionaires and dictators and other luminaries of enlightened discourse, progress and reason.

Crucially though, the March 26 demonstration called by the TUC must be seen as a springboard for further radicalisation. We want a huge, militant demonstration which brings the spirit of Tahrir to Hyde Park. There are already signs of students seeking to establish *permanent* organisations of struggle, which can do the hard yards on campus, link up with sections of the class going into struggle and widen anti-cuts sentiment.

Established in November 2010, the London Student Assembly is a regular democratic forum open to all who want to organise against the cuts. Numbers attending have fluctuated in line with the ups and downs of student protests, but it is an excellent place for people to come together and organise. Usually beginning with a political discussion about the current state of play within the movement, the assembly then goes on to organise actions, stunts

and demonstrations.

The last LSA, the eighth thus far, met on Sunday February 27 and was attended by about 40 comrades. University of London Union president Clare Solomon was in the chair, alongside representatives from Counterfire, the Socialist Workers Party, Workers Power, Communist Students and others. Although some 'autonomists' and groups like the Socialist Party now appear to be less keen on attending, even when numbers are low the LSA provides a near unrivalled opportunity to bring together the manifold left fronts and cuts campaigns in a comradesly and spirited environment. Indeed, although differing opinions are thrashed out on how best to mobilise and how to make the LSA as effective as possible, the discussions are held in a very productive and comradesly fashion.

The February 27 meeting took some excellent steps forward in planning to promote both March 26 and the LSA more generally. The website has now been updated and publicity is becoming more of a priority. The LSA is supporting the budget day demonstration organised jointly by the Coalition of Resistance and Right to Work, and in the run-up to March 26 it has called for more student occupations across the city. In order to build for the education bloc starting off from ULU at 10am on the day of the big demonstration we have produced LSA posters and leaflets which will be distributed across London as part of the '18-day countdown'. This will see leafleting, banner drops and other publicity stunts across London campuses.

The education bloc will show that the student movement has not gone away, and that students recognise the *class* nature of this assault and the need to unite with public sector workers, the disabled, pensioners, etc to form the greatest possible resistance. In a positive move, LSA publicity for March 26 has details of the following LSA to be held at ULU on Sunday April 3, where

we will address the way forward after the demo. This is imperative because we not only need demonstrations, occupations and stunts, but permanent forms of organisation which can provide both continuity and endurance.

For its part, Communist Students will argue that students returning to their campuses, colleges and schools should build on the impetus of March 26 by setting up local student assemblies, which should draw in all those committed to fighting the cuts. Though it has not been without its limitations and faults, we in CS think that the LSA can certainly serve as a model. On the basis of local assemblies we can move onto delegated regional, national and even international bodies - a Europe-wide coordination meeting will come to London this summer, for example (more details soon). Given the tasks ahead, these organisational forms will be indispensable.

Separate from, but parallel to the organisation of assemblies, there must also be a patient and protracted struggle to overcome the left's debilitating division into a myriad of sect projects. Moves towards partyist unity on the basis of an inspiring, revolutionary vision of an alternative society can hopefully be facilitated by the comradesly spirit of organising together in regular, productive forums. The raw material is certainly there to take big steps forward, and a bold initiative towards serious unity in the student movement could provide a stimulus for unity in the working class movement more generally ●

ben.lewis@weeklyworker.org.uk

The next LSA will take place on March 13, from 3pm at the University of London Union, Malet Street. For more information about the London Student Assembly and to download a flyer or poster for March 26, go to: www.studentassembly.org.uk.

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sort code 30-99-64, the sum of £ _____ every month*/3 months*
until further notice, commencing on _____

This replaces any previous order from this account. (*delete)

Signed _____ Name (PRINT) _____

Date _____ Address _____